ZERO TOLERANCE: THE RHETORIC IS THE REALITY

by

April Denise Glenn

M.A., The University of West Florida, 2000

B.A., The University of South Alabama, 1997

A dissertation submitted to the Division of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Professional Studies
The University of West Florida
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

2009

The dissertation of April Denise Glenn is approved:

Robert Rotunda, Ph.D., Committee Member	Date
Joyce Nichols, Ed.D., Committee Member	Date
Janet Pilcher, Ph.D., Committee Chair	Date

Accepted for the Department/Division:

Thomas Kramer, Ph.D., Chair	Date

Accepted for the University:

Richard S. Podemski, Ph.D., Dean of Graduate Studies	Date

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge several people who have been integral to my academic achievements and dissertation completion. First of all, I would like to recognize my mother, B. Glenn. She has provided ongoing love and support. I have gained confidence to achieve my goals through her solid example of strength and courage. Second, I would like to acknowledge my late father, Lonnie Glenn. My father provided a foundation in the importance of education. To my husband, Mack Moore, I am eternally thankful. He has provided endless love, support and encouragement. He challenges me to achieve my goals and has made our home livable during my focused attention on educational aspirations. He bravely entered a marriage with me amidst the lengthy and time consuming dissertation process. He is my biggest fan and my gratitude and love for him is immeasurable.

Academically, there were several people who guided me through this process including my committee members. First of all, I'd like to extend a special thank you to Dr. Rob Rotunda who always believed in me. He always knew that I would complete my doctorate. It is through his encouragement that I began this pursuit. Second, I would like to thank Dr. Joyce Nichols for the many opportunities she afforded me through graduate assistantships. Her calm demeanor and suggestions have been comforting during this arduous process. I would like to thank Dr. Gail Honea for her support and assistance. She came through for me when I faced uncertainties with my research. She served as a very

important safety net which ultimately facilitated my dissertation research completion. A special thanks to my chair, Dr. Janet Pilcher. She willingly accepted responsibilities as chair and jumped into this role with faithful expediency offering very valuable feedback and suggestions which helped put the important finishing touches on my work. Thanks to all of my friends and colleagues who made this process a fulfilling journey. Specifically, I would like to thank all of the colleagues who have been in past or present dissertation groups with me. Thank you for your ideas, support, encouragement, fellowship and sense of community!

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to the loving memory of Dr. Mary Rogers, my dissertation chair, role model, mentor, teacher, and friend. Dr. Rogers guided me every step of the way through this dissertation process. Thanks to her, each step was filled with joy! She challenged me with intense academic rigor and helped me "find my voice." She inspired me with her wisdom and community minded activism. She encouraged me with her warmth and caring spirit. She was a phenomenal woman who will live on in her student's memories and work

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

ZERO TOLERANCE: THE RHETORIC IS THE REALITY

April Denise Glenn

In this study, the researcher explores the effects of zero tolerance policy expulsions with emphasis on first time offender students and their families. Using archival data, the researcher compares grade point average (GPA), pre/post math, reading, self-concept, and behavior assessments of 40 zero tolerance offenders and 40 students with chronic behavior problems participating in a voluntary drug and alcohol prevention program at an alternative middle school. Additional data are generated from clinical progress notes, parent and student blogs and e-mail correspondence with an adult expelled as a youth because of zero tolerance. There are no statistically significant differences in overall self-concept or number of behavioral issues between these two groups of students. Zero tolerance students demonstrate higher scores on math and reading assessments and higher GPA at first semester. Both groups have limited behavioral issues which are mild in severity and moderate levels of self-concept at pre and posttest. Parent and student reactions to zero tolerance expulsions suggest effects on school bonding, peer relationships, emotional stability, educational opportunities, and have some parallels to the grief process. The researcher provides suggestions for policy reform, further research and preventative strategies.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1993, I graduated from high school and began my college education. During my first quarter at the University of South Alabama, I took Psychology 101. I immediately knew that I wanted to major in Psychology. I was intrigued by the human brain and learning about why we do what we do. During my four years of undergraduate study, I enrolled in as many psychology courses as possible, far exceeding the minimum requirements. I went back and forth between sociology and English in deciding on my minor but finally settled on English. My first psychology related job was at the University of South Alabama's Comparative Hearing Lab where I did research on speech and hearing discrimination.

Drawn to Florida's sunshine and beaches, I decided to pursue my graduate education at the University of West Florida. Although forewarned that counseling is emotionally stressful and financially unrewarding, I opted for a meaningful career where I could make a difference in people's lives. I completed my master's degree in Counseling Psychology in 2000. While in that program, I worked as a teaching assistant, participated in research on domestic violence and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), volunteered for telephone crisis intervention counseling, and completed a one year internship at the University Counseling Center. After graduation, I was unsure which population I would like to serve, but I was certain it would not be children.

My first post graduate position involved counseling court mandated substance abuse clients and administering intelligence, achievement, learning disability, and neuropsychological tests. I enjoyed the testing but found that the involuntary nature of the counseling made many clients resistant to change. At this point in my career I came across a job opening for a prevention counselor in a middle school setting. After working with resistant substance abuse clients, counseling children now held some appeal.

By now, I have worked in the field of prevention for eight and a half years. I have worked with middle school students, rural communities, parents, teachers, and school staff. Working with middle school students has proven to be a challenge full of meaningful rewards. In 2003, I accepted a promotion to program manager/counselor. Although more responsibilities come with this position, I also have more input into developing a program based on positive reinforcement that addresses student needs.

Zero-Tolerance Policies

I had my first experiences with the zero-tolerance policy in 2003 when I began working as a prevention counselor/program manager in an alternative middle school. In this position, I worked with students facing multiple adjustments and crises. Some students had juvenile delinquent records and chronic behavior problems, whereas others appeared to be relatively well adjusted, average students. I soon discovered that many of these "average" students had been expelled because of the zero-tolerance policy.

The ultimate goal in counseling is to facilitate personal growth to the point where the client is self-sufficient and no longer needs the counseling relationship. However, it soon became apparent to me that the zero-tolerance policy was working in direct opposition to the overall philosophy of counseling. Instead of providing a safe

environment where self-growth is facilitated, zero-tolerance expulsions seemed to be creating a hostile, punitive environment where negative stereotypes prevail. In addition, the expulsion created devastation, embarrassment, anger, and feelings of helplessness for many parents and families. Parents reported to me that they were incensed by what they considered to be an unfair policy. They often wanted to take action to help their child but felt powerless. The children, on the other hand, frequently reported feeling responsible for causing family stress and disappointment. My counseling work with diverse populations had not prepared me for a policy that sometimes seems to work against child and family well-being. I realized at this point that the changes needed were less within the students and more within the system that sometimes presents impediments to personal growth and success.

The zero-tolerance policy emerged in response to increased fatal school violence incidents such as Columbine and other shootings. Indeed, most would agree that it is the responsibility of school personnel to implement strong school safety precautions. Proponents believe it to be a method for ensuring clear regulations that promote fair and equitable treatment in school discipline. The goal of the zero-tolerance policy is to provide a safe environment for students and staff and to punish students who are a serious criminal threat. The assumption behind zero-tolerance policies is that the removal of disruptive students will deter others from misbehaving and improve the overall school climate. Casella (2003) notes that the policy was never intended to operate as the sole method of discipline in school. The Safe Schools Act of 1994 and the Safe and Drug-Free Schools Communities Act of 1994 allowed school funding for other violence prevention programs to operate in addition to zero tolerance. Because of lethal school shootings, a

swift response to crisis situations was needed as part of a whole school violence prevention package. Supporters believed the policy would provide uniformity, equity, and a concrete approach to discipline, decreasing violent incidents. In fact, some national studies have reported an overall decline in victims of crime and weapon possession in schools (Devoe et al., 2002; National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). Yet it is difficult to isolate the causal factor behind these reductions in school violence since there has been an overall increase in a variety of school violence prevention strategies.

In a time of increased awareness of fatal school shootings, the zero-tolerance goals are easily defended. The goals of the zero-tolerance policy raise no controversy. Rather, the unfair implementation and punishment of minor, trivial behavior causes public outcries against the policy. Moreover, the policy's effectiveness in reducing school violence is widely questioned (American Psychological Association [APA] Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Skiba, 2000a, 2000b; Skiba, 2004; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). In particular, research suggests that schools with higher rates of school suspensions and expulsions have less satisfactory ratings of school climate (Bickel & Qualls, 1980), poorer school-wide academic achievement (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Raffaele-Mendez, 2003; Skiba & Rausch, 2006) and a moderate association with higher rates of school dropout and failure to graduate on time (Bowditch, 1993; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Developed from the Gun Free School Act of 1994 in reaction to notable school violence incidents, the zero-tolerance policy requires schools receiving federal funds to expel students in possession of a weapon for at least one year. However, the policy allows for modifications and subjective judgments in its application. For example, the

definition of weapon is left up to school administrators. This definition has been broadly conceived to include pocket knives, nail clippers, forks, butter knives, and other household items. Along with the latitude in weapon definition, schools can include other offenses under zero tolerance. Many schools have adopted zero-tolerance policies against drugs, bomb threats, and some forms of aggressive threats and/or harassment.

In the state of Florida, the 2007 statutes provide a definition of zero-tolerance requirements. A student found to have committed a zero-tolerance infraction must be expelled, "with or without continuing educational services, from the student's regular school for a period of not less than one full year" (Florida Statutes, 2007). The following offenses warrant expulsion in the state of Florida: possession of firearm or weapon, and threat or false report involving school-related property, transportation or activity. According to the statute, superintendents can consider the one year expulsion requirement on a "case-by-case basis" making modifications to the requirement (Florida Statutes, 2007). In the student rights and responsibilities book for the school district in the county where I did my research, drugs are added to the list of zero-tolerance offenses which includes firearms, weapons, and bomb threats. A drug offense is use, possession, or sale of a controlled substance defined in the Florida Statutes. However, some students get expelled for non-prescription over-the-counter products not listed as controlled substances in the statute. Locally, there is a specific definition of weapons. Prohibited weapons include dirks, metallic knuckles, slingshots, sword, sword cane, tear gas, chemical weapon or device, electrical weapons, stun gun, knife, razor, box cutter and any destructive device designated to inflict injury or destruction of life.

In my initial attempts at research using school data, school administrators indicated that they often feel that their "hands are tied" in applying these specific zero-tolerance guidelines to student infractions. In addition to the precarious position of some "good" students and parents, many school personnel seem to feel they themselves are in positions that leave them helpless when it comes to expelling an otherwise "good kid." The state statutes delineate the required course of action for any zero-tolerance policy infraction. Some administrators feel that these guidelines force school boards to take action even if they disagree with the expulsion.

Because of the sensitive nature of zero-tolerance, some have been prohibited from researching this policy. The website masslive.com, the online home of Amherst, Massachusetts newspaper, *The Republican*, reported an instance of censored zero-tolerance research at the middle school level (Contrada, 2008). Several middle school students in Amherst wanted to interview peers about their opinions of the policy and other school practices. After an eighth grade student met with the interim principal about the zero-tolerance policy and disciplinary issues, he decided to poll the other students at his school. This middle school student and others spent weeks interviewing peers. They compiled their results in graphs, summarized student comments, and submitted a number of recommendations for improvement to the school newsletter. The student's poll showed that 78% do not believe that their voices or ideas are being heard, 76% think the disciplinary practices make the school a worse place to attend, and 65% did not feel that the school vision was an accurate reflection of the school atmosphere. When the students presented their research to the school personnel, they were told that their research was biased and flawed. They were not allowed to publish or distribute their findings in the

school newsletter so they went on-line with their findings and the restrictions they experienced on their freedom of speech (Contrada).

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is now asking administrators to publish the findings. The ACLU attorney wrote, "it is ironic indeed that when a student publication says that middle school students' voices are not being heard by the administration, the administration's response is to silence student's voices" (Contrada, 2008). School administrators indicated that they would like the entire student body polled and that they had concerns about how the interviews were done, face-to-face in lunchroom (Contrada).

I faced similar obstacles in my own school district when I tried to get approval to look at student cumulative records and to interview students regarding zero-tolerance experiences. Thus, I had to explore other options for researching this policy. With such restrictions in obtaining student feedback regarding zero tolerance, children's voices continue to be stifled.

It is not difficult to locate controversial incidents of zero-tolerance policy expulsions in the media. Locally, at least two incidents have made national headlines. In 1999, a high school sophomore was expelled for bringing a nail clipper to school (Skiba, 2000a). The student, using the clipper to clean her nails, did not realize that a small knife was attached. The student received an expulsion despite having offered no threatening or harmful behaviors. Another incident surfaced in 2002 when a college bound, high school honors student mindlessly picked up a bag of pills from the ground. The pills were a mixture of over the counter sinus and allergy medications along with one anti-anxiety or seizure pill. The student panicked. She put the pills in her backpack to consider what to

do. Another student spotted the pills and turned the honors student in to school officials. After national attention, public and media outcry, legal proceedings, and a month long suspension, this student was able to get the recommended expulsion overturned. However, the disciplinary infraction will remain on her school record, and her emotional turmoil remains as a reminder of what has been called the "common sense" policy (Center for Individual Freedom, 2002a, 2002b).

Starting out as a counselor/program manager in an alternative school, I was unaware of the zero-tolerance policy and its repercussions. My primary goal was fulfilling my work responsibilities and helping students succeed personally and academically. In my position, I work directly with students, school staff, and parents. I provide individual counseling once a week, group counseling twice a week, and monthly parenting skill meetings. In addition to counseling responsibilities, I handle program budgeting, maintain relationships with school staff, and supervise a staff member teacher who tutors students in core academic subjects. The ultimate goal of my school based program is prevention of drug/alcohol use, school drop out, and other problematic behaviors.

The program rests on the social development model that emphasizes increasing protective factors to counteract the many risk factors students are facing. Risk factors include family, community, and individual instabilities such as family management problems, family history of alcoholism, high geographic mobility, academic failure, and antisocial behaviors. Protective factors serve as a buffer to prevent drug/alcohol problems through improved emotional well-being. Examples of protective factors are family member or mentor who supports the child's interests, opportunities at school for

success, problem solving skills, and industriousness. In particular, my program serves to enhance the protective factor called school bonding.

Research on risk and protective factors shows that students who feel a strong bond to school are less likely to drop out or use drugs/alcohol (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992). In my professional position, I soon began to feel the challenge of repairing some school bonds that had been severed under extremely controversial and often emotional circumstances. For instance, I encountered students and parents who were frustrated and angry over severe punishments for seemingly innocuous offenses. Several students with no previous disciplinary records had been expelled for having something broadly construed as a weapon, such as an eyelash curler, a fork, or nail file. Others were caught with nonprescription medication or a drug prescribed for them, and some had simply used the word *bomb* in written or oral communication.

In my experience, many students are expelled for what most people would consider innocuous offenses with no threat of harm. In fact, I have witnessed very few students being expelled for the first time for weapon-related threatening behavior. Most students are either innocently and unknowingly in possession of what some would consider a weapon, or they brought the weapon to school for a dare or to scare a bully. Skiba (2000a) says both local and national school data "have shown that the serious infractions that are the primary target of zero tolerance (e.g. drugs, weapons, gangs) occur relatively infrequently" (p. 6). This is not to say that most children expelled because of zero tolerance are innocent, but some first time offenders seem to be charged unreasonably and unfairly punished. Typically, these children face an intolerant school

and community despite their first time offender status and seemingly innocuous "weapon" or medication.

These first time offenders get transferred to an alternative school where they interact with a variety of students, many with chronic behavior problems and/or juvenile delinquent records. Teen middle school students frequently struggle with identity and "fitting in" concerns (Erikson, 1963). At the alternative school these peer acceptance issues become apparent as some first time offenders begin to mimic their more deviant peers in order to fit in. I began to ask myself, how effective is the zero-tolerance policy in promoting quality education and character development in our youth?

As I spoke with friends, colleagues, and associates about my research topic, I learned that the zero-tolerance policy has affected the lives of many individuals in our community. It became an almost predictable occurrence to hear about its effects. Everyone seemed to know someone, whether it be a family member or friend, who had been a victim of zero tolerance. The emotional reaction was outrage and dismay. I also heard pleas for necessary policy change.

Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical perspectives I use in this study include social learning theory, adolescent developmental theories, theories of juvenile delinquency, and the dramaturgical theory of stigma. Together these theories offer insights into first time offender expulsions under zero-tolerance policies. In particular, they address deviant peer influence, broken school bonds, juvenile-delinquency predictors, and stigmatization.

Social learning theory presupposes that learning often occurs through modeling. According to Bandura (1977), modeling involves observational learning of the behaviors of valued members of one's social environment. A behavior is more likely to be modeled when valued "social inducements" are provided for the behavior. A social inducement could be the approval of a peer or an adult or some other form of positive reinforcement such as perceived acceptance. According to Erikson (1963), adolescence is a time of identity confusion. The primary crisis at this age is to develop a well-established identity. At this pivotal time of development, the peer group can be one of the strongest influences on an adolescent's identity. With this premise in mind, it is reasonable to wonder whether students with no history of academic or behavior problems would model the negative behavior and poor academic motivation of peers in the alternative school. If so, would this behavior continue after returning to a traditional school and thus compromise the student's school success?

At least three adolescent development theories emphasize school bonding as a critical influence on positive adjustment: attachment theory, control theory, and the social development model. All three theories emphasize how school bonding promotes a child's development of prosocial attitudes and behaviors. Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, and Hawkins (2004) assert that school bonding promotes "healthy development and prevents problem behaviors" (p. 252). This research prompts the following question: what happens to the school bond when a student is expelled and removed from school? If the school bond is severed, can it be reconstructed? What might be the results of disconnectedness from school?

Some theories focus on the different contributors to juvenile delinquent behavior. Peer socialization, opportunities for misbehavior, unstructured time with peers, and criminal propensity characteristics are some of the precursors to juvenile delinquent behavior. Socializing with deviant peers increases the likelihood of juvenile delinquent behavior (Haynie, 2005). An inordinate amount of unsupervised, unstructured time with deviant peers escalates risk for juvenile delinquent behavior (Osgood, Wilson, O'Malley, Bachman, & Johnston, 1996). Early onset criminal propensity personality characteristics are another predictor of juvenile delinquent behavior (Caspi, 2000; Hare, 1996; Loeber & Farrington, 1990). Although it is difficult to measure the unstructured, unsupervised time students have outside of school, most first time offenders are sent to an alternative school where they have structured socialized time with deviant peers. The first time offenders in this study have limited to no prior history of the criminal propensity early onset antisocial behaviors that would put them at risk for juvenile delinquent behaviors. Thus, in this study I focus partly on whether the peer influence alone would be a strong enough influence to create school-related delinquency behavioral problems for the first time offender population.

According to Goffman's (1963) theory, "society establishes the means of categorizing persons and the complement of attributes felt to be ordinary and natural for member of each of these categories" (p. 2). When an individual is determined to have attributes different from others in the social category and these attributes are undesirable, stigma occurs. Stigma is an "attribute that is deeply discrediting" (Goffman, p. 3). Stigmatized individuals get labeled and treated as less than "normal" human beings, and they often endure discrimination. A child who is expelled and sent to an alternative

school is labeled as a "troubled youth" or "juvenile delinquent." This stigma could follow the student, providing a stark contrast to non-expelled students at traditional schools. How do these stigmas, which some have referred to as a criminalized label, affect the first time offender when entering an alternative school and returning to a traditional school setting?

Statement of Purpose

The school-wide zero-tolerance policy is a topic of much discussion and debate. Zero tolerance has garnered much controversy as children get expelled from school for offenses ranging in seriousness from possession of guns and knives to possession of nail files and over the counter medications like Midol (Michie, 2001).

Some students face expulsion as first time offenders with little to no history of disciplinary referrals and no previous expulsions. According to Morrison and D'Incau (1997), first time offenders are less likely than chronically delinquent peers to face academic difficulties and to lack school social support. Hawkins et al. (1992) characterize academic success and school support as protective factors that help to prevent a child from dropping out of school and using drugs or alcohol. Without these protective factors, students are more likely to exhibit problematic behaviors. In fact, the APA Zero Tolerance Task Force reports that expulsion from zero-tolerance policies can increase behavior problems and raise drop out rates (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008).

The implications are that the zero-tolerance policy could inadvertently increase juvenile misbehavior by decreasing protective factors in the first time offender population while also exposing them to antisocial peers. For example, association with drug-using peers is one of the strongest predictors for substance use among youth (Hawkins et al.,

1992). Additionally, expulsion through zero tolerance breaks the school bond, also increasing the chances of school drop out (Hawkins et al., 1992). School suspensions have consistently served as a moderate to strong predictor of school drop out and failure to graduate on time (Bowditch, 1993; Ekstrom et al., 1986; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Yet past research on zero tolerance does not address first time offenders' academic achievement, behavior or self-concept upon return to their home school. The APA recently commissioned a Zero Tolerance Task Force to examine the academic and behavioral effects of zero-tolerance policies. Their research suggests that behavior worsens after a child has been expelled for zero tolerance, but very little research specifically compares the first time offender to the chronic behavior problem student (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). A study comparing first time offenders to chronic behavior students at an alternative school could provide some insight into the possible short term effects of the expulsion. According to Skiba and Peterson (2000), there is little evidence that the zero-tolerance policy increases school safety or improves student behavior. Thus, study of first time offender's achievement, behavior, and self-concept during alternative school attendance is overdue.

An examination of how the zero-tolerance policy affects first time offenders will provide direction for administrators, policy makers, teachers, counselors, and prevention specialists. Administrators and policy makers will benefit from this research in their design of programs and policies that promote student success. Teachers and counselors will be able to identify circumstances that may be hindering student success so that effective interventions can be implemented. This research will provide valuable results to

school based substance abuse/drop out prevention programs so that need for further prevention efforts can be assessed. As the educational community learns about the effects of the zero-tolerance policy, school improvement initiatives can further address student success.

My research has emergent qualities reflected by the many adjustments that I have made to respond to unpredictable events and new data sources. For example, my study initially had a quantitative component which sought to understand the long term effects of zero-tolerance expulsions on first time offender grades and behavior upon returning to a traditional school. This component of the study was eliminated because of indefinite time lines for research approval through the school district. As I discussed my research with colleagues, I discovered other rich sources of data available through blogs and agency records. The purpose of this study is to compare reading and math achievement, behavior, and overall self-concept of first time offenders to chronic behavior students participating in a prevention program at the alternative school. Since expulsion and alternative school attendance labels students, reduces protective factors, and increases interactions with delinquent peers, these experiences might negatively affect first time offender's academic achievement, behavior, and overall feelings of self-worth.

My mixed methods study focuses on first time offenders who have been expelled and referred to an alternative school. The first time offenders and chronic behavior students in this study all participated in a semester long prevention program. The study revolves around four research questions:

1. How do the Kaufman Test of Education Achievement (K-TEA) pre- and posttest scores of these zero-tolerance offenders compare with those of chronic

behavior students?

2. Is there a significant difference in behavior, as measured by the Burks' Behavior Rating Scale (BBRS), between zero-tolerance offenders and chronic behavior students controlling for preset behaviors?
3. Is there a significant difference in self-concept, as measured by the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale, between zero-tolerance offenders and chronic behavior students controlling for preset self-concept?
4. What insights into the more diffuse effects on zero-tolerance first time offenders and their families can be gained by looking at themes in clinical progress notes on students, blogs, and an interview with an adult who had been previously expelled because of zero tolerance?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Thus far research on zero tolerance has focused on the characteristics of expelled students, racial disparities, differential application of the policy, "the school to prison pipeline," and alternative disciplinary strategies with little attention to its effects on first time offenders. When a child is expelled, a typical consequence is a transfer to an alternative school. That school environment often leads to first time offenders being categorized and socialized with peers having chronic behavior problems and/or juvenile delinquent records. Although APA suggests a negative influence on behavior and school attendance as a result of zero tolerance, it remains unclear how expulsion, subsequent labeling as an alternative school student and association with juvenile offenders affect student behavior and academic achievement (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). We do know, though, that some first time offender groups have close to a C average with low rates of disciplinary problems prior to alternative school attendance (Morrison & D'Incau, 1997).

Nationwide Attention

Adapted from the "war on drugs" in the late 1980's, the zero-tolerance policy first got national attention when it emerged as a no-nonsense reaction to drug trafficking in sea vessels. At this time, the policy was "intended primarily as a method of sending a

message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated, by punishing all offenses severely, no matter how minor" (Skiba, 2000a, p. 2). The zero-tolerance language soon became a popular response to varying issues including pollution, trespassing, and even homelessness.

In 1994 President Clinton signed the Gun Free School Act, which requires one year expulsion for firearms. However, the law lets school administrators modify expulsions on a "case-by-case basis" (Skiba, 2000a, p. 2). Recent amendments broadened the bill to include a variety of instruments that can be used as weapons. Since these amendments, many schools have also broadened their zero-tolerance policies to include offenses such as drug and alcohol possession, threats, and other misbehaviors.

The zero-tolerance policy has frequently been the focus of national attention. In addition to extensive scholarly research on this topic, there is a copious amount of editorials, commentaries, book review, literature review summaries, newspaper and magazine articles addressing the negative effects of zero tolerance (Armistead, 2008; Black, 2004; Bowman, 2002; Cohen, 1999; Essex, 2000; Gladwell, 2006; Kauffman & Brigham, 2000; Lenckus, 2007; Martinez, 2009; Mosca & Hollister, 2004; Peebles-Wilkins, 2005; Schone, 2001; Smothers, 2000; Springen, 2001; Tulman, 2008; Zernike, 2001). In some cases, the policy's threats to a student's right to an education have caused community outrage (Davis, 1999; Johnson, 1999; Zernike, 2001). Illustrative incidents include a Colorado high school student threatened with expulsion for having three baseball bats in his car, New Jersey elementary school students expelled for pretending that their fingers were guns, a first grader suspended for three days for pointing a breaded chicken finger at a peer and saying "pow, pow, pow," and two

Virginia fifth graders expelled and charged with a felony for putting soap in the teacher's water (Associated Press, 2003; Goodman, 2000; Schone, 2001). The *Reader's Digest* refers to the policy as "ongoing madness" citing expulsion incidents involving Boy Scout knives, paper clips, rubber bands, and scary Halloween stories (Crowley, 2007). According to a *Reader's Digest* senior editor, "schools nowadays are wildly overreacting to any behavior with a whiff of danger or controversy" (Crowley, p. 35).

Jesse Jackson has been a vocal opponent of the zero-tolerance policy. He offers such examples as a child suspended on a weapons charge for having a rubber hammer which was part of a Halloween costume and a youth expelled on a drug charge for having two lemon cough drops (Rethinking Schools, 2000). Another highly publicized incident in Decatur, Illinois involved a seventeen-second weaponless fight at a football game between seven African American students. Two of these students were high school seniors ready to graduate. The seven students were expelled for two years but the expulsion was later reduced to one year after Jesse Jackson brought national attention to the incident (Rethinking Schools). These incidents illustrate how the zero tolerance policy allows for criminalization of innocent youth and a "'quick and dirty way of kicking kids out' of school rather than creating safe environment for them" (Giroux, 2003a, p. 561)

Because of national attention and the frequency of zero-tolerance expulsions, the APA created a Zero Tolerance Task Force to survey research on it over the last 10 years. The APA reports that "zero tolerance has not been shown to improve school climate or school safety" (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008, p. 860). In fact, "school suspension and expulsion are moderately associated with a higher likelihood of school

dropout and failure to graduate on time" (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008, p. 854). In particular, APA cites concern with excessive time spent disciplining students, minority overrepresentation in expulsions, lack of consideration for developmental immaturity and intent, and increased juvenile justice referrals APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). According to Skiba and Peterson (2000), some evidence suggests that schools with zero-tolerance policies are less safe than those without them. Further, the zero-tolerance policy permits authority figures to view student violations of school rules in a "social and historical vacuum" with no consideration for cause, intent, or circumstance (Robbins, 2005, p. 7).

Negative Effects

Several studies indicate large racial disparities among students expelled under the zero-tolerance policy (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Dohrn, 2001; Giroux, 2003a; Robbins, 2005; Skiba, 2000b; Skiba, et al., 2002; Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Verdugo, 2002). African American students have been consistently overrepresented in suspensions and expulsions (Advancement Project, 2000; APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Dohrn, 2001; Giroux, 2003a; Kaeser, 1979; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; McFadden, Marsh, Price & Hwang, 1992; Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Raffaele-Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Robbins, 2005; Skiba, 2000b; Skiba, et al., 2002; Verdugo, 2002; Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982). They are more likely to be expelled regardless of the seriousness of the offense. In fact, "since zero tolerance policies have been instituted, the numbers of suspended and expelled students mirror those of the criminal justice system, reinforcing the fear of African American youth" (Robbins, 2005, p. 9). Verdugo's (2002) analysis of public

schools records for 1996-1997 shows that schools with higher minority student representation are more likely to have the following zero-tolerance policies: school uniform policies, closed campus, controlled access to school, drug sweeps, metal detector checks, and police presence.

Skiba (2000b) researched the overrepresentation of minority students for disciplinary infractions in a Midwestern urban school district. For the 19 schools in the district during 1994-1995, the 11,001 middle school students included 56% African Americans and 42% Caucasians. Yet African Americans represented 66.1 percent of office referrals, 68.5 percent of suspensions, and 80.9 percent of expulsions. Skiba's further research with added controls shows that although poverty puts a child at risk for disciplinary referrals, poverty alone fails to explain these racial disparities. Skiba concludes that there are more frequent, harsh disciplinary reactions to African American students on more subjective and less serious cases. Other research studies support the finding that African Americans receive more severe discipline for less serious, subjective offenses (McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; McFadden et al., 1992; Skiba et al., 2002). Some possible explanations for this differential disciplinary practice include lack of teacher preparation for classroom management (Vavrus & Cole, 2002), poor training in culturally responsive teaching (Ferguson, 2001; Townshend, 2000) or racial stereotypes (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Graham & Lowery, 2004). Schools with the highest rates of suspension also have the highest rates of African American overrepresentation in suspensions (Skiba et al., 2002). However, there is "no evidence that African Americans misbehave at a significantly higher rate" (Skiba, 2000a, p. 12).

Students with disabilities also appear to be affected by the policy. Although there are fewer data, some studies suggest that this population is suspended and expelled at disproportionate rates to their representation (Leone, Mayer, Malmgren, & Meisel, 2000; Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, Epstein, & Sumi, 2005). Emotional and behavioral disorders are the most common diagnoses in the students suspended and expelled.

According to both Robbins (2005) and Giroux (2001a, 2001b, 2003a, 2003b), the zero-tolerance policy is a major source of inequality in today's schools. Giroux suggests that it is sometimes easier for teachers and administrators to punish than to provide support services, listen to students, and offer viable alternatives for troubled youth. Instead of investing in early childhood programs, repairing buildings, and hiring more qualified teachers, money goes to upgrading security systems that make schools look more like a prison and less like a safe haven for education and support.

Robbins (2005, 2008) emphasizes that the policy is anti-democratic. It blocks the communication lines between students and adult authority figures, implying that listening to youth is unimportant. School personnel often fail to give students a voice in explaining the intent or motivation behind their actions. Expelled students lose opportunities to learn how to be productive participants in the traditional school environment. Robbins concludes that the excessive expulsions of African American students reproduce historical inequalities through "mass removal" of African American students from schools. In the long run, "zero tolerance might mean less racial equality and democracy, not less violence" (Robbins, 2005, p. 14).

In addition to racial disparities, inconsistent applications of the policy warrant concern (Advancement Project, 2000; Dunbar & Villaruel, 2002: Dunbar & Villaruel,

2004). In their study of 36 principals in a Midwestern urban school district Dunbar and Villaruel (2002) reported that the following factors influenced principal's decision regarding zero-tolerance expulsions: age and grade of student, whether student was a first time offender, potential threat to school safety, and the availability of a parent at home to support the principal's decision.

In another study, Dunbar and Villaruel (2004) found different interpretation and implementation of the policy in rural and urban school districts. Their face-to-face structured interviews with 36 urban school principals and 8 rural principals revealed differential interpretation and initiation of the policy. Urban principals had a very specific understanding of the policy and believed it was useful in reducing the "gray areas" in school discipline. Rural principals, on the other hand, did not fully comprehend the policy specifics but did not feel it was necessary or a priority in their schools. The urban principals, believing that there is a higher degree of threat within their student population, were more likely to enforce the policy as indicated by law, representing an authoritarian-disciplinary stance. Rural administrators did not perceive their student population to be a major threat and often used authoritative discipline with discretion in their application of the policy. Such differential applications of the zero-tolerance policy negatively affect both students and teachers allowing for expulsions based on personal characteristics, socioeconomic status, or race. Psychologists argue that inconsistent punishment is ineffective and can lead to side-effects, such as counter-aggression (Skiba, 2004).

Yet zero-tolerance policies commonly allow teacher and administrator discretion in applying the policy. For example, Michigan lets teachers suspend students based on behaviors perceived to be disruptive or "assaulting" (Dunbar & Villaruel, 2002).

However, this allowed discretion often places the burden of responsibility of making difficult decisions on teachers. According to a mixed method design study by Fries and DeMitchell (2007) using focus groups, experienced and preservice teachers report a constant struggle of implementing zero tolerance since the policy does not allow consideration of context, intent and history. Most teachers address this struggle by attempting to "balance the paradox of fairness through their decisions of when to escalate a discipline decision and when to handle it in the classroom" (Fries & DeMitchell, p. 229). Such zero-tolerance policies present difficult decisions and sometimes open the door for racial prejudices and cultural misunderstandings to influence suspensions and expulsions.

Just as the zero-tolerance policy is applied differentially, it also entails differential consequences for different socioeconomic groups. Some families can use monetary resources and status to their advantage. For example, an affluent family may be able to send an expelled student to a private school or to a different school district or hire an attorney to challenge an expulsion. Even when their daughter or son gets sent to an alternative school, such parents have more resources for extracurricular activities, tutoring, and other means of easing the transition (Robbins, 2005).

Not surprisingly, many researchers express concern that some nonviolent behaviors are being criminalized because of safety concerns despite the fact that less than one percent of violent crimes against students occur at school (Dohrn, 2001). In addition, the alternative school setting can present a prison-like atmosphere (Souza, 1999). Souza reports that students at an alternative school often used prison metaphors. Further, they emphasize doing "time" rather than doing class work or learning.

According to the American Bar Association (ABA), school systems today are mimicking the adult criminal justice system (Martin, 2001). The ABA finds fault with the policy's "one-size-fits-all" approach that ignores developmental level, emotional problems, disabilities, or intent. The ABA has rejected mandatory sentencing as too harsh even for adults. Yet the zero-tolerance policy is an attempt to implement mandatory sentencing for children.

Martin (2001) reported that

> Rather than having a variety of sanctions available for a range of school-based offenses, state laws and school district policies apply the same expulsion rules to the six-year-old as the 17-year-old; to the first time offender as to the chronic troublemaker; to the child with a gun as to the child with a Swiss Army knife (Zero Tolerance and Mandatory Punishment section, ¶ 8).

Some researchers describe the criminalization of youth as a crisis of democracy that reflects racial injustices (Giroux, 2003a, 2003b; Robbins, 2005). Youth already stand in the position of having fewer rights than other groups, often being treated as objects of distrust (Giroux, 2001a, 2001b). School policies and procedures further complicate their position of relative powerlessness. For example, children are being treated "like criminal suspects who need to be searched, tested, and observed under the watchful eye of administrators who appear to be less concerned with educating them than with policing their every move" (Giroux, 2003a, p. 554). Examples of the criminalization of schools and students include visible police officers, drug dogs, random drug testing of athletes, bans against loitering and "cruising," metal detectors, armed guards, see-through backpacks, video surveillance cameras, and youth treated as suspects. Research on the

effectiveness of these resource intensive security measures is inconclusive (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). However, there is a positive correlation between security measures and school crime. Schools with a greater number of restrictive security measures have higher crime rates (Chen, 2008; Mayer & Leone, 1999). According to Giroux (2003a), "as compassion and understanding give way to rigidity and intolerance, schools become more militarized and appear as adjuncts, if not conduits, to the penal system" (p. 561)

Along with the school environment is the emphasis on criminality and punishment to the neglect of education. In many states, more money is spent on prison construction than higher education. Many states are hiring more prison guards than teachers. Giroux (2003a, 2003b) argues that we are at risk of losing many youth, especially minorities, because of our current system of intolerance for difference. In comparison to whites, minority youth more often receive criminal charges for the same offenses. He calls this a "crisis of democracy" that has resulted in the U.S having the highest rates of imprisonment in the world.

The increased emphasis on punishment and criminalized reactions to youth could have a significant impact on school bonding. Jenkins (1997) examined the effects of four components of the school social bond on school crime, misconduct, and attendance. The components include school commitment, attachment to school, school involvement, and school nonattendance. The sample of 754 seventh and eighth grade middle school students completed an anonymous questionnaire on personal background, family involvement in school, school commitment, behavior, and ability grouping. The results suggest that the school bond is an important step in reducing school delinquency. Thus, these findings support the social development model that emphasizes school bonding as a

protective factor against the development of conduct problems, school misbehavior, truancy, and drug abuse (Hawkins et al., 1992). The social development model advocates teacher skill training so as to increase positive reinforcement. Hawkins et al. assert that successful school involvement in prosocial activities strengthen the school bond which protects against antisocial behaviors.

Many researchers argue that expelling a student from school for zero tolerance leads to student exclusion and isolation as well as inadequate education which in turn can lead to increased delinquency, criminal behavior, and exacerbated mental health issues (Hayden, Sheppard, & Ward, 1996). For instance, research shows that removal from school through suspension can have negative effects on behavior and school success. School suspensions predict higher future rates of misbehavior and suspensions (Bowditch, 1993; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Raffaele-Mendez, 2003; Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996) and consistently show up as a moderate to strong predictor of school drop out (Skiba & Peterson, 2000). According to Bowditch (1993), suspensions are sometimes used to encourage the early exit of academically undesirable students and "troublemakers." Gordon, Della Piana, and Keleher (2000) report that students performing poorly in school are most likely to be suspended despite the fact that they can least afford to miss classes. In addition to these negative effects, students generally view school suspensions and expulsions as unfair and ineffective (Brantlinger, 1991; Sheets, 1996; Thorson, 1996).

When a student is expelled from school, the options are usually alternative schooling including home schooling, dropping the case or determining whether expulsion is actually warranted (Morrison & D'Incau, 1997). According to Losen and Edley (2001),

alternative school programs commonly evoke concerns about "watered-down curriculum," "few positive peer models," and "low expectations by unqualified instructors" (p. 243). Losen and Edley report that minority children are more likely to be transferred to alternative schools which "might be another conduit for the school-to-jail pipeline" (p. 243).

Given the widespread negative notions about alternative schools, research on student's experiences should be considered. Souza's (1999) qualitative study of at-risk students in an alternative school setting was conducted in a large Northwestern United States alternative high school. This alternative school had an average enrollment of 300 students. Souza observed and interviewed ten students over a four week Re-Entry Program in a classroom setting. The results indicate lower teacher expectations for students and conflicting student/teacher attitudes and expectations about the program. Teachers expected students to attend class and behave with little emphasis on academics. Most of the time, teachers were focused on classroom management skills. Many of the teachers found the program to be worthwhile, whereas most students found very little value in the program. Faced with these contradictory messages, results revealed that student's expectations, norms, and attitudes were more influenced by their peers than teachers at the school. The norms at the school emphasized attendance over learning. This focus on "serving time" and "work" can create the student disengagement which was apparent at this particular alternative school.

Coyl, Jones, and Dick's (2004) work supports previous research on the intensity of peer influence but they suggest a positive influence of alternative schools and peers. Using a mixed method, cross sectional research design that included self-report

questionnaires, interviews, and surveys, these researchers report improvements in student peer relationships after attending an alternative school. Many students said that their peers at the alternative school provided positive models for staying in school and maximizing academic effort. They felt accepted by peers and less stigmatized by teachers and administrators. Students noted that the small student body decreased anonymity and enhanced peer relationships. Yet this alternative high school had fewer authoritarian teachers and more "responsive," "openly caring" staff who addressed student needs by providing counseling, academic tutoring, mentoring, and time for personal issues to be discussed in class in a noncompetitive learning environment. Thus this school and student population (primarily Caucasian) may not be representative of alternative schools nationwide.

In fact, many alternative and secondary schools in general tend to be "at odds with the developmental challenges of adolescence" (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008, p. 855). Most adolescents younger than 15 struggle with developmental immaturity in the following areas: poor resistance to peer influence (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005), attitude and perception of risk (Arnett, 1992; Hooper, Luciana, Conklin, & Yarger, 2004), future oriented thinking (Greene, 1986); and impulse control (Cauffman & Steinberg, 2000; Luna, Garver, Urban, Lazar, & Sweeney, 2004). Adolescents are prone to greater risk taking without forethought for consequences. This leads to questions about how an adolescent who is developmentally inclined to take risks, act impulsively, and respond favorably to peer influence will fare in an alternative school environment mingling with a large number of youth with chronic behavior problems and juvenile delinquent records. It also provides a possible explanation for zero-tolerance offenses with the 15 and younger

age group. In fact, "used inappropriately, zero tolerance policies may exacerbate both the normative challenges of early adolescence and the potential mismatch between the adolescent's developmental stage and the structure of secondary schools" (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008, p. 855).

First Time Offenders

Morrison and D'Incau (1997) characterize first time offenders as students who get caught with a weapon by accident with the incident being isolated from their normally appropriate school behavior and who have a history of few disciplinary referrals and evidence of school support; also, they are likely to be from a lower grade and may be reacting to a family crisis. Other students in this study were categorized as either "disconnected," "troubled," or "socialized delinquent." A qualitative examination of 158 expulsion files from two school years revealed distinct differences between these groups. The most pertinent information for my study are the results pertaining to first time offenders. The first offender group was more likely to have these "resiliency factors": higher pass rates on competency tests, more school support, and more involvement in extracurricular activities. These students had lower levels of disciplinary problems and were closest to C average students. Morrison and D'Incau note a tendency to drop the case when a student is a first time offender. However, not all cases are dropped, and special consideration must be given to first time offenders in alternative schools who despite their resilience could face several risk factors for antisocial behavior during their expulsion.

Theoretical Perspectives

My observations at the alternative school led to concerns about the influences of peers, school environment, labeling, and exclusion. These personal observations along with the research on the negative effects of the zero-tolerance policy warranted the use of a variety of theoretical perspectives to provide a framework for the research questions addressed in this study. I chose to utilize theories formed out of different disciplines within the social sciences including psychology, sociology, and criminal justice. The theoretical perspectives are social learning theory, the social developmental model, stigmatization theory, and juvenile-delinquency theories.

Social Learning Theory

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory accounts for how juvenile delinquent behaviors sometimes develop. Children model their behavior after those around them, and the behavior adopted depends on the variety of models available (parents, other adults, peers), inconsistencies in the behavior of the same model over time, and the perceived consequences and "social inducements" of the behavior. Behaviors that present a high risk of punishment require the "cumulative impact of salient examples to reduce restraints sufficiently to initiate a rise in modeled behavior" (Bandura, p. 55).

Along with modeling, social learning theory emphasizes rewards/costs and the individual's learning history with that behavior. A criminal offense or school misbehavior is more likely when an adolescent perceives greater rewards for delinquent behavior than for prosocial behavior (Bandura, 1977). Learning history consists of observations of the rewards and costs of antisocial behavior as opposed to prosocial behavior. Antisocial attitudes and moral disengagement can also inform an adolescent's learning history. The

adolescent's learning history and cognitive factors serve as influences on their "perceptions of rewards and costs in particular situations" (Watt, Howells, & Delfabbro, 2004, p.148).

According to social learning theory, discriminative stimuli are the determining factors as to whether an adolescent will engage in a specific behavior. The adolescent is more likely to engage in a criminal behavior when rewarding stimuli are present (antisocial peers) and less likely to engage in criminal behavior when stimuli indicate greater costs (prosocial peers). The influence of peers on juvenile delinquency is great, if only because "adolescents spend much time with their friends, attribute great importance to them, and are more strongly influenced by them during this period than at any other time in the life course" (Haynie, 2005, p. 1110). Adolescents with antisocial peers are more likely to get frequent reinforcement for criminal behavior and have higher rates of recidivism than youth with prosocial peers (Hoge & Andrews, 1996; Hoge, Andrews, & Leschied, 1994; Tollett & Benda, 1999). Also, adolescents with antisocial attitudes have a higher risk of recidivism than those with less antisocial attitudes (Andrews & Bonta, 1998).

Robbins (2005) indicates that the threat of exclusion from school is less powerful than the threat of peer exclusion. Thus in the context of social learning theory, peer acceptance and self-defense may be more rewarding than "doing the right thing." For example, in a bullying situation, self-defense and peer acceptance can be more rewarding than the punishment, more beating or ridicule for not defending one's self. Some might even venture to say that expulsion from school can increase a student's status in some deviant peer groups.

Some authors argue against peer socialization in favor of a peer selection explanation (Gleuck & Gleuck, 1950; Hirschi, 1969). According to peer selection theories, adolescents choose friends who are similar in behavior and interests. From this perspective, delinquent youth are more likely to select peers who engage in similar criminal behaviors. Watt, Howells, and Delfabbro (2004) indicate that "delinquent behavior causes an individual to choose delinquent peers, rather than delinquent peers causing criminal behavior" (p.150). Some research indicates that both socialization and selection are at work among juvenile delinquents (Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999; Thornberry, Lizotte, Krohn, Farnworth, & Jang, 1994). Delinquent youth are more likely to interact with one another and have higher rates of recidivism as a result.

School Bonding

In addition to peer socialization, the school bond plays an important role in adolescent development. The school bond gets emphasis in three theoretical perspectives: attachment, control, and social development theory. Attachment theorists initially focused on the parent-child bond as key to positive child motivation. Later, researchers extended the attachment bond to include school relationships with other adults. This school bonding promotes "healthy development and prevents problem behaviors" (Catalano et al., 2004, p. 252). Secure attachment promotes identity development and trusting relationships. Hirschi's (1969) control theory of deviant behavior emphasizes involvement, attachment to affective relationships, investment or commitment, and belief in the values as facets of the school bond. When these four factors are present, the school bond can help to prevent deviant behavior. The social development model integrates

social learning, social control, and differential association theory. According to this model, a child's behavior is learned within a social environment through opportunities for involvement, actual involvement, skill for involvement, and perceived rewards for involvement. Whether a child develops prosocial or antisocial behavior depends on the "predominant behaviors, norms and values held by those individuals or institutions to which/whom the individual is bonded" (Catalano et al., p. 252). A strong school bond for instance, can deter behaviors inconsistent with school norms and values.

School bonding consists of two interdependent components: attachment through close affective relationships with school personnel and school commitment developed from feelings of success. When both components are present, the student is less likely to get involved with delinquency and crime, engage in violent acts, and drop out of school, and is more likely to have high academic achievement. According to Catalano et al. (2004), school bonding even benefits "high risk groups including aggressive boys, children with parents who modeled problem behaviors, and children from low income families" (p. 256). In fact, "an increase in school bonding between grades seven and twelve correlated positively with self-reported and official grade point average (GPA) and correlated negatively with school misbehavior in 12th grade" (Catalano et al., p. 256). Thus, the school bond contributes to healthy adolescent development. Assessing school bonding "from a developmental standpoint, one might well question the wisdom of school disciplinary strategies that are expressly intended to break that bond with troublesome students" (Skiba, 2000a, p. 14).

McNeely, Nonnemaker, and Blum (2002) identify school bonding or "school connectedness" as important in lowering chances of adolescent substance use, violence,

and early sexual activity. According to their analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, school connectedness increases with positive classroom management, extracurricular activity participation, small school size, and flexible disciplinary policies. By contrast, school connectedness is lower in schools that expel for minor offenses such as possession of alcohol. School connectedness is even lower in schools that expel for the first offense. McNeely et al. indicate that "increasing students' sense of connectedness to school decreases health-risk behavior" (p. 138).

Other research on adolescent development focuses on risky decision making and peer influence. Gardner and Steinberg (2005) report that adolescents in middle to late adolescence are more susceptible to peer influence in risky situations. In contrast with adults, adolescents are much more likely to engage in risk taking and risky decision making. Because of differences in psychosocial capacities such as self-reliance, adolescents have more difficulties resisting risk taking peers. According to this research, placing a teen in a school environment saturated with risk taking peers could increase risky decisions, leading to behavioral difficulties in school.

Stigmas

It is also important to consider the influence of stigma and self-fulfilling prophecies on adolescent behavior. A stigma is an "attribute or condition devalued or derogated by many individuals in a culture" (Jussim, Palumbo, Chatman, Madon, & Smith, 2000, p. 375). According to Goffman (1963), stigmas are commonly of the body, character, or tribe. Body stigma includes visible physical deformities while tribal stigma is related to race, nationality, family and religion. The type of stigma most associated with first time offenders would be characterological stigma. These consist of

perceived personal flaws such as mental disorders, imprisonment, addiction, and unemployment. For first time offenders, the stigma of being expelled from school could negatively affect their interactions with "normals" who have no perceptible stigma.

Goffman (1963) suggests that what is stigma at one level might not be considered a stigma at another level. For example, the first time offender fits in at the alternative school but is later stigmatized when returning to the traditional school. While at the alternative school, encounters with "social deviants" can provide "models of being for restless normals obtaining not only sympathy but also recruits" (Goffman, p. 145). By becoming a "recruit," the first time offender avoids stigmatization at the alternative school but as a result of this deviant socialization could face stigma when returning to a traditional school.

Stigmas can lead to self-fulfilling prophecies when "an initially erroneous social belief leads to its own fulfillment" (Jussim, et al., 2000, p. 376). Self-fulfilling prophecies maintain and reinforce stigmas. The "labeling and exclusion practices" of zero tolerance "can create a self-fulfilling prophesy and result in a cycle of antisocial behavior that can be difficult to break" (Noguera, 2003, p. 343). Much of the research on self-fulfilling prophecies focuses on teacher expectations and class "climate." For example, a teacher's expectation about a student's capabilities can affect the student's overall academic achievement. Although self-fulfilling prophecies can have negative or positive results, most critical to my research are the negative effects of self-fulfilling prophecies based on stigma. In fact, positive self-fulfilling prophecies can have pronounced beneficial effects for highly stigmatized individuals. However, negative self-fulfilling prophecies can be very powerful. Although many students may work hard to disconfirm stigmas, the

research suggests that negative expectations are particularly harmful for students with a history of poor school performance (Jussim, et al., 2000). Thus, a stigmatized first time offender student may encounter negative expectations from teachers when returning to a traditional school. These negative expectations could lead to self-fulfilling prophecies creating behavioral difficulties and lowered academic achievement.

Cassidy and Jackson (2005) address the effect of negative labels such as "severe behaviour," "troubled" or "violent" through interviews with youth expelled because of zero tolerance. They point out that these labels are socially constructed "determined or interpreted by the observer, according to a particular lens" (Cassidy & Jackson, p. 451). These labels target the child rather than the problem and tend to persist over time. Labeling also contributes to a deficit model of youth rather than strength based. The deficit model does not acknowledge extenuating factors and individual characteristics that may be affecting the youth. Their interviews reveal parents' concerns about their children developing aversions to school because of negative labels. Students complained of a lack of mutual respect from teachers. Students reported feeling targeted, singled out, isolated, not listened to, and judged. In addition, Cassidy and Jackson report that labeling can create an "us against them mentality" undermining opportunities for community building and school bonding.

Juvenile Delinquency

The opportunity perspective can be traced to Hawley's (1950) social ecology theory. Social ecology theorists emphasize systems and symbiotic relationships that occur as a function of spatial and temporal patterns of everyday life. Osgood et al. (1996)

extended social ecology theory with their opportunity theory of antisocial behavior. They suggest that antisocial behavior is situational; it is more prevalent during unstructured, unsupervised socialization with peers. Juvenile delinquency is thus connected to the amount of unstructured time spent with peers. Haynie (2005) reports that both peer socialization and opportunity play important roles. Socialization with antisocial peers and unstructured time with peers is significantly associated with delinquency in both longitudinal and cross-sectional analyses of national data.

The criminal propensity theory was developed to understand the precursor characteristics of delinquent youth. The assumption is that most first time offenders have no criminal propensity characteristics. However, if these characteristics are present, the zero-tolerance expulsion could place the youth at higher risk for the onset of juvenile delinquent behavior. Criminal propensity theorists state that with an early onset individual criminal characteristics tends to be stable throughout the lifespan (Loeber & Farrington, 1990). Some of the criminal proneness predictor characteristics are low self-control, egocentricity, manipulative behavior, impulsivity, inability to delay gratification, antisocial behavior, and neuropsychological difficulties (Caspi, 2000; Hare, 1996).

Research on juvenile recidivism supports the criminal propensity theory. Juvenile delinquents with early onset of criminal behavior are more likely to re-offend than those with a later onset (Wierson & Forehand, 1995) In addition; juvenile delinquents with low self-control and poor socialization have higher rates of recidivism than those with high self control and appropriate socialization (Gough, Wenk, & Rozynke, 1965). Those students with the criminal propensity characteristics are more likely to be negatively influenced by a school expulsion. An expulsion or suspension "may simply accelerate the

course of delinquency by providing a troubled youth with little parental supervision and more opportunities to socialize with deviant peers" (Skiba, 2000a, p. 14).

Social control theorists examine why people do not offend. According to social control theory, a juvenile delinquent continues to offend when their social bonds are weak or broken (Hirschi, 1969). Protective factors that reduce juvenile delinquent recidivism include family (bonding and cohesiveness), school (achievement, attachment, commitment, involvement, good behavior), and extracurricular activities. Hoge et al. (1994) note that juvenile delinquents with high family bonding are less likely to re-offend than those with less cohesive families. On the other hand, juvenile offenders with high family conflict are more likely to re-offend than those with cooperative families.

Social control theorists also point to school factors. Youth with higher academic achievement and fewer behavioral problems are less likely to re-offend than those with lower school achievements (Duncan, Kennedy, & Patrick, 1995; Kahn & Chambers, 1991). Hirschi (1969) suggests that structured extracurricular activities could provide an additional social bond that would prevent juvenile criminal behavior. Some researchers find support for recreational activity as a protective factor. It appears that youth offenders involved in structured recreation are less likely to re-offend (Hoge, et al., 1994; Shields & Whitehall, 1994).

In summary, several theories suggest a possible negative influence of the zero-tolerance policy on students. Social learning theory proposes peer acceptance and socialization to be powerful influences on adolescent behavior. In conjunction, research in the area of risky behavior shows that peer influence and risky decision making both increase in the teen years. According to these theories, a first time offender attending an

alternative school where antisocial behavior is common would have a greater chance of modeling negative peer risk taking behaviors. The school bonding research suggests that commitment, attachment and a sense of connection to school can serve as a buffer for antisocial behaviors. A first time offender expelled from school will most likely suffer a weakened school bond that increases the risk of academic failure and drop out. Stigma and self-fulfilling prophecy research imply that a first time offender who internalizes a character stigma and is stigmatized by teachers has a greater probability of fulfilling negative behavioral and academic expectations. Finally, juvenile-delinquency research suggests that opportunities for misbehavior, criminal propensity characteristics and weakened social bonds are important factors in predicting juvenile delinquent behavior. First time offenders may or may not have criminal propensity characteristics. However, the first time offender will have increased opportunities to socialize with deviant peers at the alternative school and possibly weakened social bonds through school and community exclusion.

The breadth of research in the area of zero tolerance presents many issues for consideration. The research suggests that children expelled through the zero-tolerance policy face discrimination, unfair treatment, criminal labeling, decreased school bonding, adjustment to a new school environment, and socialization with antisocial peers. In my research, I address the impact of these factors on parents and first time offenders whom Morrison and D'Incau (1997) describe as having multiple "resiliency factors," few disciplinary referrals, and average academic achievement.

The zero-tolerance literature suggests that first time offenders have different characteristics than other expelled students. In addition, the research outlines negative

effects such as racial disparities, differential application of the policy, decreased school bond, poor academic success, criminalized stigmas, and behavioral issues. My study further develops the research in these areas by testing for differences in first time offender students. My research tests theories of social learning, social development and juvenile delinquency to see if there are negative effects on behavior, self-concept, school bonding and success of first time offenders and chronic behavior students while attending an alternative school. In addition, descriptive statistics and qualitative research provides information on the characteristics of these first time offenders such as demographics, reason for expulsion, and the student's perspective on their expulsion. Demographic information determines whether there are racial disparities in expelled students as suggested in a large number of previous studies. The most common reasons for expulsion provide insight into the application of the policy in one school district. Finally, the student perspective looks at whether first time offenders in this study perceive the policy as anti-democratic, criminalizing, and a detriment to their school success as some authors have suggested. The family perspective has not been addressed in previous research. Thus, my research in this area highlights another important area that may be affected by the zero-tolerance polic

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of first time offenders sent to an alternative school. A mixed methods two-fold approach was used to achieve this purpose. The quantitative part of the study included descriptive and inferential components. Descriptive statistics were used to describe demographic and student achievement, self-concept, and behavior data. The inferential part of this study included a comparison of first time offenders and chronic behavior students on their behavior and overall self-concept scores. I utilized the subsequent qualitative part of the study to explain and further describe the personal components of a first time offender through the use of clinical progress notes, blogs, and an e-mail interview with an adult who was expelled by zero tolerance as a youth. The study included the following four research questions:

1. How do the K-TEA pre- and posttest mean scores of first time offenders compare with those of chronic behavior students?
2. Is there a significant difference in behavior, as measured by the BBRS, between first time offenders and chronic behavior groups controlling for preset behavior?
3. Is there a significant difference in self-concept, as measured by the Piers-

Harris Self-Concept Scale, between first time offenders and chronic behavior groups controlling for preset self-concept?

4. What insights into the more diffuse effects of zero-tolerance first time offenders and their families can be gained by looking at themes in clinical progress notes on students, blogs, and an interview with an adult who had been previously expelled because of zero tolerance?

Research Design

In choosing mixed methods research, I used qualitative data to enhance and explain my quantitative findings. Good mixed methods research approaches use the two methods to complement and enhance findings. Both quantitative and qualitative research entails empirical observations, data, arguments constructed from data, and consideration of the ramifications of findings. In addition, both types of research employ "safeguards" to "minimize confirmation bias and other sources of invalidity (or lack of trustworthiness) that have the potential to exist in every research study" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 15).

Using Johnson and Onwuegbuzie's (2004) frame of reference, mixed methods research is a combination of "research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts, or language into a single study" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). It is eclectic, inclusive, non-dogmatic, creative and practical in seeking value-oriented answers to research questions. However, the combination of two very different research approaches requires careful planning around the five major purposes or rationales that Johnson and Omwuegbuzie associate with mixed methods studies. These include triangulation,

complementarity, initiation, development, and expansion. First of all, mixed methods research provides triangulation or corroboration of data through the use of different methods and designs in a single study. This triangulation strengthens the evidence garnered to support findings. Complementarity refers to enhancing and clarifying results through the combined strengths of methods. The words, narratives, and "voice" of qualitative research data add meaning to the numerical data of quantitative research while the numbers add precision to the words. In addition, the results from one method can illustrate certain points to further elaborate on results from the other method. This breadth of information provides insights and understanding that may be missed with a single method. Initiation involves open access to new discoveries that leads to reframing research questions. These new discoveries may be paradoxes or contradictions which lead to a more defined set of research questions. Development is the use of findings from one method to help inform the other method. Strengths of one method can help overcome the weaknesses of the other. Finally, mixed methods research allows for an expansion of research knowledge to generalize and fully address a research problem. Expansion means that different methods can be used for different inquiry components.

Some of the challenges of mixed methods research that I experienced included linguistic difficulties and time consumption. First of all, specific language and styles are associated with each approach. Thus, it can be difficult to integrate or switch back and forth between quantitative and qualitative prose. I have struggled with integrating the different linguistic styles of quantitative and qualitative research attempting to provide smooth transitions and clarity. In particular, the narrative voice shift has been a difficult challenge with my writing style often oscillating from subjective active narrative to an

objective passive stance. In addition to linguistic barriers, mixed methods research often includes a quantitative phase and qualitative phase of the overall study, which fundamentally creates two small-scale studies. Implementing two separate studies can be time intensive and challenging, especially if inconsistent results emerge.

In this study, the quantitative data included a pretest and posttest quasi-experimental research design. This design involved the study of individuals, the administration of a pretest for baseline scores, the administration of the 3 month semester-long prevention program treatment administered to the two groups studied followed by a posttest to determine if the treatment affected the outcomes. In this study, the pre-and posttests included the K-TEA, BBRS, and the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale. The treatment was the semester long drug and alcohol and drop out prevention program which includes individual counseling once a week, group counseling twice a week, weekly academic tutoring, and monthly parenting meetings. The prevention program group curriculum addressed the following life skills: social skills, goal setting, problem solving, decision making, conflict resolution, anger management, communication, stress management, drug education, and peer refusal skills. Individual counseling addressed significant behavioral, self-concept, academic, and family issues. Academic tutoring was offered in either small groups or one-on-one for all academic core subjects. Students volunteered to participate in this pull out program, which required students to be removed from their regular classroom for services. All pre/posttest data were existing accumulated information from the program over a five-year time period.

According to Creswell (2005), "quasi-experiments include assignment, but no random assignment of participants to groups. This is because the experimenter cannot

artificially create groups for the experiment" (p. 297-298). Quasi-experimental design allows for "inferences about causality" but "lacks the true control of experimental research" (Harris, 1998, p. 52). Like the experiment, the quasi-experiment has independent variables and dependent variables. The dependent variable was hypothesized to be affected by the independent variable. The independent variable in this study was group association, first time offender or chronic behavior. The dependent variables were behavior and self-concept as measured by the BBRS, and the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale.

In addition to independent and dependent variables, quasi-experimental design usually entails a treatment and a control group. The control group "consists of those who receive the ordinary, usual, common procedures to which the experimental procedure is being compared" (Harris, 1998, p. 53). Unlike typical quasi-experimental designs, there was no control group in this study. Both first time offender and chronic behavior students received the prevention program treatment. I did not have access to a control group to make this a true quasi-experimental design. Therefore, this study included the assessment of group differences on the two dependent variables (behavior and self-concept) before and after treatment (prevention program).

The qualitative research components of this study revolved around textual analyses, specifically thematic analyses. I used clinical progress notes from first time offender student's individual counseling sessions to explore themes about student overall adjustment. Students received individual counseling once a week during their participation in the prevention program. I recorded weekly progress notes for each individual session. These progress notes addressed students' general mood, the content of

the session, counseling strategies used, and progress toward established treatment plan objectives. Each student had specific measurable objectives outlined in a treatment plan called a prevention plan. These objectives were derived from three assessments (K-TEA, BBRS, and Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale) and any other presenting issues. The prevention plan was used to establish goals for counseling sessions. I analyzed clinical progress notes to further understand the lived experience of first time offenders. Through coding and analysis, I was able to identify major themes. I compared progress notes with quantitative data results to enhance and clarify the research findings. The qualitative progress data illuminated the distinct experiences of first time offender cases giving voice and meaning to quantitative results.

In addition to progress note qualitative data, I also looked at zero-tolerance Internet blogs by parents and youth. These blogs were unrelated to the students in the prevention program but provided a look into the personal and familial effects of zero-tolerance policies. A blog is a web log that serves many different functions. Many blog websites tell stories about parent and student experiences with the zero-tolerance policy. Most of these websites serve as a support and informational resource for concerned parents of students expelled for zero tolerance. I chose one parent and one student blog to explore the personal and emotional results of zero-tolerance expulsions. During my preliminary search for blogs, I discovered only one blog focused solely on the zero-tolerance experience of one family. This blog was written by a mother and father of a boy who was expelled as a first time offender with no prior disciplinary records. The blog completely focused on the zero-tolerance expulsion. The parents contributed to the blog

frequently providing updates throughout the lengthy process of expulsion hearings and attempts to "fight" the policy.

Most website blog story contributions are written from a parent's perspective, but my search did reveal one story by a student who is now an adult. This young man's story provides an example of how a zero-tolerance expulsion can affect a student years after the incident. This unique blog presented the student's viewpoint and also explained the aftereffects of the policy. In order to triangulate the student blog data, I also interviewed an adult who had been expelled because of zero-tolerance in his senior year of high school. This interview occurred through a series of e-mails. In my analysis of blogs and the e-mail interview, I did not focus on details of the offense, home environment, or school. Instead, I emphasized the affective dimensions of parents and former offender's memories. The emotional experiences of students and families can have a critical influence on the school bond that serves as a protective factor preventing school failure. In analyzing these two blogs and the e-mail interview, I looked for expressions of affect and personal elements of their lived experience relating to my theoretical perspectives.

The quantitative research in my study necessitates different types of internal and external validity checks to assess accuracy of inferences and consistency of findings. Internal validity is any event or problem that decreases the researcher's ability to make inferences about statistical relationships within the study. According to Creswell (2005), "the quasi-experimental approach introduces considerably more threats to internal validity than the true experiment. Because the investigator does not randomly assign participants to groups, the potential threats of maturation, selection, mortality, and

interaction of selection with other threats are possibilities" (p. 298). Other common threats to internal validity include history, regression effects, and testing effects.

Internal validity determines whether the experimental variable caused the observed change or if changes were due to some other variable. Typical threats to internal validity are history, maturation, regression, and mortality. History refers to events that happen because of the passage of time which influence research findings. Maturation or developmental changes in participants can also affect results. A natural regression of scores can occur when extreme cases are chosen as the basis of research. Mortality is another word for participant drop out.

In my study, most events that may create history threats to internal validity were experienced by both groups. For example in 2004, a major hurricane occurred that caused sufficient displacement and family stress to some students. There were no other known historical internal threats in the school district. Since this research follows students over short time span, one semester, maturation effects were minimal. It is unlikely that one semester of maturation would create significant changes in academics and behavior. Zero-tolerance participants in this study did not represent extremes in their grades or behavior. Since the participants had average grades and behavior, regression toward the mean was not a concern. However, the chronic behavior problem students did have extremes in behavior and grades so regression to the mean is a very real threat in this group. The random selection of participants prevented "people factors" that could influence outcomes. Mortality was not an issue in this study since preexisting records are the basis of the analyses. One possible threat to internal validity in this study was the pre- and posttesting procedures. For the K-TEA, Piers-Harris, and BBRS, the participants and

teacher's familiarity with the test may have affected results. For example, participants may have been more likely to score higher on the K-TEA at posttest because they remembered the questions from the pretest. For the Piers-Harris, they may have answered differently in reaction to perceived expectancy effects. The teacher rated BBRS was also subject to expectancy effects.

External validity concerns the ability to generalize from the research results. Common threats to external validity are interactions among selection, setting, and history. The interaction of selection and treatment reduces the ability to generalize results to other populations because of characteristics such as gender, race, or age. All first time offenders who participated in the prevention program over the last five years were selected for this study. All participants in the prevention program were referred by school staff, but they made the final decision regarding their participation in the program. The voluntary and referred nature of student participation in the prevention program decreased the likelihood that these students represented the general population of first time offenders and chronic behavior problem students. The fact that all students were referred into a prevention program created concerns about generalizing to the general population. These students had the added benefit of some school recognition and enhancement of protective factors such as school bonding through their participation thus they cannot be compared to first time offenders who are not participating in a prevention program. Only one school district was selected to participate in this study. Thus, the results may not generalize to other school districts with different student characteristics. In addition, the interaction of setting and treatment reduces generalizability to other grade levels and school settings. For example, the results cannot be generalized to elementary

schools, high schools, or private schools at any level. Since this study entailed a pre- and posttreatment analysis for several different school years, the interaction threat of history and treatments are minimal. The quantitative data provided results over time to increase generalizabilty and consistency of findings. The qualitative data, on the other hand, enriched the quantitative data and had no impact on the latter's validity.

Another method of ensuring validity is triangulation. "Triangulation is a means of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws" by examining "a conclusion (assertion, claim, etc.) from more than one vantage point" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 257). Along with counteracting biases, triangulation also serves to enrich the data and the researcher perspective lending strength of credibility to findings. There are three types of triangulation: methods, data, and theory. Method triangulation involves the use of one or more unobtrusive research methods. Data triangulation combines multiple sources to validate thematic findings. Theory triangulation involves a variety of theoretical perspectives to view the research data from different points of view.

Here methods triangulation occurred through the use of three different tools of generating data: archival data in the form of report cards, three different pre- and post assessments, progress notes, Internet blogs, and an e-mail interview. Case study, archival research, and quantitative quasi-experimental methods were used as research methods. Several different theoretical perspectives were used to broaden the scope of data analysis. In particular, my research was guided by social learning theory, adolescent developmental theories, theories of juvenile delinquency, and the dramaturgical stigma theory.

Setting

My study included students participating in a prevention program located in one school district in northwest Florida consisting of thirty-five elementary schools, nine middle schools, and seven high schools as well as several specialized alternative education centers at the time of this study. The pre- and post analysis in this study utilized records from a school based prevention program located in an alternative middle school. Sixth, seventh, and eighth grade records were included in the study. The alternative school in this study was a small, inner city school with a low student to teaching staff ratio. The population of the alternative school ranged in size with a maximum of two hundred thirty students. The alternative school was considered to be a disciplinary program for middle school students who have been recommended for expulsion or a lengthy suspension by the District and/or court mandated to attend. This alternative school had strict disciplinary measures in practice including school uniforms, metal detector checks/searches upon entrance onto school grounds, and visible student resource officer on campus at all times. There was approximately one teacher and one teaching assistant for all general education classes with a maximum of 15-20 students per class.

Students at the alternative school were either referred or expelled. Most referred students had chronic behavior problems and were sent to the alternative school for a minimum of 90 days (18 weeks) as a behavioral consequence. Expelled students were sent to the alternative school for zero-tolerance policy infractions or for criminal charges such as assault and battery with a one year minimum stay. My study focused on first time offender zero-tolerance students. In fiscal year 2007-2008, 67% of students in the

local district and 59% of students statewide were first time offenders (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, 2009).

The prevention program had been contracted to this particular alternative school since 2000. This semester based prevention program provided individual counseling once a week, group counseling twice a week, academic tutoring weekly, and monthly educational parent meetings. The program was located in a portable on the school campus. It was a voluntary program but students were referred by school personnel with most referrals gained from guidance counselors.

Participants

The quantitative part of this study included two groups of students a first time offender group and a chronic behavior problem group. These categories are used only for ease of reporting results not to negatively label these youth by their behavior. The first time offender students had average grades and minimal to no disciplinary referrals. This was their first expulsion. These students had been expelled for a minimum of one year for one of the following: weapon possession, drug possession, or bomb threat. Students expelled for violent offenses had been excluded from the first time offender group and my focus was on what most would consider innocuous offenses. The chronic behavior problem students had not been expelled for a zero-tolerance infraction but had been referred to the alternative school for 90 days or more because of excessive disciplinary referrals.

The quantitative data in this study came from 80 client charts from the prevention program treatment for the 2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008 school years. The client charts included 40 first time offender zero-tolerance middle

school students and 40 chronic behavior problem student charts. This study included all first time offenders participating in the prevention program at the alternative school during the 2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008 school years. I used a table of random numbers to select 40 chronic behavior student's charts.

I also collected qualitative data in my study. Internet blogs were selected in order to provide a parent and student perspective. Only one full blog parent website was located and only one student story was found in the Internet search. Thus, I presented data from one parent blog website and one student blog story. The parent blog site was written by a mother and father and is ongoing. The data came from the first five months of the blog. The student blog story was a one time 12 paragraph entry into a public domain zero-tolerance blog website composed mostly of parent or family stories. A colleague referred the e-mail interview participant. This participant was expelled in a nearby school district to where the study's prevention program and alternative school were located. E-mails were used to interview this participant in order to mirror the written data found in the blogs.

Data Collection

I collected both quantitative and qualitative data to address the research questions. The quantitative part of the study included both descriptive and inferential approaches. Three different instruments were used: the K-TEA, Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, and the BBRS. For first time offenders and chronic behavior problem students, the initial baseline preassessment data were collected at the beginning of the semester long prevention program. Postassessment data were collected at the end of the semester long prevention program, approximately three months from their start date. The descriptive

data included demographic information and achievement factors. Inferential data included the scores from the self-concept and behavior rating scales. The qualitative information consisted of several sources of information described in this section.

Achievement Measures

The K-TEA is a brief achievement test measuring mathematics, reading, and spelling for children in grades 1 through 12, ages six years, 0 months to 18 years, 11 months. It is an individually administered and norm-referenced achievement test, providing age and grade based norms. The Mathematics subtest (52 items) measures basic arithmetic concepts, applications of mathematical principles, numerical reasoning, and computational skills. The Reading subtest (52 items) requires students to decode printed words and assesses reading comprehension by having the student provide an oral or gestured response to printed commands. The Spelling subtest (40 items) requires the student to spell a word after the word is read aloud and used in a sentence (Kaufman & Kaufman, 1998). The K-TEA is widely used in educational settings. During test development, extensive research studies and data analyses were conducted on split-half reliability, standard errors of measurement, intercorrelations, content validity, item selection, construct, and concurrent validity. Split-half reliability coefficients for all grades ranged from .85 (Mathematics) to .89 (Reading) and mean values for all ages ranged from .87 (Mathematics) to .91 (Reading). For test-retest reliability, coefficients ranged from .84 (Reading) to .90 (Spelling) and clustered at .84 to .85 for all three subtests at grade 7-12. Thus, the K-TEA has demonstrated reliability and validity.

The K-TEA was administered by a certified teacher who worked for the prevention program and who provided remediation and tutoring services. However, the

spelling subtest was not administered to students. Pre- and posttests for K-TEA were administered to students for the semester long program. The results from the K-TEA provided direction to the teacher for determining student need for remediation/tutoring services in math and reading.

Grade point average (GPA) data was assessed through the use of school report cards. GPA is an average of grades in seven classes for a nine week grading period. Math, reading, science, social studies or geography, language arts, and physical education were the seven required classes taken by all students who attended the alternative school during this time period. Grades were weighted on a four-point scale. A copy of the report card was maintained in the chart for the duration of the student's semester long participation in the prevention program. If the student was participating in the Spring semester, the report card would have GPA's for the preceding semester. However, the prevention program does not maintain report cards after the student was discharged from the program. Thus, there were only two available GPA's for students who participated in the Fall semester.

Self-Concept Measure

The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale subtitled "The Way I Feel About Myself" is a self-report 80-item questionnaire that assesses children's feelings and attitudes regarding self-concept. According to Piers (1984), "self-concept, as assessed by this instrument, is defined as a relatively stable set of self-attitudes reflecting both a description and an evaluation of one's own behavior and attributes" (p. 1). The Piers-Harris provides an overall total self-concept score and individual cluster scores. There are

six cluster scales which measure specific aspects of self-concept including behavior, intellectual and school status, physical appearance and attributes, anxiety, popularity and happiness and satisfaction. During test development, these clusters were identified through several factor analyses. Higher scores correlate with higher assessed self-concept.

The Behavior cluster assesses for behavioral problems at home and/or school. Examples of Behavior questions include "I am well behaved in school" and "I cause trouble to my family." The Intellectual and School Status cluster measures the child's feelings about school achievements and overall intelligence. Examples from this cluster include "I am smart" and "I can give a good report in front of the class." The Physical Appearance and Attributes cluster measures feelings regarding looks and personality. Feelings regarding appearance, leadership and assertiveness skills are examined in this cluster. Examples include "I have pretty eyes" and "I am a leader in games and sports." The Anxiety cluster measures emotional issues such as shyness, sadness, fear, and alienation. Examples include "I cry easily" and "I worry a lot." The Popularity cluster measures feelings of self-worth in friendships. Examples include "my classmates in school think I have good ideas" and "people pick on me." Happiness and Satisfaction measures overall levels of content and satisfaction with life. Examples include "I am unhappy" and "I like being the way I am." All questions require a yes or no response.

In addition to the overall and sub-cluster scores, there is also an inconsistency and response bias index to assess validity of results. The inconsistency index measures internal consistency in responses to similar questions. The response bias index measures "positive or negative response tendencies—a 'yea saying' or 'nay saying' bias" (Piers,

1984, p. 2). Scores range from 0-80. There have been numerous research studies on the Piers-Harris since its development in 1964 (Piers, 1984). These studies provide a thorough analysis of test-retest reliability, internal consistency, content validity, intercorrelations, convergent and discriminant validity. The test-retest reliability coefficients from these studies ranged from .42 to .96 with a median of .73. Piers (1984) suggests careful interpretation of the Piers-Harris results for validity concerns such as faking, acquiescence and negative response set, random responding, and special populations and moderator variables. Each of these issues can pose potential validity threats.

The Piers-Harris was used in this prevention program as pre- and post measures of self-concept. Results were utilized in treatment planning for program counseling services. The Piers-Harris can be administered individually or in groups. In this prevention program, it was administered individually during individual counseling. The posttest results provided a method of assessing student self-concept progress during the semester.

Behavior Measure

The BBRS is a 110 item assessment that measures childhood behavioral problems (Burks, 1977). It is most often completed by a teacher or parent. The BBRS utilizes a five point scale with increasing levels of significance. A student's behavior is rated on this 1-5 scale with one being "You have not noticed this behavior at all" and five being "You have noticed this behavior to a very large degree." Factor analyses concluded that the 110 items clustered into 19 groupings. The BBRS's 19 different behavioral groupings are excessive self-blame, excessive anxiety, excessive withdrawal, excessive dependency,

poor ego strength, poor coordination, poor intellectuality, poor academics, poor attention, poor impulse control, poor reality contact, poor sense of identity, excessive suffering, poor anger control, excessive sense of persecution, excessive aggressiveness, excessive resistance, and poor social conformity. When scoring is complete, each grouping is rated as not significant, significant or very significant.

The BBRS has been widely used in educational settings and has established validity and reliability. For example, item test-retest reliability correlation coefficients range from .60 to .83. The average item/item retest correlation coefficient is .705. The BBRS also has a high degree of criterion-related validity (Burks, 1977).

In the prevention program in the study, the BBRS was used as pre- and post measures of behavioral problems. Results were utilized in treatment planning for program counseling services. The BBRS was rated by the student's homeroom teacher at the beginning and end of the semester. The posttest results provided a method of assessing student behavioral progress during the semester.

Demographic Data

I collected data for this study through analysis of client charts spanning five school years for assessment results and clinical progress note themes. These archival data were collected at one time interval on the premises of the prevention program which is located on the school campus. I recorded demographic data which included gender, race, grade and age. In addition, reason for expulsion or referral to the alternative school, and semester in the prevention program were also noted. Demographic data were presented using percentages and prevalence rates.

Qualitative Data

The qualitative data in this study consisted of clinical progress notes, an ongoing parent blog, a blog story, and an e-mail interview. The clinical progress note data came from the 40 first time offender charts. These are the same charts utilized in the quantitative analysis of assessment data. I read through all clinical progress notes for each chart and noted theoretical themes and commonalities. In addition to theoretical themes, I included general information regarding family functioning, personality characteristics, mental health diagnoses, and parent participation. I then coded themes as either positive or negative.

Blog data were generated from specific zero-tolerance Internet resources. I conducted an extensive Internet search that led me to two unique blog sources: a parent blog website and student blog story. In coding the parent and student blog data, I first highlighted all emotional words and metaphorical expressions of affect. In my study, emotional words were reflections of the intersubjective process of the lived experience. According to Schwandt (2001), emotions figure "prominently in arguments reuniting reasoning and feelings" (p. 66). Emotions often raise issues of objectivity and subjectivity but they cannot be reliably separated from expressions of fact. Both factual and emotional expressions are part of an individual's life world. From a phenomenological perspective, the lifeworld composes the experiences of everyday life "constituted by thoughts and acts of individuals and the social expressions of those thoughts and acts" (Schwandt, p. 147).

After delineating personal posts from informational posts, I utilized frequencies to refer to how many times I found a specific emotion or metaphorical expression in all personal posts over a five month time span for the ongoing parent blog. There are

limitations to using frequencies in contrast to percentages but difficulties with completing a total word count and the variety of specific emotions prevented the use of percentages. Since the student blog was limited to 12 paragraphs, there were fewer emotional expressions. Thus, I did not use frequency counts for this data. Instead, I isolated emotional expressions and used the student's personal time line to describe his experience.

The e-mail participant was referred by a colleague. The colleague simply stated that this person had an experience with being expelled because of zero tolerance. Since the participant lived across country, he was interviewed through e-mail. A written e-mail interview was chosen over a phone interview in order to provide consistency since all other qualitative data in the study was in written format. For the e-mail interview, I composed a series of open ended questions related to the participant's zero-tolerance expulsion, alternative school attendance, and the overall effect of this experience on his life. He responded openly to all questions.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis utilized archival data. I compared zero-tolerance offenders with the same number of students with chronic behavior problems. The information in the charts came from student's voluntary participation in a one semester drug and alcohol prevention program at an alternative middle school. The data were the prevention program's assessment data which included the K-TEA, BBRS, and Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. The data cover both semesters for the school years from 2003-2004 through 2007-2008, thus a total of five school years. Qualitative data analysis utilized some archival data in the form of the 40 zero-tolerance offenders'

clinical progress notes. The rest of the qualitative data analysis involved blogs and an e-mail interview.

Descriptive

The model used for descriptive statistics data analysis was pre- and post mean and standard deviation. According to Creswell (2005), descriptive statistics are useful for summarizing overall trends in data, explaining variations in scores, and providing understanding of where scores stand in comparison to others. I analyzed demographics, reason for expulsion or referral, assessment scores (K-TEA, BBRS, Piers-Harris), and GPA data through descriptive statistics. I provided percentages for demographics and reason for expulsion or referrals. I assessed the pre- and post mean and standard deviation for GPA and assessment scores of first time offender and chronic behavior problem students. In addition, I provided percentages for pre- and post BBRS and Piers-Harris issues to identify the most commonly occurring issues (identified as categories and clusters) on these assessments. For the K-TEA, I analyzed percentages scoring within different grade level ranges and categorized by grade and group.

Inferential

The basic inferential model used was the multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) in order to look at differences between the first time offender group and chronic behavior problem group. An analysis of covariance is "most commonly used when the researcher wants to compare posttest scores for people assigned to various groups, while taking into account the fact that the individuals in the groups differed on some pretest" (Harris, 1998, p. 359). By using the MANCOVA, I was attempting to

remove the effect of preexisting individual differences among the students. Essentially, the "scores on the covariate are used to predict what scores individuals would be expected to have on the dependent measure; then these adjusted scores are analyzed by a type of analysis of variance" (Harris, p. 359). For my study, the covariate predictors were the baseline pretest scores on the BBRS and Piers-Harris. Harris (1998) indicates that the analysis of covariance "may not completely correct for pre-existing differences in means on the covariate" but it will "often increase the power of your comparisons by removing some of the variance due to individual differences" (p. 359). The power of the statistical analysis can only be increased if the covariate is related to the dependent variable. In this study, the covariate pretest scores were directly related to the dependent posttest scores. I chose a multivariate approach since there is more than one dependent variable (behavior and self-concept) and to avoid inflating Type I error rate with separate analysis of variance tests.

Qualitative

I read through 40 first time offender progress notes and coded the data into theoretical themes as positive or negative. The progress notes themes were informed by social learning theory, the social development model, stigmatization theory, and juvenile-delinquency theories. My coding scheme specifically entailed looking for information related to school bonding, social learning primarily from peers, juvenile delinquent characteristics or involvement, and stigmatization. For example, I used positive school bond, negative school bond, positive social modeling, and negative social modeling as coding categories. I also looked for any other pertinent themes. The parent blog data was

analyzed for emotional content and later presented in a grief stage framework. The student blog data was also analyzed for the emotional content of the lived experience. The e-mail interview data was analyzed using the theoretical framework related to school bonding, stigma, and social learning theory. I coded and analyzed the blog data, e-mail interview, and progress notes to compare and contrast with the quantitative data. My analysis of blogs, e-mail interview, and progress notes yielded themes that I compared with the quantitative data results.

Ethics

Ethical issues addressed in my study include confidentiality, informed consent, institutional approval, researcher bias and reflexivity. First of all, all participants signed Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) forms during their admission into the prevention program. The HIPAA from explained that their program records may be used for research purposes. Client records are confidential, and no personal identifying information was available to anyone besides the researcher. All client records were kept on-site at the prevention program. No client records or identifying information left the premises of the prevention program office. Students had been previously informed verbally and through HIPAA forms of the confidentiality of their client files. The e-mail participant agreed to participation through an informed consent form (Appendix A). This research was approved by the prevention program's privacy board (Appendix B) and the university institutional review board (IRB) (Appendix C). Open-ended interview questions were used in the e-mail interview in an attempt to avoid leading questions which could create bias (Appendix D).

Reflexivity entails a personal reflection on biases. It specifically involves a "process of critical self-reflection on one's biases, theoretical predispositions, preferences and so forth" (Schwandt, 2001, p. 224). Qualitative fieldworkers are "often encouraged to record and explore these evolving dispositions in personal notes" (Schwandt, p. 224). Reflexivity can "point to the fact the inquirer is part of the setting, context, and social phenomenon he or she seeks to understand" (Schwandt, p. 224). It also requires the researcher to reflect on the methods for establishing "social networks of informants and participants in a study" (Schwandt, p. 224).

Some issues that may have affected my research are my personal biases against the zero-tolerance policy and my contract employment with the alternative school in the study. First of all, my personal experiences with students who have been negatively affected by the zero-tolerance policy have created a bias that could find expression in my interpretation of the qualitative data. In addition, part of the qualitative data involved an analysis of client progress notes which I recorded. It is important to remember that the notes were my personal interpretations and contained what I considered to be relevant during individual counseling sessions. Thus, except for occasional quotes the progress notes did not reveal the clients specific words. The progress notes were based on my observations and interpretations of student's disclosures. Although I did my best to provide "objective" progress notes, my own personal biases and experiences could have influenced my interpretation of student reports.

Further, it is important to remember that I served as a counselor to these students. I fully explained to all students that I work for a school contracted prevention program yet many students thought that I worked for the school system. Viewing me as an

outsider, students might have inhibited their personal disclosures in counseling. I made sure to emphasize that I was not a school district employee but it was likely that some students might have viewed me as a "part of the system." I regularly utilized rapport building techniques such as open ended questions, paraphrasing, reflective listening, and empathic responses to put students at ease in counseling. However, the progress notes may have not reflected complete student honesty.

These insider/outsider dynamics can be found in Duneier's (1992) seminal work, *Slim's Table*. Although the men at Slim's table began to accept Duneier and even call him "friend" because of his immersion in their daily life, they still had concerns about Duneier's involvement with the elitism and the community domination of the University of Chicago. The university was simultaneously associated with status, intellectuality, wealth, power, oppression, prejudice, separateness, and fear. The perspective of the inhabitants of Slim's table was that the university experience somehow creates racial barriers by "othering" ghetto life as criminal, violent, and fear inducing. The students in the prevention program have, at times expressed similar ambivalence. Although they are told that education is important, some have begun to experience alienation, stigma, and judgmental attitudes from the school system. They frequently express "othering" because of their perception that school personnel do not understand their situation. In my position as a counselor, I assumed a unique perspective somewhere in the middle between insider and outsider. Students reported that they perceived me to be different from other school personnel because of my willingness to listen to their stories, immersion in their personal lives, and advocacy for them, yet they were also fully aware that I uphold school rules and regulations and function in a role that sometimes mimicked teacher responsibilities.

Thus, when reviewing my data I had to remain mindful that the glimpses of the insider perspective that I received from student self-disclosure may be filtered because of the power differential.

One other ethical issue to consider with advancements in research using technology is the lack of confidentiality with e-mail interviewing. The university IRB approved my research and the interview participant agreed to the terms of the informed consent form but the e-mail correspondence through the university server may not be completely secure. According to the The Sunshine Law Statute 119.01, which was originally enacted as the Government-in-The Sunshine Law in 1967, all state, county and municipal records are open for public inspection and copying (Florida Statutes, 2008). This includes telephone and electronic communication through any state or government institution. Since the e-mail interview was conducted through a state university server, the e-mails must be archived and available for public viewing. Although it is highly likely that the e-mail participant understood these risks, future research using e-mail communication should offer an e-mail disclaimer regarding the lack of complete confidentiality.

In summary, this study is composed of a mixed methods design that combines a pre- and posttest quasi-experimental quantitative phase with qualitative data in order to answer research questions regarding the differences between first time offender and chronic behavior groups of students and to explore the diffuse effects of zero-tolerance expulsions. The quantitative research utilized archival data from three assessments and GPA. Qualitative data included clinical progress notes from first time offender students parent and student blogs, and an e-mail interview with an adult first time offender.

Potential threats to internal validity included test re-test expectancy effects and regression to the mean for the chronic behavior group. External validity concerns related to the poor generalizability of findings because of the unique qualities of the students participating in the prevention program. Method, data, and theory triangulation were used to improve validity of data. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics including means, standard deviation, percentages, thematic analyses and a MANCOVA statistical analysis. The results of these analyses will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

UNDERSTANDING ZERO-TOLERANCE STUDENTS

Through the use of archival data, I compared zero-tolerance offenders with the same number of chronic behavior students. The data included demographic information, GPA, clinical progress report notes, K-TEA, BBRS, Piers-Harris pre- and posttest scores. The data, spanning five school years from 2003-2004 to 2007-2008, came from the student's participation in a one semester prevention program.

Descriptive Data Results

Demographic characteristics were peripheral to my research questions. However, since much of the zero-tolerance research addresses demographic patterns, it seemed helpful to cite some trends in my data that parallel previous research findings. These demographic characteristics will also help to paint a realistic picture of the participants behind the numbers. In this sample, 55% percent of the zero-tolerance offenders and 67.5% of chronic behavior students were male. Overall, males constituted 61% of the students in the combined sample. The zero-tolerance sample included seventh and eighth graders in equal proportions (37.5%), but sixth graders were most common (50%) in the chronic behavior group.

Consistent with previous research on the overrepresentation of minority students in suspensions and expulsions, African American students showed up disproportionately in both samples (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Dohrn, 2001; Giroux, 2003a; Robbins, 2005; Skiba, 2000a, 2000b; Skiba, et al., 2002; Verdugo, 2002). African American students had only slightly higher numbers in zero-tolerance cases but a large overrepresentation in chronic behavior cases. Fifty percent of zero-tolerance students and 80% of chronic behavior students were African American. When analyzing data by race and gender, African American males were most highly represented in both groups. Thirty percent of zero-tolerance students, 52.5% of chronic behavior students and 41% of the combined sample were African American males.

The prevention program commonly mirrored alternative school demographics, but the alternative school did not reflect general school district demographics. The school district demographics for fall 2007 revealed that around 55% of students are Caucasian, and only around 35% are African American. However, 65% of total students expelled and referred to the alternative school in this sample were African American. Although African American students were the minority in the school district population, they are the majority of students expelled and referred to the alternative school during the time interval this study covers. According to Skiba (2000a), there is no evidence that African American students "misbehave at significantly higher rates" (p. 12). Yet they are often expelled or suspended for more subjective, less serious offenses which may reflect teacher misperceptions of cultural differences.

The most common reason for expulsion among all zero-tolerance offenders in this prevention program was weapon possession (45%). Weapons included different types of

knives (61%), razor blades (22%) and other items that could be used as a weapon (17%). Next came bomb threats (30%) and drug related incidents (25%). The most common drug found amongst zero-tolerance offenders was marijuana (56%) followed by prescription drugs (11%), over-the-counter/non-prescription drugs (11%), alcohol (11%), and drug replicas (11%). The most prevalent offense among males was weapon possession (59%). In comparison, the most prevalent offense for females was bomb threat (39%) followed closely by drug related offenses (33%). African American students most prevalent offense was weapon possession (53%), whereas Caucasian student's most common offenses were drug related (37%) and weapon possession (37%). The most common reason for referral to the alternative school for chronic behavior students was aggressive behaviors (60%) which included fighting, threatening, and angry outbursts. Thirty percent were referred for disruptive or disrespectful behaviors while 10% were referred for other or unknown behaviors.

My analysis of zero-tolerance offense type provided the following demographic prevalence rates. Seventy-two percent of weapon possession offenses were committed by males. Out of the female weapon offenders, four out of the five were in possession of razor blades. Fifty-eight percent of bomb threats were committed by females. Sixty percent of drug related offenses were committed by females. African American students had the highest representation in weapon possession offenses (56%) and bomb threats (58%). Caucasian students were the most common demographic in drug related offenses (70%). African American males had the greatest prevalence in weapon possession expulsions (44%), African American females had the highest representation in bomb

threats (42%), and Caucasian females were the dominant demographic in drug related expulsions (40%).

Student Achievement Results

K-TEA results were presented by grade equivalency from third grade (3.0-3.9) up to twelfth grade(12.0-12.9). The scores were analyzed using percentages. Chronic behavior (C) and zero-tolerance (ZT) students were separated by grade (6, 7, 8) to determine the percentage of students scoring within a grade equivalency range for each grade level. The comparisons and conclusions herein are based on table summaries.

These results showed that 45% of chronic behavior and 40% of zero-tolerance sixth grade students scored at or above grade level on the K-TEA math pretest (Table 1). For seventh graders, 42% of chronic behavior and 40% of zero-tolerance students scored at or above grade level. Only 13% of eighth grade chronic behavior students scored at or above grade level whereas 60% of zero-tolerance eighth graders scored above grade level. Overall, 32% of all zero-tolerance students scored tenth grade level or higher on the K-TEA pre-math test whereas only five percent of chronic behavior students scored in this range.

Table 1

K-TEA Math Pretest Results (%)

Grade	6		7		8		Total	
Equivalency	C	ZT	C	ZT	C	ZT	C	ZT
Third	10	20	8	0	0	0	8	5
Fourth	15	40	8	6	25	13	15	18
Fifth	30	0	17	27	12	7	22	13
Sixth	20	0	25	7	12	7	20	5
Seventh	10	10	42	20	38	13	25	15
Eighth	5	10	0	13	13	0	5	7
Ninth	0	10	0	7	0	0	0	5
Tenth	5	0	0	0	0	20	2	7
Eleventh	5	10	0	7	0	7	3	7
Twelfth	0	0	0	13	0	33	0	18

Note. C = chronic behavior student; ZT = zero-tolerance student.

The K-TEA math posttest results (Table 2) indicated a greater number of students scoring at or above grade level than on the pretest. For sixth graders, 75% of chronic behavior students and 33% of zero-tolerance students scored at or above grade level. In seventh grade, 82% of chronic behavior students and 80% of zero-tolerance students scored at or above grade level. Out of all eighth graders, 87% of chronic behavior students and 80% of zero-tolerance students scored at or above grade level. Overall, 54%

of zero-tolerance students and 25% f chronic behavior students scored tenth grade level or higher on the K-TEA post math test.

Table 2

K-TEA Math Posttest Results (%)

Grade	6		7		8		Total	
Equivalency	C	ZT	C	ZT	C	ZT	C	ZT
Third	5	0	9	0	0	0	5	0
Fourth	5	11	9	0	0	0	5	2
Fifth	15	56	0	7	13	0	10	15
Sixth	20	11	0	13	0	13	10	13
Seventh	15	0	28	7	0	7	16	5
Eighth	10	0	18	6	38	13	19	8
Ninth	5	0	18	7	12	0	10	3
Tenth	10	0	0	7	25	0	10	2
Eleventh	10	11	18	13	0	0	10	8
Twelfth	5	11	0	40	12	67	5	44

Note. C = chronic behavior student; ZT = zero-tolerance student.

For the K-TEA reading pretest (Table 3), 55% of chronic behavior and 80% of zero-tolerance sixth graders scored at or above grade level. Forty-two percent of chronic behavior and 53% of zero-tolerance seventh graders scored at or above grade level. The eighth grade students had dramatically lower scores especially within the chronic

behavior group. For the eighth grade students, zero percent of chronic behavior and 41% of zero-tolerance students scored at or above grade level. Overall, 15% of zero-tolerance students scored tenth grade or higher whereas only eight percent of chronic behavior students scored in this range on the K-TEA reading pretest.

Table 3

K-TEA Reading Pretest Results (%)

Grade	6		7		8		Total	
Equivalency	C	ZT	C	ZT	C	ZT	C	ZT
Third	10	0	17	0	25	0	15	0
Fourth	10	10	25	7	12	13	15	10
Fifth	25	10	0	13	0	7	12	10
Sixth	25	20	16	27	38	26	25	25
Seventh	20	20	17	20	25	13	20	15
Eighth	0	30	8	0	0	27	2	18
Ninth	5	0	0	7	0	7	3	7
Tenth	5	10	0	13	0	0	3	8
Eleventh	0	0	0	13	0	0	0	5
Twelfth	0	0	17	0	0	7	5	2

Note. C = chronic behavior student; ZT = zero- tolerance student.

The K-TEA reading posttest results (Table 4) showed improvements for both groups. For sixth graders 90% of chronic behavior students and 100% of zero-tolerance

students scored at or above grade level. In the seventh grade group, 55% of chronic behavior and 93% of zero-tolerance students scored at or above grade level. Fifty percent of eighth grade chronic behavior and 74% of eighth grade zero-tolerance students scored at or above grade level. Overall, 54% of zero-tolerance students scored tenth grade or higher whereas only 35% of chronic behavior students scored in this range.

Table 4

K-TEA Reading Posttest Results (%)

Grade	6		7		8		Total	
Equivalency	C	ZT	C	ZT	C	ZT	C	ZT
Third	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Fourth	10	0	9	0	0	0	8	0
Fifth	0	0	27	0	12	0	10	0
Sixth	25	22	9	7	13	13	18	13
Seventh	5	11	18	7	25	13	13	10
Eighth	20	22	0	7	12	13	13	13
Ninth	5	11	0	13	0	7	2	10
Tenth	10	11	9	13	25	7	13	10
Eleventh	15	0	10	13	13	20	13	13
Twelfth	10	22	18	40	0	27	10	31

Note. C = chronic behavior student; ZT = zero-tolerance student.

In addition to K-TEA data, I also looked at first semester GPA mean and standard deviation. I did not use second, third and fourth semester GPA because of excessive missing data. The zero-tolerance mean GPA of 2.29 (SD=.944) was different from the chronic behavior group GPA of 1.82 (.960). The results support a previous research finding of average academics among first time offender zero-tolerance students entering an alternative school (Morrison & D'Incau, 1997).

Student Behavior and Self-Concept Results

I calculated descriptive statistics for the BBRS and the Piers-Harris. For the BBRS, there are 19 categories of behavioral issues. Each of the 19 categories are scored on a continuum ranging from not significant to significant to very significant. For this study, "behavioral issues" included the number of categories rated as significant to very significant. On the BBRS, zero-tolerance students had a mean average of 1.4 behavioral issues (SD= 2.2) on the BBRS pretest and 1.3 issues on the posttest (SD=2.5). Chronic behavior students, on the other hand, had a mean average of 2.5 behavioral issues (SD=3.3) on the BBRS pretests and 2.2 issues (SD=3.7) on the posttest. Fifty percent of zero-tolerance students had at least one behavioral issue on the BBRS at pretest, and 41% had a behavioral issue on the posttest. Forty-three percent of chronic behavior students had at least one behavioral issue at pretest, and 41% had one or more issues on the posttest. However, chronic behavior students had a higher number of very significant issues than zero-tolerance students (Table 5).

Table 5

BBRS Results (%)

Behavioral	Pretest		Posttest	
Issues	C	ZT	C	ZT
Significant	30	40	26	33
Very Significant	13	10	15	8

Note. C = chronic behavior student; ZT = zero-tolerance student.

On the BBRS pretest, zero-tolerance students' most common behavioral issue was poor attention, while poor impulse control ranked highest with chronic behavior students. At posttesting, poor attention and poor impulse control were the most common behavioral issues for both groups. Looking at specific scores on these behavioral issues, there were no differences on these individual issues. Zero-tolerance students had an average score of eight and chronic behavior students had an average of nine pre- and posttest for poor impulse control. Zero-tolerance students had an average pretest score of 10 and posttest score of nine for poor attention whereas chronic behavior students had an average score of 10 for both pre- and posttest on poor attention. All of these scores were in the not significant range on the BBRS which suggest that these behavioral issues are very minimal in degree of severity.

There are some similarities in differences in the significant BBRS categories for zero-tolerance and chronic behavior students (Table 6). At pretest, the most common

behavioral category for chronic behavior students was excessive resistance whereas poor attention ranked highest for zero-tolerance students. Thirty percent of chronic behavior students were rated as having excessive resistance at pretest while 25% of zero-tolerance students were rated as having poor attention. Excessive resistance refers to rebelliousness and refusal to follow rules. Together, both groups had between 15-28% of students receiving significant scores for poor attention and poor impulse control at pretest. At posttest, poor attention and poor impulse control ranked highest for both groups. Thirty-one percent of chronic behavior and twenty percent of zero-tolerance students were rated as having poor attention and poor impulse control at posttest. Some noticeable differences in behavioral categories were found in the excessive resistance, excessive withdrawal, poor ego strength, and excessive sense of persecution categories. From these results, it appeared that zero-tolerance students were more likely to be withdrawn whereas chronic behavior students were more likely to have excessive resistance, poor ego strength, and excessive sense of persecution (Table 6).

Table 6

BBRS Results by Category (%)

	Pretest		Posttest	
Category	C	ZT	C	ZT
Excessive Self-Blame	5	5	3	3
Excessive Anxiety	5	5	3	3
Excessive Withdrawal	8	13	3	5

(Table Continues)

Table 6 (Continued)

	Pretest		Posttest	
Category	C	ZT	C	ZT
Excessive Dependency	5	5	3	5
Poor Ego Strength	20	8	21	8
Poor Physical Strength	8	5	3	3
Poor Coordination	8	5	3	3
Poor Intellectuality	20	10	13	13
Poor Academics	18	10	18	3
Poor Attention	28	25	31	20
Poor Impulse Control	28	15	31	20
Poor Reality Contact	3	0	3	0
Poor Sense of Identity	5	0	8	5
Excessive Suffering	8	5	5	8
Poor Anger Control	15	13	23	13
Excessive Sense of Persecution	15	3	8	3
Excessive Aggressiveness	8	3	15	8
Excessive Resistance	30	10	26	13
Poor Social Conformity	8	8	10	5

Note. C = chronic behavior student; ZT = zero-tolerance student.

In addition to external behavior data, the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale provided information about student's internal feelings of self worth. The range for total *T*

score on the Piers-Harris is 0-80. A total *T* score less than 50 on the Piers-Harris reflects alow self-concept. Zero-tolerance students' mean pretest score was 56 (SD=11), and chronic behavior students' mean was 57 (SD=8). The mean posttest score was 61 (SD=11) for zero-tolerance students and 60 (SD=9) for chronic behavior students. Thus, the average for both groups was reflective of moderate self-concept. Thirty percent of zero-tolerance students scored below 50 on the Piers-Harris pretest, but only 13% scored below 50 on the posttest. For chronic behavior students, 15% scored below 50 on the pretest, and 10% scored below 50 on the posttest (Table 7). The data suggests that a higher number of zero-tolerance students have low self-concept at pretest or at the beginning of their participation in the prevention program.

Table 7

Piers-Harris Results (%)

Total T	Pretest		Posttest	
Score	C	ZT	C	ZT
0-39 (very low)	0	10	0	3
40-49 (low)	15	20	10	10
50-69 (moderate)	80	63	74	69
70-80 (high)	5	7	15	18

Note. C = chronic behavior student; ZT = zero-tolerance student.

The Piers-Harris has five different clusters of self-concept areas. There were some differences in chronic behavior and zero-tolerance students' self-concept clusters (Table

8). At pretest, 45% of zero-tolerance students had low self-concept in the area of behavior followed closely by popularity (43%). Chronic behavior students also had low self-concept in the area of behavior at pretest. Forty percent of chronic behavior students had low self-concept in the area of behavior on the Piers-Harris pretest followed by intellectual and school status (33%). At posttest, 26% of zero-tolerance students had low self-concept concerns for behavior, popularity and anxiety. Thirty percent of chronic behavior students had low self-concept in the area of behavior followed by anxiety (28%).

Table 8

Piers-Harris Results by Cluster (%)

Cluster	Pretest		Posttest	
Category	C	ZT	C	ZT
I (Behavior)	40	45	30	26
II (Intellectual and School Status)	33	30	20	13
III (Physical Appearance and Attributes)	13	33	10	15
IV (Anxiety)	25	30	28	26
V (Popularity)	30	43	23	26
VI (Happiness and Satisfaction)	23	20	13	13

Note. C = chronic behavior student; ZT = zero- tolerance student.

Inferential Statistics

A MANCOVA was used to determine the group effects on two dependent variables, student self-concept and behavior. When applying a MANCOVA to the

model, no assumptions were violated. The pre- and posttest observations were independent of one another. The independent variable, group status, was categorical. The dependent variables, behavior and self-concept scores were continuous and interval level. The covariate variables, prescores on the BBRS and Piers-Harris, were continuous and interval level and are assumed to be measured without error. There were equal group sizes so as to preserve statistical power. The equal group sizes provided a robust MANCOVA. There was an appropriate sum of squares and an adequate sample size.

All variables were assumed to have a multivariate normal distribution. There was a random distribution of residuals to form a multivariate normal distribution found in MANCOVA residual plots. There were no major outliers in covariates. Covariates were in a linear relationship with the dependents. There was homogeneity of covariances as evidenced by Box's *M* test of equality of covariance matrices, p(M)=.10. Box's *M* tests the assumption of homoscedasticity using an F distribution to ensure homogeneity of covariances.

A MANCOVA was conducted to determine if group differences (first time offenders and chronic behavior students) existed when considering the change in their self concept and behavior. The dependent variables included BBRS and Piers-Harris scores. Pretest scores on the BBRS and Piers-Harris were the preset behavior and self-concept covariates utilized in the MANCOVA. The MANCOVA Pillai' Trace test results indicated no significant differences among groups for behavior or self-concept, F (2, 73), p=.637, N=78. Therefore, no post hoc tests were completed. The discussion of the results focuses on the demographic and descriptive data, which reveal some interesting findings.

The next chapter provides the qualitative results that also provide some insights that I use to develop and explain the quantitative results reported in this chapter.

Discussion

Achievement

My first research question asked, how does the K-TEA pre- and posttest mean scores of first time offenders compare with those of chronic behavior students? According to descriptive percentage data gleaned from K-TEA results, there was a difference between first time offender and chronic behavior students on their pre- and post K-TEA reading and math scores. Overall, zero-tolerance first time offender students scored higher on pre- and post reading and math K-TEA tests. In addition to K-TEA results, there was one full data set available for the first semester GPA. According to the first semester GPA data, zero-tolerance students had higher GPA's than chronic behavior students. Thus, zero-tolerance students had higher GPA's and higher overall scores on the K-TEA math and reading achievement test. One possible explanation for this difference is that chronic behavior students may be capable of having higher GPA's and higher math and reading scores, but frequent suspensions cause them to fall behind in schoolwork, lowering their grades, GPA, and math and reading skill development.

Both groups made improvements from pre- to posttest on the K-TEA in math and reading. These results suggest that both groups of students were equally capable of making improvements in math and reading skills. In addition, the improvements on the K-TEA suggest that the prevention program treatment had positive effects on math and reading skills for both groups.

Behavior

The second research question addressed in this study asks if there are significant differences in behavior, as measured by the BBRS, between first time offenders and chronic behavior groups controlling for preset behaviors. According to MANCOVA results, there were no behavioral differences between the zero-tolerance and chronic behavior students as measured by the BBRS pre- and posttest. Both groups had similarly low levels of behavioral issues at pre- and posttest suggesting that these students may not have been suited for the alternative school environment which is structured for students with persistent behavioral problems. However, the behavior of these two groups of students may not be representative of the school population at large. It is important to remember that both groups volunteered to participate in a counseling and tutoring prevention program. Their voluntary participation may reflect greater personal maturity, insight and fewer behavioral problems than the general alternative school population.

According to the BBRS mean score results, behavior seemed resistant to change. Behavior did not significantly improve between pre- and posttest. One possibility is that peer influence could be a factor in maintaining behaviors. Past research shows that peers can be more influential than adults (Haynie, 2005). On the basis of these statistical results, the two groups appear similar in behavior. All the while, it is difficult to determine whether the groups were already similar or whether peer influences in the alternative school led to modeling of certain behaviors. In addition to peer influence, we cannot fully identify the behavioral influence of pre-existing mental health conditions such as attention deficit disorder (ADD), ADHD, depression, oppositional defiant disorder, and drug use. However, despite these factors both groups averaged a very low

number of behavioral issues on the BBRS pre- and posttest which leads to questions regarding the seriousness of the behaviors that led to their expulsion or referral to the alternative school.

The most common behaviors for both groups at posttest were poor impulse control and poor attention. My analysis of progress notes provided some explanation for the poor impulse control and poor attention behavioral trend with zero-tolerance students. Out of the 40 charts reviewed, 35% of zero-tolerance students had been diagnosed with either ADD or ADHD. Attention deficits and impulsivity are common components of the ADHD diagnosis.

Some of the common characteristics of ADD are a failure to pay attention to detail, difficulty sustaining attention, poor listening, poor follow through, difficulties with organization, poor sustained mental effort, loss of things necessary for tasks, vulnerability to distractions, and forgetfulness. ADHD adds fidgety behavior, leaving seat often, running and climbing excessively, difficulty playing quietly, "on the go" behavior, excessive talking, impulsive blurting out, difficulty waiting turn, and interrupting (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Previous research suggests that students with disabilities such as behavioral and emotional problems are disproportionately represented in suspensions and expulsions (Leone et al., 2000; Wagner et al., 2005). Although the students in this sample were not in special education classes for disabilities, ADHD is classified as a behavioral disorder often seen in exceptional special education (ESE) students. In addition, previous research on developmental aspects of youth under 15 shows significant impulse control deficits for this age group (Cauffman & Steinberg, 2000; Luna et al., 2004). These developmental

and behavioral disorder issues could play a significant role in the decision making process leading to the zero-tolerance offenses and behavior at the alternative school.

Considering these characteristics, I am scarcely alone in finding it entirely possible that a student with ADHD who is developmentally prone to impulsivity might "forget" that there is a pocket knife in his or her book bag, "blurt out" a bomb threat in frustration or not pay attention to the details of student's rights and responsibilities regarding prohibited items. In addition to ADHD diagnoses, several zero-tolerance students were on medication for depression or had been hospitalized because of previous suicide attempts. Such mental health conditions make it difficult to reliably distinguish among deliberate decisions, oversights, mistakes, and impulsive gestures.

Self-Concept

The third research question addressed in this study asks if there is a significant difference in self-concept, as measured by the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale, between first time offenders and chronic behavior groups controlling for preset self-concept. According to MANCOVA results, there were no significant differences between zero-tolerance and chronic behavior students on their Piers-Harris pre- and posttest self-concept scores. Adolescence is a time of low self-esteem thus it was a surprise to find that both groups averaged moderate levels of self-concept. A potential weakness of these results was the missing analysis for validity scores. I did not analyze validity scores for the Piers-Harris pre- and posttest results. The Piers-Harris is a self-report instrument which may not be an accurate assessment of self-concept. As previously suggested, the subjective nature of the assessment may have produced some expectancy effect and threats to validity.

The differences that did emerge for self-concept issues were apparent in Piers-Harris posttest results. At pretest, both groups lowest self-concept issue was behavior. It makes sense that chronic behavior students would have self-concept issues related to behavior since they have been frequently punished, suspended and sent to an alternative school because of behavior problems. Zero-tolerance students, on the other hand, may be questioning their behavior choices after being expelled. It is interesting to see that the two groups begin to differ in their self-concept concerns as the semester progresses. At posttest, the most frequently reported self-concept issue remained behavior for chronic behavior students; but popularity, anxiety, and behavior became the most common issues for zero-tolerance students. Popularity concerns could be a result of the adjustment to attending an alternative school where there is heightened peer conflict, part of common adolescent "fitting in" issues or a preexisting peer rejection issue which could have played a role in the zero-tolerance offense. These results fit with zero-tolerance students' regular reports of peer conflicts found in clinical progress notes. According to progress notes, 80% of zero-tolerance students face negative peer issues, such as teasing and peer conflict. The large number of students reporting negative peer conflicts suggests that zero tolerance students may have difficulties fitting in and adjusting to peer relations at the alternative school.

A common issue at posttest for both groups was anxiety. The emergence of anxiety as a self-concept issue at posttest suggests that the experiences at the alternative school may have led to increased anxiety for some students in both groups. The increased anxiety could derive from peer conflicts which show up as a common concern in their clinical progress notes. In addition, 42.5% of zero-tolerance students had a primarily

negative school bonding experience at the alternative school because of their many academic and behavioral issues that led to negative interactions with peers and school staff. For example, excessive referrals, suspensions, failing grades, conflicts with teachers and peers, attempts at skipping school or sleeping in class were some of the negative school bond issues mentioned in clinical progress notes.

One interesting Piers-Harris finding was the higher percentage of zero-tolerance students with low self-concept at pretest. It is difficult to determine the reason for this difference between the groups. One explanation could be that chronic behavior students are accustomed to disciplinary action and have grown resistant to the negative effects of school punitive actions on self-concept. Zero-tolerance students, on the other hand, are less likely to have had frequent negative school consequences which could make them more sensitive to the damaging effects of an expulsion on their self-concept. Chronic behavior students were "referred" usually for only 90 days to the alternative school while zero-tolerance students were expelled for a year or more. The expulsion could be more damaging to self-concept creating a negative stigma. Another possible explanation is that many zero-tolerance students may have preexisting low self-concept. From this perspective, the zero-tolerance offense could be a form of acting out to try to enhance feelings of self-worth and gain peer acceptance.

Progress Notes

My fourth research question sought to discover insights into the more diffuse effects on zero-tolerance first time offenders by looking at themes in clinical progress notes on students. Clinical progress notes shed light on some of the specific personal

issues that zero-tolerance students faced. The progress note generated data revealed the following trends. Among the zero-tolerance students, 57.5% percent had primarily positive school bonding experiences and thirty percent of students finished the semester long prevention program with no disciplinary referrals. Some of the positive bonding experiences in the clinical progress notes included academic success, positive recognitions by a teacher or dean, participation in a positive school activity, field trip or incentive, and recognition within the prevention program for various accomplishments. Some notable positive school bonding experiences included participation in school fun days, other incentives for maintaining no disciplinary referrals and voluntary participation as a speaker over the school intercom or as a speaker at a school assembly. In considering these results, it is important to remember that these students voluntarily participated in this counseling and tutoring prevention program. This positive reinforcement based program seeks to improve overall school bonding. Thus, the high number of positive bonding experiences may relate to the prevention program's influence or the type of student who is willing to be in this program may be more self-motivated for personal improvement and school bonding.

Negative school bonding experiences, on the other hand, included disciplinary referrals/suspensions, poor grades, peer and teacher conflicts, and negative teacher interactions. Out of the forty zero-tolerance students, 42.5% had a primarily negative school bonding experience. Seventy percent of these students had at least one disciplinary referral while at the alternative school. From the progress notes, it seemed that the most difficult part of expulsion and alternative school attendance was peer adjustments. In addition to these difficulties, 20% of parents described their child as a follower and 35%

of students were diagnosed as either ADD/ADHD or a borderline version of this diagnosis which may have presented more vulnerability to peer pressures.

Although most students did not address the zero-tolerance expulsion explicitly in their counseling, a great majority (80%) reported concerns about peer conflicts at some point during their counseling. The most common peer issues were conflicts, teasing and threats or fights. Some students discussed the dilemma of being pressured to fight to gain peer respect at the school. Others reported pressure to fight in response to threats. Students reported that the pressure to fight intensified with peer teasing. It may have been more difficult to resist this peer pressure for the many students described as followers and diagnosed with ADHD. According to social learning theory, a strong social inducement such as peer acceptance can predict modeling of negative behaviors. The modeling of negative behaviors such as teasing and fighting may have reduced student's positive school bonding, but it seemingly increased their status in the eyes of peers.

Stigmatization also was apparent in progress notes. The stigma most commonly found in progress notes related to being a social outcast, which at the alternative school was someone who "can't fight" or even worse was a "snitch" who sought help from adult authorities. Making good grades and staying out of trouble, positive school bonding activities, rarely received peer approval whereas getting a referral was often seen as a badge of honor, something to brag about. The alternative school staff sought to intervene in these negative peer norms by providing positive reinforcement incentive fun days, meet the dean parties, pizza and other snacks for students with good behavior records, but peer influence was often more rewarding.

For some students, it seemed that the harder they tried to stay out of trouble, the more their peers instigated. One student described the difficult decision he faced to press charges against a peer who continued to physically assault him despite his attempts to avoid a fight. Despite the negative peer norm against seeking help from adults, a few students attempted to resolve their conflicts with counseling using a mediation approach. However, many chose to tease or even fight in retaliation.

According to clinical progress notes, 57.5% of students had a primarily positive experience and 42.5% had a negative experience at the alternative school. Whether a positive or negative school bond emerged may depend on other available resources including family support. Some positive family support was apparent in the parent participation. Sixty-two percent of parents participated in at least one of the monthly parenting meetings offered by the program. The highest parent attendance was at the end-of-semester student awards ceremony. However, many students also had significant family stressors which prevented positive support. A great majority of all students received free or reduced lunch and all students had family adjustment issues which were being addressed in their counseling. Some of the common family issues included high mobility, family deaths, separations, incarcerations, job instability, and familial conflict. These significant family issues may have even contributed to student's zero-tolerance offense. According to Cassidy and Jackson (2005), "children who come from challenging home environments, who struggle with learning or who experience chaos in their lives are less likely to be able to conform to rules which are inflexible and do not accommodate the life worlds in which these children live" (p. 456).

Seventy-one percent of students with positive experiences at the alternative school had a parent who participated in at least one of our parent meetings. Parents who encouraged good choices and reinforced the support of the prevention program most likely helped with the transition and adjustment to attending the alternative school. Only 50% of students with a negative school bond had some parent participation. The higher percent of parent participation in students with positive school bonding experiences reinforces previous research on the social development model and risk and protective factors which emphasizes the importance of family bonding as a protective factor. Surprisingly, 58% of students with no referrals also had no parent participation.

Despite the parent participation in the prevention program, the overall parent participation at the alternative school was very low. Although the school maintained close to 200 students, usually one to ten families attended open house, orientation, and other school functions. The prevention program, on the other hand, averaged about two to three families per monthly parent meeting except for the student award ceremony which averaged six to seven families. The low parent participation may have been related to transportation, distance and finances. The school had students from all over the district. For some families, attending a school meeting required a considerable commute. Many families lacked transportation and were facing economic difficulties which prevented them from attending meetings. Considering these factors, it was impressive to discover the relatively high parent participation found in this zero-tolerance group of students.

In summary, the prevention program data provided a variety of interesting results. First of all, first time offenders scored higher on the K-TEA math and reading assessments pre- and posttest. They also had higher GPAs. However, both groups made

improvements from pre- to posttest in math and reading. There were no significant differences for behavior as measured by the BBRS. Both groups averaged a low level of behavioral issues. The most common behavioral issues among both groups were poor attention and poor impulse control, but chronic behavior students were more likely to have excessive resistance as an issue. There were no significant differences for self-concept as measured by the Piers-Harris. Both groups had moderate levels of self-concept. For chronic behavior students, there most significant cluster issue for self-concept was behavior at pre- and posttest. Although zero-tolerance students had behavior as their most significant pretest issue, anxiety, behavior and popularity were the most common low self-concept issues at posttest. According to progress notes, over 50% of first time offenders had a positive school bond, 80% reported peer issues at some point in their participation, 20% were described by parental figures as followers, 35% were diagnosed ADD or ADHD, and parent participation appeared to correlate with positive experiences at the alternative school.

Despite these extensive analyses, at this point the portrait of zero-tolerance students remained pale because of ethical constraints. Confidentiality prevented a rich and vivid description of these students and their experiences. In the next chapter, blogs and an e-mail correspondence provide a realistic look into the lived experience of zero-tolerance students and their families. These families and students have similar experiences to the zero-tolerance students in the prevention program. They could easily be any of the forty students analyzed in this chapter. Since there were no statistically significant differences found among groups using quantitative data, qualitative textual data in the form of blogs and e-mail interviews were used to tease out the personal

experience of families and first time offenders through expulsion and placement in an alternative program.

CHAPTER V

BLOGGING THROUGH GRIEF AND LOSS

The qualitative research in this chapter includes data from a blog and from an e-mail interview. Since blogs are a relatively new area of data, some background research is warranted. Weblogs, otherwise known as blogs, first hit the Internet in 1998. Since their introduction, they have increased in popularity as an easy, inexpensive way to self-publish to a large audience on the World Wide Web. A weblog is a frequently updated, archived website containing news and personal views on various topics. Many weblogs mimic a personal diary except that it is publicly accessible. The blogosphere, the universe of available blogs on the Internet, initially gained media attention because of the rising number of blogs inspired by politics, terrorism, and national disasters (Herring, Scheidt, Kouper, & Wright, in press).

In recent years, researchers have exhibited increasing interest in blogs. Most of their research focuses on the characteristics of bloggers. This research provides a vivid picture of bloggers' personalities, motivation, and demographic characteristics. In 2006 the Pew Internet and American Life Project, which explores how the Internet affects different areas of our lives, initiated an extensive phone survey using a nationally representative sample of 233 bloggers (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). According to this survey, approximately 12 million (8%) of Americans keep a blog. In addition, 39% of the population reads blogs. The most popular topic for Internet blogs is life experiences and

most describe the blog as a hobby. The main reasons cited for blogging are creative expression and sharing personal experiences.

Bloggers are evenly distributed among the genders and less likely to be white than the general Internet population, more than half (54%) are under the age of 30, and most live in either urban or suburban locations (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). Herring, et al.(in press), who initiated a longitudinal content analysis of weblogs between the years 2003 and 2004, report that most blogs provide personal content and become more friendly, informal, and self-revealing over time.

Other studies focus on the personality of a blogger (Guadagno, Okdie, & Eno, 2007; Nowson, Oberlander, & Gill, 2005; Stefanone & Jang, 2007). These recent studies indicate openness, neuroticism, extraversion, and agreeableness may correlate with blogging. Guadagno et al. (2007) used the Big 5 Personality Inventory Short Form to clarify personality characteristics of two blogger samples from a large university. This study dovetails with other research on blogging, indicating that most bloggers share details of their personal lives and are comfortable revealing identifiable information. Further, personality characteristics most common to bloggers were openness to new experiences and neuroticism. Openness, which predicted maintenance of the blog, is imagination, curiosity, artistic talent, intelligence, and diverse interests. Neuroticism, on the other hand, was defined as anxiety, worry, emotional reactivity, and nervousness.

Nowson et al. (2005) analyzed linguistic differences among blogs. According to their research, openness, agreeableness and gender are most influential in predicting individual differences in context and formality of blog writing. Stefanone and Jang's (2007) blog on-line survey participants tended to be extraverted with many close,

supportive relationships. These researchers suggest that individuals with extraversion, self-disclosure traits, and larger social support networks are more likely to use blogs for interpersonal communication.

Parent Blog: "Up and Down Hill Battles"

The parent blog used in this study chronicled an Indiana mother's and father's experiences throughout the lengthy process of school meetings, suspensions, expulsion hearings, and court dates connected with their son's zero-tolerance policy infraction. They appeared to write openly and candidly about their experiences, shared their own personal backgrounds, and offered detailed information about their son's experience. They created the blog to "inform and tell others what we have been going through" and "with hopes to educate those around us." Although the website was a public domain, I used the pseudonym "John" and "Mr. and Mrs. Jones" since there was no need to reveal their identities.[1]

The Jones' "complete profile" provided some information about the family's personal life. In their profile, they chose to share information about their age, astrological sign, zodiac year, location, interests, and age of their children. They listed their age as 37, their astrological sign as Scorpio and their zodiac year as Boar. It is difficult to determine definitively whether this information applies to one or both parents but it likely describes Mrs. Jones as she appears to be the primary writer of the blog. Most of the posts seemed to be written by Mrs. Jones as evidenced by personal references in the posts. The Joneses, who live in Salem, Indiana, went on to say that they are "proud parents" of two boys ages

[1] Pseudonyms have been used for all blog quotes to protect the anonymity of the bloggers. A copy of the blog data is available upon request.

16 and 5. In their profile, they provided a one sentence rationale for their blog: "We have been through some rough times this past year and decided to talk about it." They indicated that they both share a common interest in their children and God. Mrs. Jones enjoys quilting, reading, and gardening. Mr. Jones likes horses and animals. The Joneses reported that their musical interests are difficult to identify because of listening to "so many different kinds of music." In addition to their profile information, it became obvious that the Jones' have strong religious beliefs as evidenced by frequent posts referencing God, faith, and scriptures. Posts revealed that Mrs. Jones is an intensive care registered nurse and Mr. Jones is a technician/installer of commercial doors. Mrs. Jones is the daughter of a school principal and chief of detectives. The couple has lived in their Indiana community for 16 years.

The Jones' personal profile aligns with previous research on blogger characteristics. According to the research on blogs, the most common reason for blogging is to share personal experiences (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). The Joneses make it very clear that they are using their blog to "talk about" their experience. The Jones' profile together with information gleaned from posts provided some clues about personality factors. For example, the interest in writing, quilting, reading, gardening, animals and books combined with their extensive research on zero tolerance, writing style and reports of taking college courses suggests a certain level of intelligence, creativity, and diverse interests. Artistic talent, intelligence, and diverse interests are all components of the openness personality factor commonly associated with bloggers (Guadagno, et al., 2007). However, in one post Mrs. Jones revealed that she is "not an open person" and has a "reserve personality" which is incongruent with an open personality.

Neuroticism, which has been identified as a blogger trait by Guadagno et al., (2007) is defined as anxiety, worry, emotional reactivity, and nervousness. Further, individuals with high levels of neuroticism tend to be emotionally unstable, anxious, insecure and self-pitying. They blog to relieve feelings of loneliness and reach out to others to make social connections. Guadagno et al. found that their results were moderated by gender meaning that women with high levels of neuroticism are more likely to blog. Mrs. Jones appeared to be writing most of the blog. The Joneses expressed anxiety, worries, and emotional reactivity in their posts and reached out for support from family, readers, and other's experiencing similar situations in at least four posts. However, there was a known precipitating event, their son's expulsion, which contributed to these emotions. The Joneses typical emotional reaction to less distressing life events is not known. Thus, it is difficult to determine if they exhibit the neurotic trait or if they are simply reacting appropriately to a major loss and family stressor.

This parent blog was ongoing. The blog began when the zero-tolerance incident happened and the parents continued the blog throughout the expulsion experience, court dates, and law suit. John's zero-tolerance law suit court date was impending as of November 2008. At the end of August, the parent blog averaged 25 posts per month. The blog, begun in April 2008 a few months after John was initially involved with the zero-tolerance infraction, consisted of both informational and personal posts. The posts that I coded as informational included research studies, statistics, newspaper articles, websites, legal information, and other data on the zero-tolerance policy. Personal posts consisted of parent disclosures about their experiences with the zero-tolerance policy. Since I am focusing on the affective dimensions of a personal zero-tolerance experience, I only

analyzed the content of the Joneses personal posts. However, the majority of posts were informational. In April, 61% of their posts were informational; May, 66%; June, 58%; July, 67%; and August, 59% informational.

All of the information in the Jones' personal posts was an expression of their lived experience. Many of the posts had emotional tonality, but I chose to focus coding analysis explicitly on emotional words. The emotional words that surfaced included dread, disbelief, tiredness, denial, frustration, anger, concern, worries, anxiety, happiness, calm, hurt, mixed emotions, disappointment, alienation, distrust, embarrassment, shame, stress, depression, forgiveness, pride, and difficulty concentrating. It was apparent that the majority of emotional content was negative. In addition to emotional words, I also coded metaphorical expressions and posts addressing school bonding, stigma, and coping mechanisms to further understand the Jones' emotional lives as they directly experience the zero-tolerance expulsion and its aftermath. During the five month time period of data analysis, 40 posts were personal. Out of the 40 posts, 47.5% contain emotional words, 45% refer to John's school bond, 40% utilized metaphor to express emotions, 35% had direct references to faith, religion, or biblical scriptures, 30% requested external support such as comments, prayers or positive thoughts, and 27.5% expressed concerns about stigma.

The frequencies of occurrence parenthesized in the following paragraphs refer to how many times I found a specific emotion in all personal posts over the five month time span. There were limitations to using frequencies in contrast to percentages but difficulties with completing a total word count and the variety of specific emotions prevented the use of percentages.

I initially struggled with how to effectively organize and present the vast amount of emotions discussed in the parent blog. As I looked for a cohesive framework for presenting the emotionally volatile experience of these parents, I noticed that the emotions expressed seem to mirror the stages of grief that Kubler-Ross (1969) delineated in *On Death and Dying*. Some might contend that being expelled from school represents a major loss that could eventuate in a grieving process. In a couple of posts, the Jones's identified their experience as a form of loss leading to feelings of grief. In May, they described their son's experience as a loss: "To know the loss he has experienced over this is unimaginable unless you have been through it yourself." Later in July, they referenced a biblical scripture and specifically identified some of their feelings associated with grief to describe their healing process: "We mourned and wept but now we can laugh and dance. When something like this happens, you feel angry and hurt. Your body reels from the pain. Your emotions become raw. You go through denial and feelings of shame."

I presented the data using Kubler-Ross's five stage model of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These five stages are neither clear cut nor time contingent. The grief stages overlap and vary with many different aspects of the loss. A grieving individual may oscillate between different stages or simultaneously experience more than one stage. The grief process is thus an individualized experience encompassing a range of typical emotions.

Denial

The denial stage of grief entails a sense of shock and numbing. Denial is a defense mechanism guarding against the reality of the loss. The individual has difficulty

accepting the loss and often questions how this could happen. “Denial is usually a temporary defense and will soon be replaced by partial acceptance” (Kubler-Ross, 1969, p. 34). The “first reaction may be a temporary state of shock” (Kubler-Ross, p. 36). Life does not make sense, and confusion ensues. The loss seems unbelievable and unreal. The sense of numbing and isolation gradually passes as acceptance settles in. Kubler-Ross’s analysis of death and dying was based on her observations of the terminally ill. In these cases, the individual could deny the diagnosis hoping for a medical error. For the Jones’, there was no questioning the reality of the loss because of the rapid development of very real events including school meetings, expulsion hearings, and court dates. Because of the frequent reminders of the loss from school personnel, the Jones’ most likely enter and exit this temporary stage at an advanced pace. Also, since their blog begins a little over three months after the zero-tolerance infraction, they could have been coping with this stage before beginning the blog. Overall, there were limited emotional expressions of denial in posts.

The feelings most closely related to shock and denial for the Jones family were distrust (5), disbelief (4), disappointment (3), confusion (2), surprise (2), and uncertainty(1). In a post entitled “How Expulsion Affected Us,” the parents wrote about their disbelief: “There is anxiety and disbelief that this is happening. Then the thought of where do we go from here?” In addition, they reported that the expulsion affected the extended family who were confused and in a state of disbelief. The Jones’ reported that it was difficult for everyone to accept since their son had never had trouble in school.

Anger

According to Kubler-Ross, the second stage of grief typically involves angry feelings toward self, others, and even God. This stage involves wondering why is this happening to me? The Jones' reported feelings of anger (9), frustration (4), challenged faith (2) and times of questioning the fairness of their son's expulsion (2). In fact, in a post entitled "Faith," they wrote about how their "faith has been tested as it has never been tested through this expulsion and dealing with the school." One of the Jones's reported usually being a "very calm laid-back person," but "I have changed through all of this." This parent goes on, "there are times that I have been so angry and frustrated with this that I want to scream. Our son did not deserve this."

They admitted to being very trusting of school officials before this zero-tolerance infraction which occurred in December 2007. After the experience that "changed our family lives," they developed a sense of distrust for the school system: "I have always before had the utmost unquestionable respect and trust in both schools and law enforcement. That is no longer true. I have developed weariness of both." The Jones' tried to make sense of what they considered to be a "biased and unjust" experience with the school by coming up with different rationales.

Early on through the expulsion hearing, the Jones' anger took the form of incessant questioning of school officials. As often happens during the anger stage in the grief process, the parent's questions did not get sufficiently answered. The Jones' featured the following quote by Haim Ginott repeatedly in the blog as an expression of their frustrations over their son's "unfair, unjust expulsion" and the heavy influence of

school staff on a child's life. In fact, this quote became a permanent statement found on their blog home page:

> I've come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or de-humanized (June 11, 2008 post).

Bargaining

The bargaining stage involves restorative efforts. The aim is to somehow bring the lost loved one back. Grieving persons may make promises to be a better person or attempt a temporary truce to alleviate feelings of loss. They may find fault with themselves and engage in "what if" thinking. This stage involves attempts to postpone the loss. Some bargains involve a secret promise made to God which could be associated with quiet guilt. Other bargains involve asking for a prize for good behavior set on a personal timeline. With terminally ill patients, the bargain may include "an implicit promise that the patient will not ask for more if the postponement is granted" (Kubler-Ross, 1969, p. 95).

For the Jones', this stage was practically non-existent. They did not try to bargain, but they did try to rectify the loss through their law suit. In pursuing the law suit, they engaged in "what if" thinking when they worried about the school staff's reactions to them: "Will the school find us so outspoken through the blog that they will single out our sons?" The "what if" thinking returned as the family faced the first day back at school

after summer vacation. They were afraid that their actions may negatively affect their son: “What if they harass him? Will he be accepted for him and not the lies they portrayed” “Will he be singled out by the administration?” However, they were determined to resolve this loss and preserve their son’s future opportunities. They were dedicated to helping their son and others.

Depression

The depression stage of grief/loss involves symptoms such as withdrawal, sadness, lethargy, poor concentration, and apathy. The sense of loss begins to settle in, and the individual slips into varying degrees of depression. For the Jones’, symptoms of this stage were frequently reported as financial and emotional stress (8), anxiety (7), fear (6), mixed emotions (5), hurt (5), alienation (4), fatigue (4), dread (3), poor concentration (1), and embarrassment (1). The Jones’ described how the lengthy process created an inescapable and extreme fatigue: “Going through something like this is emotionally draining. It stays on your mind 24-7. It is always there.” “Sometimes I feel alienated from my friends because I know they don’t understand what I am going through. How can someone?” They felt overwhelmed with questions regarding their son’s future.

> Then the thought of where do we go from here? Do we allow him back to that school? Do we home school? Do we look at a private school? How do we get him caught up? If he goes back will he be harassed from the administrators? What about our youngest? Have we become too out spoken and will that affect our sons? Do we continue to fight for what we know is true and what is right? (May 8, 2008 post)

There are several possible explanations for the heightened frequency of depression emotional expressions in the Jones' posts. Since the acceptance stage is stalled because of an indefinite timeline for the lawsuit that the Jones associate with closure, they may have difficulty reconciling the loss leaving them in the depression stage. Another possible explanation is a pre-existing depression condition. A predisposition to depressive symptoms and anxiety would align with neurotic personality factors common to many bloggers (Guadagno, et al., 2007). On the other hand, the grief/loss issues may have triggered a depression.

Acceptance

The final stage of Kubler-Ross' model is acceptance of the reality of the loss. At this point, the individual can recall memories without overbearing sadness. A sense of closure emerges. The Jones do not seem to have fully entered this stage. They have had moments of sentimentality during which they recalled memories of their children before this zero-tolerance "nightmare." They also dedicated the majority of the "Faith" post to forgiveness which they seemed to associate with personal closure. They admitted to having a spiritual calling to forgive the school personnel, but they had difficulty forgiving because of the anger that remained for unfair treatment. They laid out what they considered to be all of the transgressions against their son and the family: "punishing him for standing up for the right thing," "calling our son a liar," "taking away his education," "belittling and intimidating him," "not investigating the truth," "alienating him from his friends," "lowering his self-esteem," "hurting him," "hurting my family," and the "pain we have been through with this expulsion."

Although they indicated that they forgave the school, they admitted that they will never forget: “So yes, forgive but will not forget.” This inability to forget and move on suggests a failure to reach the acceptance stage of loss. The acceptance stage was difficult for the Jones family because they do not feel a sense of closure. “So yes, the date has come that ends his expulsion but there is no closure here.” At this point, we again see the Jones’ anger and frustration with not being able to get closure. This lack of closure keeps them from fully experiencing the acceptance stage. They continued to hold out, hoping that their impending court date would give them closure: “Maybe, there will be some resolve then.” Their life continued to be placed on hold as they awaited their court date for the law suit. Their movement through the acceptance stage was inextricably tied to the court date and resolution of their law suit. Everyone progresses through the stages of grief differently. Some may have let go of the loss earlier but the Jones were tenacious in their attempts to “do the right thing.” They refused to accept that “bad things happen to good people.” Since the impending law suit was tied to their personal closure, they oscillated between depression, anxiety, and anger.

Metaphors

Instead of fulfilling the acceptance stage, the Jones continued to circle back to the anger stage of grief. The Jones’ unresolved anger was apparent in the metaphors frequently expressed in posts. The most common metaphorical expressions were related to fighting, taking a stand, battles or war. They made sacrifices, attempted to fight (10) the expulsion in order to defend their son and “stand for what is right (11).” They described their “up and down hill battles.” They even “laid their lives on the line” to try to alleviate the “nightmare threat that has been plaguing us.” The parents often used

metaphors such as “fights” or “battles” to describe efforts to prove their son’s innocence. They referred to times of war and peace and “time to rend and sew.” They emphatically declared that they would not take a “backseat” to the school system. They were empowered to a call to battle, to stand up and be heard.

Part of their determination to take a “stand” seemed motivated by frustrations with not being heard or prioritized by the school system. Their concerns and questions were dismissed, ignored, and not addressed. In addition, the Jones reported that their basic rights were disregarded in a biased and unfair expulsion process. In some cases, the practice of zero tolerance has been a violation of student and family rights to due process (Zweifler & DeBeers, 2002) and civil rights (Eskenazi, Eddins & Beam, 2003). The Jones felt like they were not being heard and they emphatically stated that their “due process was NOT given.” They experienced what they perceived to be a biased and unjust hearing, concerns about the stigmatization and alienation of their child from the school system, questions left unanswered, dismissive treatment and an overall systematic lack of concern for their feelings. This treatment by the school system made them question: “do they really care about our children?” Ultimately, they felt compelled to continue to “fight” to try to clear John’s record because “he did not do this.” Thus, their fighting metaphors demonstrated the intense anger and defenses evoked by this “roller coaster” experience which created tremendous “emotional cost” for John and the family.

School Bonding

According to the Jones, one of the primary costs to John was related to the severed school bond. These school bonds posts were divided into three themes: the pre-expulsion positive school bond, post expulsion feelings of school disconnectedness, and

post expulsion concerns about missing educational opportunities. In at least four posts, the Jones described the positive bond that John had with the school before he was expelled. His school bond was strengthened through friends, positive relationships with teachers, and involvement with band, track, FFA, student council, and other school activities. In addition, he was involved with 4-H and church. John had no disciplinary record and a sense of school pride before his expulsion. His high involvement with school and community activities was a protective factor which served to prevent school drop out and drug/alcohol abuse (Hawkins, et al., 1992).

Other posts focused on John's disappointment and embarrassment that the "school he loved and was so involved with, could turn on him." The Jones indicated that John's "only embarrassment in this is the way the school he loved has treated him." Further, the experience affected John's "trust in the school system" and "his positive outlook on life has changed."

The Jones frequently posted about the hardship they faced because of John's educational exclusion. For example, in April, they attempted to find ways to keep John's "education going" through home schooling or on-line credits. They learned that educational credits could not be obtained during expulsion forcing John to make up the credits later in order to graduate on time. In a May post, the Jones' used their experience and research to hypothesize about the negative effects of lost educational opportunities. They listed feelings of isolation, abandonment, segregation, low self-esteem, and alienation from peers as common concerns. In particular, they cited the disrupted learning process, time spent catching up on missed work, and reduction in instructional and learning time as possible risk factors for juvenile delinquency and drop out. Their

hypotheses aligned with research findings identifying expulsion as a risk factor for school drop out and juvenile delinquency (Hayden, et al., 1996; Skiba, 2000a, 2000b; Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

They later reported frustrations with the schools refusal to allow "any type of education credits" during this expulsion. In their home state, "children and parents are left up to their own devices to obtain their credits once the expulsion is over." The Jones began to "wonder, does this set a child up to fail?" They later compared John's expulsion to being fired from a job, except without the readily available option of finding a new job. After being "fired from school, they do not have an opportunity to seek another school unless it is a private school. For those in a rural community a 40-minute one-way trip to a private school is not an option." Once the expulsion hearing ends, they chose the option of on-line courses for John's educational credits.

The Jones were pleased to see that John's friends and teachers welcomed him back to school after the expulsion ended. There were "no harsh words." The Jones admitted to having a "great feeling" about John returning to school, band, friends, and education. Unlike some students who would not have computer resources for on-line classes and the influence of involved parents, John was able to return to school to reassemble his previously intact school bond. Yet the Jones continued to worry about how he would be stigmatized by this experience throughout their ongoing lawsuit against the school.

Stigmas

Stigmatization concerns were apparent as evidenced by the Jones's repeated posts about how John and the family were being perceived by school officials and peers. Three

separate posts mentioned worries about the expulsion affecting John's military and college future: "We have continued to appeal this because with an expulsion on his record colleges and military will look unfavorably at him. It has been devastating to him. His reputation has been tarnished." They were also afraid of being condemned as parents: "You feel like you are being judged as a parent but then you do some soul searching and discover why should I be ashamed" The Jones further described the stigmatizing effects of being "abandoned," "exiled" and "segregated" from school and friends. They related John's experience to being "fired from school" and denied educational opportunities. According to the Jones, the removal from school disrupted the learning process, reduced instruction and learning time and put John behind having to catch up on missed work. The Jones went on to suggest that expulsion could lead to "low self-esteem and alienation from peers."

The parents also felt alienated from their friends and had concerns about being harassed by school administration. Specifically, they worried about their sons being "singled out" or "bullied" because of their "outspoken" behavior. They were not always outspoken. When the expulsion first happened, they admitted that they did not want anyone to know. They were afraid that it would reflect poorly upon the family. However, they soon realized the necessity of disclosing the details of this experience in order to help their son and help others in similar situations.

Coping

The analysis of the parent blog revealed a high frequency of references to what could be described as coping mechanisms. In particular, the Jones often referred to their faith (11), strength (7), and the importance of forgiveness (18), plus they often offered

biblical quotations (15). The Jones described the zero-tolerance experience as a major challenge that eventually builds their family strength and faith. It was, indeed, unexpected to find that the Jones' seemed to grow stronger with their family bond and faith through this experience: "As a family it has made us stronger." In addition, the Jones' expressed pride in their son for his Christian values and willingness to forgive school personnel. Despite the emotional turmoil, the Jones indicated that their son taught them important moral values which created a sense of family pride. John "tells me to just keep praying and everything will work out in the end. His faith has grown strong over this."

They utilized the blog as a coping mechanism, looking for support from others experiencing similar zero-tolerance circumstances. In twelve separate posts, they asked for comments, shared experiences, prayers, and positive thought from blog readers. Consistent with previous research showing that bloggers tend to have important social support networks, the Jones appeared to have some social support from friends and family as evidenced by posts expressing gratitude to friends and family members for their support. From a risk and protective factor standpoint, the Jones encompassed many important protective factors which served as coping mechanisms. In particular, family bonding, religious faith, extended family support, and optimism were noticeable protective factors.

This family is not representative of all families dealing with a zero-tolerance expulsion. In particular, the Jones appeared to have significant resources and protective factors to help them cope with this loss. The family had some financial stability which allowed them to hire lawyers and pursue a lawsuit taking a proactive stance toward their

child's expulsion. They were in a position to "fight" the school system to advocate for their son. The Jones had a high degree of involvement with spiritual/religious outlets as well as family/friend support. Despite all of these resources, the family still struggled with emotional turmoil. Considering the emotional stress suffered by the Jones, one might question how a family without these resources would cope with a zero-tolerance expulsion.

Robbins (2005) identifies the differential and often devastating consequences for marginalized students with limited resources. Without empowered family units, community status/support and financial resources, minorities, students with risk factors, special needs, and low socioeconomic status are predisposed to entering the "school house to jailhouse track" (Robbins, 2008). There is an established link between school expulsion and drop out with higher drop out rates for minority students (Skiba, 2000a, 2000b). In addition, schools are frequently using the criminal justice system as a punishment for school offenses. According to Robbins, "schools use zero tolerance as a safety valve to dispose of students for whom they do not have the structural or personnel resources or for students who require more intense academic resources" (Robbins, 2008, p. 11). These students, lacking the coping mechanisms, protective factors and resources of the Jones, most likely suffer greater long term consequences to their life chances and educational opportunities.

The Student's Perspective: The Incident "I'll Always Remember Far Too Well"

It is difficult to assess John's feelings about his zero-tolerance expulsion because he never contributed to the blog. However, his parents did occasionally make reference to his adjustment. These limited posts provided a glimpse into how the expulsion may be

affecting John's relationship with school. Prior to this alleged zero-tolerance infraction, John was "very involved" with school through "band, track, FFA, student council and has never had any discipline problem." His involvement suggested a strong school bond and a high level of school connectedness.

Through his parents' words, we learn that John also experienced some of the stages of grief because of his lost connection with school. At first, the parents reported that John was in a state of disbelief or denial: "He still cannot fathom how the school he loved and was so involved with, could turn on him. School was his life." The Jones were frustrated by the way their son was treated: "Our son has more pride in this school than what it deserves." John's "pride" in the school suggests a strong school bond: "His only embarrassment in this is the way the school that he loved has treated him." John's previous involvement in the school activities and sense of school pride likely intensified the loss he suffered.

Since there were limited posts from the Jones' blog from John's perspective, I sought another source of information on a student's zero-tolerance experience. This student blog story was part of a website solely dedicated to presenting stories of zero-tolerance "nightmares." On the website were approximately 30 stories, mostly by parents about zero-tolerance experiences. Out of these 30 stories, only one came from an expelled student. This was the only first hand account that I could find on any website or blog site. This student story was written from an adult standpoint, six years after the zero-tolerance experience. Consisting of only 12 paragraphs, this more condensed glimpse into the zero-tolerance experience nevertheless expressed powerful emotions.

I analyzed the student blog story for the affective dimensions of the zero-tolerance experience. Although the student, whom I will call "Sam," did have some expressions that paralleled the grief process, his experience settled primarily in the depression stage. This difference could be attributed to the timeline. The Jones' were actively experiencing the loss, writing in the present moment. This allowed for a glimpse into the daily, weekly, and monthly lifeworld of the Jones' family. The Jones's blog had the revealing qualities of a diary written in the here and now. This provided a more time-centered subjective account of the grief process as it was happening. Sam, on the other hand, was far removed from the experience. He vividly recounted his story, but he relied on memories of a traumatic experience that happened years ago. These memories were rooted in his time lapsed personal interpretation. He recalled the most personally significant elements of the experience which centered on the depression stage.

Sam began his story by discussing his early years of high school. He presented himself as an "introverted," "shy," "quiet," and "calm" student whose teachers knew he "wouldn't harm a fly." He reported that he was often "depressed" and "afraid" because of peer bullying. Insufficiently challenged in school, he felt "bored" and eventually "floundered" and "stagnated" because of "no stimulator or new learning." At this time, he seemed to lack a sense of school bonding.

Sam experienced a dramatic turn during his senior year. Because of a "fear" of not graduating and a renewed sense of "inspiration" from what he deemed his personal maturity, he began to excel academically. As he began to make A's and B's and then later straight A's on his report card, he developed a sense of "pride" that "strengthened [his] resolve." He "soared," and his "confidence was the best it had ever been, and even the

bad points in [his] life at that time couldn't touch [him]." He also reported increased involvement and success with music related activities at school. At this point, Sam's sense of school connectedness seemed to have hit an all time high.

As Sam recalled the incident that he will "always remember far too well," the emotion he most frequently expressed was fear. He admitted to having "fears," feeling "scared," "afraid" and even "terrified" at times. As a "scared kid," he reacted to the school officials threats of expulsion by crying and later "sobbing," expressing feelings of being "cursed" or damned. During his suspension interim, he "dared to hope" while the "days dragged by." As he awaited the results of the expulsion hearing, he "waited, hoped, and prayed." He admitted that he "didn't have the courage" to open the letter from the school and had to wait until his mother got home so she could open it for him. When he found out that he had been expelled, he was very "upset." It "drove my sense of the world far and away from anything I'd known up until that point."

After being expelled, Sam felt a sense of hopelessness:

> The events of that expulsion had convinced me, even though falsely, that attempts at good grades were futile at worse, fragile and unreliable at best, as they could apparently be so easily taken from me by chance and circumstance. I had lost the will I'd gathered to the task of my education, and six months later I would drop out, believing my best efforts to be futile and a diploma something out of my grasp. (¶ 9)

Sam reported that he became withdrawn, hopeless, and suicidal: "I drew further into myself than I'd ever been, and my mind for the first time ever truly started to dwell on suicidal thoughts that would linger for years to come." Like the Jones, Sam's family

fought for him but he reported that it was too late because "unfortunately damage was already done." After the expulsion, we see "Sam's" school bond drop to a nonexistent level prompting a sense of hopelessness and alienation which eventually led to drop out.

It took "Sam" three years to get his GED and an additional three years before he would start college. Finally, in college he began to feel a resurgence of confidence with "no hesitance at all." However, he still recalled the "severe depression" and "lasting effects" of the zero-tolerance expulsion.

> The event had lasting effects, which I have managed to overcome but are still felt as post recovery from the severe depression that followed for years afterwards, I look to finishing my first year of college at age 25. There are no doubts in my mind that the impact of Zero Tolerance on my life has been both lasting and inarguably negative (¶ 10).

He later used metaphor in describing the zero-tolerance policy as a "blind and unthinking beast lurching towards the operation table with chainsaw in hand." Sam further expressed his opinions regarding the weaknesses of the zero-tolerance policy in relation to his own emotional situation. He metaphorically described the problem of violence and drugs in schools as a "cancer" that is being erroneously treated through the zero-tolerance policy.

> Its failure is the removal of the most crucial and valuable tools in the treatment of this cancer, those being the human capacities of compassion and reason. It removes the decision making process regarding the future of students entirely from the due process of dealing with apparent infractions of school rules. Administrators should be allowed to judge and weigh each situation individually.

> They should be allowed to use common sense to prevent good, well-meaning students who present no actual danger from being swept clean, in the manic attempt to remove all perceived threats in a fit of risk management. They should be allowed to tailor the punishment to fit the crime. Zero Tolerance, as I have seen, makes no distinction and allows no reason (¶ 11).

Sam's blog story revealed the intense depression, sense of helplessness, and school disconnection incurred through a zero-tolerance expulsion. Unlike John, Sam did not start out with a strong school bond pre-expulsion. He had poor attendance, was frequently tardy, and often failed to complete schoolwork. He was verbally and physically "harassed" by peers. However, his school bond improved during his senior year because of his own self-awareness and motivation to graduate from high school. In his senior year, he made A's and B's and later straight A's. He also chose to get involved with music making the state soloist final. Thus, his school bond was at an all time high vastly decreasing his chances of school drop out in his senior year. Reflecting this positive school bond, many teachers testified on his behalf that he was of no threat to others. After his expulsion, Sam's school bond dropped to a non-existent level as he watched his hard work dissipate.: "I had been completely expelled; my credits erased from that semester, all would be marked as failing grades." Although Sam was allowed to return partway into the next school year, "the damage" to his school bond "was already done." He indicated that "the shining grades which I'd earned that previous year had been an intense effort on my part as a student who'd spent this entire educational career until that point failing repeatedly." Sam then "lost the will to the task of my education" and dropped out six months later. Sam's experience is an unfortunate real life example of the

research findings demonstrating the increased risk of drop out because of the negative influence of expulsions and broken school bonds (Hawkins, et al., 1992; Skiba, 2000a, 2000b; Skiba & Peterson, 2000).

In understanding Sam's emotional reaction to the expulsion, it is hard to determine which came first, depression or expulsion. He explicitly acknowledged that he was often depressed prior to the expulsion. Sam justified his depression as being common to high school students. "I was often depressed as many high school children in all honesty are." His home life was not ideal and he was frequently teased. Thus, it is probable that Sam either had a predisposition to depression or a situational depression in reaction to external events (home and school life). It is difficult to determine if the severe depression was entirely a reaction to the expulsion, related to other external factors or a predisposition. However, Sam was certain that the expulsion caused significant distress, depression, and suicidal ideation having an "inarguably negative" and "lasting" effect on his life.

To further understand the student's perspective, I used e-mail correspondence to interview "Bob," an adult who, like Sam, experienced a zero-tolerance expulsion in his senior year of high school. Bob provided the unique perspective of an adult reflecting on a zero-tolerance experience which happened 15 years ago in a nearby school district to the one in this study. A colleague referred Bob to me and I used e-mail interviewing because of the distance of his location and to mirror the written blog data. Bob's experience is organized by the following themes school bond, parents, teachers, peers, and his emotional reaction pre- and post expulsion.

Before the expulsion, Bob had a positive school bond. He was an A-B "honor student," "not a 'trouble kid.'" He indicated that he "always strived for the best and [I] still do strive to achieve better than what is expected of me." His academic motivation was evident in his dual enrollment in college classes, advanced high school classes, and memberships in MAO and Beta Club. He was only a few months from graduation when he was expelled for a zero-tolerance infraction. He admitted that he made a mistake. However, just as Sam reported that the school should be "allowed to tailor the punishment to fit the crime," Bob reported that the "consequences did not fit the crime" in his situation. When he was called to the office and later "cuffed and taken to jail," Bob reported feeling "scared to death" and "guilty."

As Bob faced his fear, his mother was preparing for a fight. "She was prepared to fight for my honor and defend me." Like the Jones who willingly engaged in a fight to preserve their son's honor, Bob's mother was ready to "defend" him: "I can still remember her storming in with such integrity." As Bob further reflected on his parent's reaction, he concluded that the "stress of their son getting kicked out of school did not help" in that it added to other stressors that they were dealing with at the time.

When Bob found out that he would be expelled from school, he faced "shock." At this point, he seemed to feel an extreme disconnect and alienation from friends and his previously positive school bond: "To become excommunicated so quickly from my friends and life was a shock." He reported feelings of bitterness for being "forced" out or "kicked out" of school so close to graduation after having a history of positive school involvement.

Bob made the transition to an adult high school program "designed for dropouts who wanted a different learning experience." This school was "simple" in comparison to his high school. "Seriously, we went from Dark matter and energy to 2+2=4." "If you did not show up no one cared, it would be affected in your grade." The school was a "cake walk" for Bob but he "wanted more challenges." He had a positive experience with the teachers who were "all very friendly" but he reported that they often had to "dumb it down" to fit the varying educational backgrounds of the students.

The peers Bob encountered at the adult high school program were mostly "dropouts and drug dealers." He reported that many of his peers smoked cigarettes and "I met more drug dealers there than ever at" high school. He concluded that the zero-tolerance policy somehow "perpetuated the drug culture." Although he tried to keep to himself to focus on grades, "the students I did meet were party animals." The students there were "mostly concerned with sex, drugs, and rock and roll." He admitted that he later chose to "party along with them."

As Bob reflected on his zero-tolerance experience, he was able to identify some of the ways it affected his life. He was "fortunate to still obtain a high school diploma not a GED" and finished a month ahead of his high school peers. When he began to apply to college, he experienced some negative effects of the zero-tolerance experience: "At first I felt that it held me back." He recalled that "in the beginning it was difficult to get scholarships. Originally I was walking right into them while at high school" but after graduating from the adult high program, "the opportunities were not available as they are now." Thus, he was forced to "fund most of my higher education personally." He eventually got scholarships because of his high GPA "on the college level." He admitted

that finding scholarships was work. “I had to search but they were out there. And as a striving young student I was able to get some financial aid.” Despite these setbacks, “in the long run I went to college, started a family, and became who I was achieving to be. . . myself.”

However, the zero-tolerance infraction was not Bob’s last arrest. Later in life, he was arrested for similar issues “more than once.” He indicated that he was “just in the wrong place at the wrong time.” He goes on to attend “party schools” where he “did 3 years in music theory” before deciding “that was not for me.” He then “started college over again (all except core courses) and followed my second love of plants. Eventually I met my wife, started a family, bought houses, land, moved across country. . .”

When he reflected on his thoughts regarding zero tolerance, he described the policy as a “joke” that taught him that “society in the SE United States is closed minded.” He reported that “people are quick to judge based on what you do and not who you are.” He indicated that “everything is not as black and white” as the judicial system makes it out to be: “How can you say zero tolerance and not look for surrounding facts? Are there not enough resources, or are people too lazy?” These questions resonated with similar concerns expressed by the Jones and Sam reflecting the issues of stigmatization and fairness. The Jones, Sam and Bob all make pleas for the consideration of circumstances and personal background before making a judgment call which can affect a child’s life.

Bob initially had a positive school bond. He was a seventeen-year-old honor student involved with school clubs and activities with an eye on college scholarships. He had positive relationships with school staff which continued after school. He described the school dean as a “wonderful lady who I had the pleasure to know later in life” and he

also worked with the school resource officer after high school. He had positive relationships with school staff, academic success and school involvement, all important qualities of the school bond which prevents drop out and drug abuse.

When Bob got expelled, he disconnected with the school that forced him out and alienated him from friends. His advanced academic past did not fit in with the simplistic academic curriculum at the adult high program. His experience in the adult high program was consistent with previous research which suggests that there are low academic expectations, "watered down" curriculums and few positive peer role models in alternative schools (Losen & Edley, 2001; Souza, 1999). Bob initially tried to keep to himself but eventually chose the party lifestyle that prevailed at the alternative program. Although he was only at the adult high program for a few months, it was unclear how much this peer influence and school disconnectedness contributed to later arrests. However, it is clear that the expulsion and adult high program inhibited his opportunities for scholarships.

Ultimately, Bob was successful in his achievements. He was able to get an education, start a family, and accumulate financial possessions. It appeared that he had resiliency which helped him overcome this situation. Part of this resiliency may be related to having a mother who was willing to "fight" for him. In addition, he was very close to graduation and had achieved success up until that point. It is difficult to determine how this experience would affect a younger student, in middle school for example, especially if the student had limited personal and family resources or protective factors. According to Bob, "we all have our experiences and that is what makes us human. Some get their life straight and others never do." Bob was able to get his life

"straight" but for others this experience could be more detrimental to achieving their life goals.

In summary, the blogs and interview data demonstrate that zero-tolerance expulsions can present significant issues for families and students. Issues of grief, decreased school bonding, stigmas, and negative peer modeling are apparent in this data. The data show that a zero-tolerance expulsion can be experienced as a major loss causing emotional reactions that mirrors the grief process. The Jones' experience shows how the zero-tolerance expulsion affects the family. They proceeded through the grief process with much time spent in the anger stage. They expressed concerns about weakened school bonds and the effects on peer, school relations, stigmas, and future career options. Sam's emotional experience reflected the depression stage of the grief process. The zero-tolerance expulsion led to depression, suicidal ideation, drop out and significant delays in his college enrollment. Bob's experience at the alternative program suggests some possible negative peer modeling which may have led to future arrests. In addition, his zero-tolerance expulsion decreased scholarship opportunities.

These three stories only provide a glimpse into the personal experience of zero-tolerance offenders. It should be noted that the blog stories in particular may reflect extreme situations. Research suggests that bloggers tend to be higher in emotional reactivity and it is unlikely that an individual would blog about a positive zero-tolerance experience. Thus, this data may be biased toward the negative. However, this data suggests that more research is needed on the emotional experience and long term repercussions of zero-tolerance expulsions.

CHAPTER VI

THE FUTURE OF ZERO TOLERANCE

Research Findings: An Overview

The preceding two chapters provide results that are broad in scope. Thus, the results are summarized through a reference to the initial research questions. My first research question asked how the K-TEA pre- and posttest mean scores of first time offenders compare with those of chronic behavior students. This research question was answered through a grade level analysis of the K-TEA pre- and posttest grade equivalency scores using percentages. The data suggests that expelled zero-tolerance students entered the alternative school with a slighter higher GPA and achieved higher scores on the K-TEA math and reading assessments.

My second research question sought to determine if there were significant differences in behavior, as measured by the BBRS, between first time offenders and chronic behavior groups controlling for preset behaviors. This question was answered through the MANCOVA statistical procedure. Findings revealed no significant differences between zero-tolerance and chronic behavior students in behavior as measured by the BBRS. Looking at descriptive data for specific behavioral issues on the BBRS, poor impulse control and poor attention were the most common behaviors found

in zero-tolerance students whereas excessive resistance was common in chronic behavior students.

The third research question asked whether there would be significant differences in self-concept, as measured by the Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale, between first time offenders and chronic behavior groups controlling for preset self-concept. The MANCOVA was also used to analyze these statistics. Similar to behavior, there were no significant differences in self-concept among the groups. However, an analysis of self-concept clusters showed behavior, popularity and anxiety to be the most common self-concept concerns for first time offenders at posttest.

My last research question sought to discover insights into the more diffuse effects on zero-tolerance first time offenders and their families from themes in clinical progress notes on students, blogs, and an interview with an adult who had been previously expelled because of zero tolerance. The progress notes results suggested significant peer adjustments for first time offender students. The overwhelming number of zero-tolerance students reporting peer conflicts provides evidence that peer influence at the alternative school may be affecting first time offender students. In addition, some first time offender students had ADHD/ADD diagnoses and were described by parents as followers. These students were facing a variety of family stressors but over 60% had some family or parent participation in the prevention program and over 50% of the students had a positive school bonding experience at the alternative school.

From blogs and an e-mail interview, we begin to see some of the specific personal effects of zero-tolerance expulsions on families, student identity, emotional stability, peer relationships, school bonding, and educational opportunities. For the Jones family, the

zero-tolerance experience was an “up and down hill” ongoing “battle” which seemed to mirror the grief/loss process. From the student’s perspective, both Sam and Bob experienced alienation from school and peers and had to reassess their identity in relation to school. The experience delayed Sam’s enrollment in college. Bob, on the other hand, lost out on scholarship opportunities. Emotionally, Sam had the most severe reaction to his expulsion. He became seriously depressed and contemplated suicide while Bob experienced fear and frustration.

Past Research

My research corroborates previous zero-tolerance research in the following areas: overrepresentation of African American students and students with disabilities, student inequality, criminalization and reduced academic rigor in alternative schools, academic exclusion and isolation, developmental impulsivity and peer influence, and the unique qualities of first time offenders. Similar to previous research, my research demographic data uncovered an overrepresentation of African American students in expulsion and suspensions (Advancement Project, 2000; APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Dohrn, 2001; Giroux, 2003a; Kaeser, 1979; McCarthy & Hoge, 1987; McFadden et al., 1992; Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Raffaele-Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Robbins, 2005; Skiba, 2000a, 2000b; Skiba, et al., 2002; Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Verdugo, 2002; Wu, Pink, Crain, & Moles, 1982). African American students were the majority of the combined sample of chronic behavior and zero-tolerance students. There were a disproportionate number of African American students in this sample in comparison to the school district population. In addition, clinical progress notes indicated that 35% of zero-tolerance students were diagnosed with ADD

or ADHD and some students were diagnosed with other mental health issues. These mental health diagnoses supports previous research that students with emotional or behavioral disorders may be more likely to be suspended or expelled (Leone, et al., 2000; Wagner, et al., 2005).

Another related area of concern found in this research was the high number of zero-tolerance students experiencing financial challenges and significant stressors within the home environment. At any given time, over 90% of the alternative school population receives free or reduced lunch. Cassidy and Jackson (2005) suggest that schools may be "further punishing students who are already marginalized and experiencing pain, through labeling them" and "subjecting them to zero-tolerance policies that apply the 'letter of the law' but do not give sufficient allowance for the person or the context of the behavior" (p. 459). Casella (2003) further emphasizes that there are differential consequences for those already facing poverty, racism and academic failure. "Ultimately, then due partly to their circumstances and their lack of social capital, these young people are penalized more severely than those who can bounce back from a suspension or expulsion. The punishment is different for them; it is not consistent, especially in regard to its severity" (Casella, p. 888).

Many researchers have suggested that the zero-tolerance policy reflects inequality and is anti-democratic (Giroux, 2003a, 2003b; Robbins, 2005). In addition, research suggests that most students perceive school suspensions as unfair and ineffective (Brantlinger, 1991; Sheets, 1996; Thorson, 1996). Both Sam and Bob described the zero-tolerance policy expulsion as unfair because of its rigid "black and white" approach that did not consider the student's circumstances. They both suggested changes to the policy

which would allow administrators to look at "surrounding facts" and "tailor the punishment to fit the crime."

One issue of inequality involves the research on the criminalized treatment of students and "watered down" curriculums in alternative schools (Losen & Edley, 2001). Previous research suggests that these schools have significant limitations and negative effects on students (Losen & Edley, 2001; Souza, 1999). The alternative school in this study is similar to those described in past research in that it had metal detectors, daily searches, and a visible school resource officer. However, over 50% of zero-tolerance students had a positive school bond at the alternative school. Bob attended a different alternative school in a nearby district. He did not describe concerns about criminalized treatment but did indicate that the academic curriculum was not challenging. He described the coursework as simplistic and regressive. He reported that attendance appeared to be more important than educational objectives supporting previous research on poor academic rigor in alternative schools.

Other research has emphasized the negative effects of educational exclusion and isolation resulting from zero-tolerance expulsions (Bowditch, 1993; Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Raffaele-Mendez, 2003; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996). Research suggests that this isolation can exacerbate mental health issues and can lead to drop out (Hayden, et al., 1996; Skiba & Peterson, 2000). Sam and the Jones' both mentioned concerns about school exclusion. The Jones' wrote about the limited educational opportunities for John during his expulsion. They faced some isolation already because of their rural location and had difficulty finding acceptable educational alternatives for their son. After much searching, they discovered on-line

education opportunities. However, they indicated that the alienation from school and friends caused significant emotional turmoil for John. Sam, on the other hand, was just beginning to feel a sense of belonging at school when he was isolated by expulsion. This expulsion led to school drop out, and exacerbated mental health issues which included extreme depression and suicidal ideation.

Sam and Bob's experience demonstrated somewhat divergent responses to the school exclusion. First of all, previous research shows that suspensions and expulsions increase the likelihood of school dropout or failure to graduate on time (Bowditch, 1993; Ekstrom, et al., 1986; Skiba & Peterson, 2000; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Consistent with this previous research, Sam dropped out of high school and subsequently stalled his college education. Bob, on the other hand, did not fit in with the research statistics. He actually graduated ahead of his peers because of his previous dual enrollment and advanced classes. These differences suggest that a student's reaction to school expulsion may relate to previous school experiences, resiliency or coping mechanisms and other resources such as family support.

Previous research suggests that youth under the age of 15 are developmentally prone to impulsive, peer influenced behaviors. According to my progress report data, 80% of students reported peer issues and 20% were described by parents as followers. The Piers-Harris results support these findings as evidenced by the predominance of low popularity cluster scores. The BBRS revealed that the most common behavioral issues for zero-tolerance students were impulse control and poor attention. This supports previous research suggesting that this age group tends to be more impulsive and peer oriented (Cauffman & Steinberg, 2000; Gardner & Steinberg, 2005; Luna, et al, 2004). However,

impulsivity is also a criminal propensity characteristic which could reflect a predisposition to juvenile delinquent behavior (Caspi, 2000; Hare, 1996). If this predisposition exists, the expulsion could accelerate the course of criminal involvement.

According a study by Morrison and D'Incau (1997) on the characteristics of first time offenders, these students tend to be from lower grades, are reacting to family crises, have more involvement with extracurricular activities, higher scores on competency tests, more school support, and close to a C average. In my study, the highest percentages of first time offenders were from a lower grade, sixth grade. They all had significant family issues. Many were involved in extracurricular activities. Also, Sam and Bob reported involvement with a variety of extracurricular activities. The zero-tolerance students had higher scores on the K-TEA achievement tests and had higher GPA's (above a C average).Thus, their characteristics appear to fit with previous research.

One of the more interesting findings in this study is the missing link between quantitative and qualitative data. According to the quantitative data, there is no difference between first time offenders and chronic behavior students in their behavior and self-concept. Yet clinical progress reports suggest that zero-tolerance students experience peer related adjustment issues. Since chronic behavior progress notes were not analyzed, it is possible that they are experiencing some of the same issues. Further, blogs and interview data show the negative and sometimes detrimental impact of the expulsion and alternative school attendance on family life, school bonding, peer relations, self-esteem, emotional development, and academic opportunities.

Limitations

Because I've gone outside of my prevention program for qualitative data, one cannot assume that the bloggers and interviewee had the same experience as the students in my prevention program. In fact, it is quite possible that the prevention program serves as a buffer to some of the lasting negative effects of the experience. Thus, there is a need for longitudinal quantitative research to assess the zero-tolerance students academic, behavior, self-concept, emotional adjustment and school success upon returning to a traditional school to determine whether they mirror the bloggers and e-mail participant's experience. Future research should take a random sample of zero-tolerance students within a district or nationwide sample and compare their academic and behavioral success pre and post expulsion to a control group in order to assess the effects of the policy on school success. Also, in-depth interviews with students and families about their experience would provide important information on the emotional repercussions of zero-tolerance expulsions. Finally, future research should also look at the characteristics of students who won expulsion hearings, compare graduation rates of zero-tolerance offenders to overall district graduation rates, compare the graduation rates before and after the implementation of zero-tolerance policies, interview students regarding the peer and teacher adjustment when they return to a traditional school, and assess the relationship between zero-tolerance offenses and Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) referrals.

In considering these results, it is important to be aware of potential limitations of this study. One major limitation involved the lack of access to school district data which halted my initial research proposal. Initially, I had hoped to look at GPA and disciplinary

records pre-, during, and post expulsion and alternative school attendance. I would then compare these data to a control group of students attending a regular school over the same time period. In addition, I had planned to interview current students who had been expelled because of zero tolerance. Because of lack of approval from the local school district, I had to use data which is narrower in scope. Thus, I was unable to address long term effects of the zero-tolerance expulsion and alternative school attendance on a random group of students. Instead, I used data from a voluntary group of students participating in a semester long prevention program, blogs and an e-mail interview. These students may be different from the general population in their academics, behavior and motivation for personal change. In addition, research suggests that bloggers may be higher in emotional reactivity. Thus, the Jones' may be more emotionally unstable or reactive in compared to the general population. Overall, this data cannot be assumed to be representative of the overall zero-tolerance student and family population. It merely provides a glimpse into the experiences of 82 students and one family.

Recommendations

When we look at the overall picture presented from this research, we see that the zero-tolerance policy can pose many challenges to some students and families. These challenges could best be addressed through a policy change which would allow teachers and administrators to examine consequences on a case-by-case basis, and consider the student's personal, academic, and behavioral background which would include consideration of developmental level and any pre-existing mental health diagnoses. Since the majority of the research shows that the zero-tolerance policy does not increase safety

nor improve school climate, other disciplinary policies should be used. Specifically, control-based, punitive programs do not demonstrate significant positive effects on reducing school crime (Chen, 2008). Thus, in developing school disciplinary policies, school employees should take into consideration circumstance, developmental level, past history, and resources for the student and family.

My research suggests that prevention programs can have a positive effect on student's academic achievement, behavior, self-concept, and school bonding. At posttest, chronic behavior and zero-tolerance students had much higher grade level scores on the K-TEA math and reading test, higher self-concept, and maintained a low number of behavioral issues. In addition, over 50% reported a positive school bonding experience which most likely related to the positive reinforcement based prevention program. There are many prevention programs with high success rates which could be implemented in all schools. These programs could be used as a preventative tool and as an intervention requirement for students in possession of prohibited and dangerous items. In teaching basic life skills such as problem solving, decision making and non-violent conflict resolution, these programs could help prevent poor judgment in the student population, keep students in school, increase school bonding and improve graduation rates.

Extensive research and national panels have uncovered consistent findings in the area of efficacious school safety and violence reduction school strategies (Dwyer, Osher, & Wagner, 1998; Elliot, Hatot, Sirovatka, & Potter, 2001; Greenberg, et al., 2003; Mihalic, Irvin, Elliot, Fagan, & Hansen, 2001; Tolan, Guerra, & Kendall, 1995). According to the findings, disciplinary and school violence program must include three levels of intervention: primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention strategies. Primary

prevention targets all students, secondary targets at-risk groups and tertiary targets students who are already involved with violent or disruptive behavior. Three programs that have been effective in reducing violence or disruption in schools are bullying prevention-primary prevention (Olweus & Limber, 1999), threat assessment-secondary prevention (Cornell & Sheras, 2006) and restorative justice-tertiary prevention (Karp & Breslin, 2001). Specific program models that have had promising results in reducing referrals, suspension, and expulsions and improving school climate are Positive Behavioral Supports (Rosenberg & Jackman, 2003) and Safe and Responsive Schools (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008).

According to Astor, Meyer, Benbenishty, Marachi, & Rosemond (2005), school violence has had a general decline over the last 6-8 years. However effective disciplinary strategies are necessary to prevent serious incidents. Some recommended disciplinary alternatives include Saturday morning disciplinary programs for non-violent offenders (Dunbar & Villaruel, 2004) and comprehensive school improvement programs which revise disciplinary procedures and enhance prosocial school activities to promote academic achievement.

School prevention programs are commonly assessed through a three-tier rating model. The programs are then rated as effective, promising or noteworthy. The highest rating is effective. An effective program is well implemented and evaluated with rigorous standards of research. Prevention programs meeting the effective standard include the Seattle Social Development Project (Hawkins, Catalano, Morrison, 1989), Child Development Project (Battistich, Schaps, Watson & Solomon, 1996), Bullying Prevention Program (Olweus, Limber & Mihalic, 1999), and FAST Track Families and

Schools Together (Bierman, et al, 1999). Many others are rated promising or noteworthy. In addition to funding effective prevention programs, Astor et al. (2005) suggests using a school mapping procedure to identify violent hot spots.

Skiba and Peterson (2000) also suggest an early response comprehensive violence prevention approach which brings together parents, school, and community in a partnership. Since punishment alone cannot teach new behaviors, this early response approach focuses on developing prosocial behaviors rather than an exclusive focus on punitive reactions. They suggest inclusion of conflict resolutions skills in the curriculum, increased use of positive reinforcement systems, parent partnership, screening for early warning signs, improved school-wide data collection on suspensions and expulsions, crisis intervention and security planning, consistent school-wide discipline plans, and functional assessment to provide positive behavior support to students with disabilities.

In screening for early warning signs, Skiba, Rausch, and Ritter (2004) emphasize the difference between profiling, which has been proven ineffective in addressing school violence, and threat assessment. Threat assessment uses a team approach to analyzing student, school, family, and community to determine if an incident is low, medium or high threat (Skiba et al., 2004). They add mentoring, teacher training in classroom management, and anger management as other important components of early identification and intervention that reconnects alienated students to the school community. Casella (2003) adds that long-term mediation and mentoring could be used to address lingering conflict issues among peers. Curwin and Mendler (1999) suggest a similar holistic approach that they call “as tough as necessary.” This approach to school discipline includes counseling, parental involvement, conflict resolution, training and

planning. All members of the community (teachers, administrators, students, paraprofessionals, and parents) contribute to general safety guidelines. Schools should also plan ahead for crises and have the following effective responses for dealing with disruptive and violent behaviors: restitution, individual behavior plans, restorative justice like teen court, community team approaches with wraparound services. Curwin and Mendler suggest using alternative placement only with the most severe behaviors.

According to the APA Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008), the zero-tolerance policy needs reform. It has been associated with increased likelihood of dropout and failure to graduate on time, poor academic achievement, increased suspensions and expulsions, overrepresentation of minorities and disabled students in expulsions, increased resource intensive security measures, increased referrals to juvenile justice, and the removal of educational opportunities for many students. Because of these concerns, the APA Zero Tolerance Task Force outlines practical, policy, and research reform suggestions. In addition, they offer practical, policy, and research options for alternatives to zero tolerance.

APA Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008) suggests using discretion and flexibility to look at context and utilize teacher expertise, regular teacher/parent communication about discipline as a preventative measure, continual teacher training in classroom management skills to defuse rather than escalate minor classroom disruptions and clear definitions of behaviors provided in consistent school-wide rules. Their policy reform ideas include reserving expulsions for serious offenses which jeopardize safety of students or staff including repeat offenders, required child development training for school resource officers, graduated discipline policies (parent contact, community

service, counseling), and less severe consequences for minor classroom disruptions, attendance issues, and minor fights. According to APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, future research needs to include longitudinal data from all school districts on outcomes of suspended and expelled students, research data from DJJ on the connection between suspensions/expulsions and DJJ referral, research on demographics and the disproportionate effects on minorities, and an overall research based cost-benefit analysis.

Practical alternatives to zero tolerance should facilitate improved school and community belongingness or bonding through proven prevention measures, a continuum of alternatives for those who have chronic behavior problems (restorative justice, alternative therapeutic programs, community service), integrated wrap around services, and increased prevention programs to reduce violent or disruptive behavior and keep students in school. Policy alternatives that offer promise are legislative initiatives that encourage an array of disciplinary alternatives, increased resources for alternatives such as prevention programs, and required teacher training in culturally responsive classroom management to reduce disciplinary referrals because of cultural misinterpretations. Research should address outcomes of schools with and without zero-tolerance policies, increased funding for prevention programs, and outcome research on effective evidence-based prevention programming.

In addition to practical and policy reform, an overall climate change could occur through a community-building, strength-based ethic of care. Cassidy (2005) recommends an ethic of care culture which would require teachers and administrators to practice and model care, dialogue around care, confirm care when observed, facilitate moral development, engage all players including parents to develop a positive culture of care,

create community, and applaud differences. This type of school setting has been effective even in alternative schools. In a study by Coyl et al. (2004), students at an alternative school with "openly caring" school staff reported positive peer support for school attendance and academic effort. Another strength based school in the greater Vancouver area showed similar success (Cassidy & Jackson, 2005). The staff at this school showed respect for each student focusing on their strengths rather than their problems. The curriculum was individualized, behavioral issues were considered by context, and each day began with a forgiveness policy. Students experience academic success, attendance rates are high, violent behavior is almost non-existent, and parents are happy with the school environment. Rather than criminalizing all youth behavior, a caring school environment suggests positive expectations for youth.

Some school districts and states are taking encouraging steps toward the suggested policy reform. In my district, there has been a recent revision to the zero-tolerance policy called Safe Harbor. Safe Harbor is now included in the student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook for 2009-2010 school year. Safe Harbor allows a student in possession of an item of "contraband" such as a pocket knife or drugs to willingly surrender the item to a staff member. This surrender must occur prior to search or investigation by school staff. The student then may be eligible for mitigation in whole or in part of the penalty for possession. Safe Harbor suggests that there may be some leniency in consequences for students who turn in items prohibited under zero tolerance. Future research should assess the total number of suspensions and expulsions before and after the institution of Safe Harbor to determine its effectiveness.

As of June 17, 2009, the state of Florida took a major step to reform the statewide zero-tolerance policy (Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, 2009). According to Florida Senate Bill 1540, the policy was amended to prohibit required reporting of "petty acts of misconduct and misdemeanors to law enforcement," and allowing for "disciplinary or prosecutorial action taken against a student who violates a zero-tolerance policy be based on the individual student and the particular circumstances surrounding the student's misconduct" (Florida Senate, 2009). The bill is also "encouraging school districts to use alternatives to expulsion or referral to law enforcement agencies unless using such alternatives pose a threat to school safety" (Florida Senate). This policy reform, which is to be applied equally regardless of economic status, race and disability, was initiated to decrease the number of youth being referred to juvenile justice system. Senate Bill 1540 suggests increased awareness of the negative effects of the zero-tolerance policy and a statewide dedication to youth school success.

Overall, the zero-tolerance policy criminalizes and marginalizes an ever increasing segment of our youth community. It is a significant challenge affecting school bonding, peer relationships, student identity, and family. Policy change is needed to encourage a caring approach to our youth which considers individual differences and needs. In the State of the Union Address on February 24, 2009, President Barrack Obama emphasized the need to improve high school graduation rates encouraging students to not give up on themselves. "And dropping out of high school is no longer an option. It's not just quitting on yourself, it's quitting on your country--and this country needs and values the talents of every American" ("Obama's speech," 2009). These words are particularly pertinent to the zero-tolerance policy which has increased suspensions

and expulsions from school (Skiba, 2000b). Forcing students out of school should no longer be an option. It is not just quitting on our children, it is quitting on our country, and our country needs the talents of all Americans especially our youth.

REFERENCES

Advancement Project (2000). *Opportunities suspended: The devastating consequences of zero tolerance and school discipline*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.

American Psychiatric Association (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed., text revision). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.

American Psychological Association (APA) Zero Tolerance Task Force (2008). Are zero tolerance policies effective in schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations. *American Psychologist, 63*(9), 852-862.

Andrews, D. A., & Bonta, J. (1998). *The psychology of criminal conduct* (2nd ed.). Cincinnati, OH: Anderson.

Armistead, R. B. (2008, June 11). Zero tolerance: The school woodshed. *Education Week*, *27*, 24-26.

Arnett, J. (1992). Reckless behavior in adolescence: A developmental perspective. *Developmental Review, 12*, 339-343.

Associated Press (2003, June 22). Punishment upheld for kindergartner who imagined finger as a gun. Retrieved March 30, 2009, from www.nytimes.com/2003/06/22nyregion/22Kind.html?ei+1&en=16427bccaa259a5

Astor, R. A., Meyer, H. A., Benbenishty, R., Marachi, R., & Rosemond, M. (2005). School safety interventions: Best practices and programs. *Children and School, 27*, 17-32.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Bargh, J. A., & Chartrand, T. L. (1999). The unbearable automaticity of being. *American Psychologist, 54*, 462-479.

Battistich, V., Schaps, E., Watson, M., & Solomon, D. (1996). Prevention effects of the Child Development Project: Early findings from an ongoing multisite demonstration trial. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 11*, 12-35.

Bickel, F., & Qualls, R. (1980). The impact of school climate on suspension rates in the Jefferson County Public Schools. *Urban Review, 12*, 79-86.

Bierman, K. L., Coie, J. D., Dodge, K. A., Greenberg, M. T., Lochman, J. E., McMahon, R. J., et al. (1999). Initial impact of the Fast Track Prevention Trial for conduct problems: I. The high-risk sample. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 67*, 631-647.

Black, S. (2004). Safe schools don't need zero tolerance. *Educational Digest, 70*(2), 27-31.

Bowditch, C. (1993). Getting rid of troublemakers: High school disciplinary procedures and the production of dropouts. *Social Problems, 40*, 493-507.

Bowman, D. H. (2002, April 10). Interpretations of 'zero tolerance' vary. *Education Week, 30*, 1,13.

Brantlinger, E. (1991). Social class distinctions in adolescents' reports of problems in punishment in school. *Behavioral Disorders, 17*, 36-46.

Burks, H. F. (1977). *Burks' behavior rating scales manual*. Los Angeles: Western Psychological Services.

Casella, R. (2003). Zero tolerance policy in schools: Rationale, consequences, and alternatives. *Teachers College Record*, *105*, 872-892.

Caspi, A. (2000). The child is father of the man: Personality continuities from childhood to adulthood. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 78,* 158-172.

Cassidy, W. (2005). From zero tolerance to a culture of care. *Education Canada*, *45*(3), 40-42.

Cassidy, W., & Jackson, M. (2005). The need for equality in education: An intersectionality examination of labeling and zero tolerance practices. *McGill Journal of Education*, *40*(3), 445-466.

Catalano, R. F., Haggerty, K. P., Oesterle, S., Fleming, C. B., & Hawkins, J. D. (2004). The importance of bonding to school for healthy development: Findings from the social development research group. *The Journal of School Health, 74*(7), 252-261.

Cauffman, E., & Steinberg, L. (2000). (Im)maturity of judgment in adolescence: Why adolescents may be less culpable than adults. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, *18*, 741-760.

Center for Individual Freedom (2002a, September 26). Zero tolerance in Pensacola: Inquisitions in a cesspool. Retrieved October 27, 2007, from http://www.cfif.org/htdocs/freedomline/current/in_our_opinion/zero_tolerance.htm

Center for Individual Freedom (2002b, October 25). Student continues to suffer as school board reconsiders zero tolerance policy. Retrieved October 28, 2007, from

http://www.cfif.org/htdocs/legal_issues/legal_activities/litgation/zero_tolerance_escambia.htm

Chen, G. (2008). Communities, students, schools and school crime: A confirmatory study of crime in U.S. high schools. *Urban Education*, *43*, 301-318.

Cohen, W. (1999, November 22). Zero tolerance brawl. *U.S. News and World Report*, *127*(20), p. 34.

Contrada, F. (2008, March 20). Student paper faces censorship. *The Republican*. Retrieved August 23, 2008, from http://www.masslive.com.

Cornell, D. G., & Sheras, P. L. (2006). *Guidelines for responding to student threats of violence*. Boston: Sopris West Educational Services.

Costenbader, V., & Markson, S. (1998). School suspension: A study with secondary school students. *Journal of School Psychology*, *36*, 59-82.

Coyl, D. D., Jones, R. M., & Dick, A. J. (2004). The influence of peer status and peer relationships on school related behaviors, attitudes, and intentions among alternative high school students. *American Secondary Education*, *32*(2), 39-62.

Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.

Crowley, M. (2007, May). No mercy kid! *Readers Digest*, 35-39.

Curwin, R. L., & Mendler, A. N. (1999). Zero tolerance for zero tolerance. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *81*, 119-120.

Davis, A. (1999, November 18). “Zero tolerance” ignites debate in Hartford: Meeting on drug problem draws hundreds to school: Expulsions are hot topic. *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, p. 1.

Davis, J. E., & Jordan, W. J. (1994). The effects of school context, structure and experiences on African American males in middle and high schools. *Journal of Negro Education, 63*, 570-587.

Devoe, J. F., Peter, K., Kaufman, P., Ruddy, S. A., Miller, A. K., Planty, M., et al. (2002). Indicators of school crime and safety. *National Center for Educational Statistics*, Washington D.C.: Department of Justice.

Dishion, T. J., McCord, J., & Poulin, F. (1999). When interventions harm: Peer groups and problem behavior. *American Psychologist*, *54*, 755-764.

Dohrn, B. (2001). “Look out kid/It’s something you did”: Zero tolerance for children. In W. Ayers, B. Dohrn, & R. Ayers (Eds.), *Zero tolerance: Resisting the drive for punishment in our schools* (pp. 89-113). New York: New Press.

Dunbar, C., Jr., & Villaruel, F. A. (2002). Urban school leaders and the implementation of zero-tolerance policies: An examination of its implications. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *77*(1), 82-104.

Dunbar, C., Jr., & Villaruel, F. A. (2004). What a difference the community makes: Zero tolerance policy interpretation and implementation. *Equity and Excellence in Education*, *37*, 351-359.

Duncan, R. D., Kennedy, W. A., & Patrick, C. J. (1995). Four-factor model of recidivism in male juvenile offenders. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology*, *24*, 250-257.

Duneier, M. (1992). *Slim’s table: Race, respectability, and masculinity*. London:

University of Chicago Press.

Dwyer, K., Osher, D., & Wagner, C. (1998). *Early warning, timely response: A guide to safe schools.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Ekstrom, R. B., Goertz, M. E., Pollack, J. M., & Rock, D. A. (1986). Who drops out of high school and why? Finding from a national study. *Teachers College Record, 87*, 357-373.

Elliot, D., Hatot, N. J., Sirovatka, P., & Potter, B. B. (2001). *Youth violence: A report of the Surgeon General*. Washington, DC: Office of the U.S. Surgeon General.

Erikson, E. (1963). *Childhood and society* (2nd ed.). New York: Norton.

Eskenazi, M., Eddins, G., & Beam, J. M. (2003). *Equity or exclusion: The dynamics of resources, demographics, and behavior in New York City public schools*. New York: Fordham University National Center for Schools and Community.

Essex, N. L. (2000). Zero tolerance approach to school violence: Is it going too far? *American Secondary Education, 29*, 37-40.

Ferguson, A. A. (2001). *Bad boys: Public schools and the making of Black masculinity*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (2009, June 17). Governor Crist signs DJJ priority legislation enhancing zero tolerance in schools. Retrieved June 28, 2009, from http://www.djj.state.fl.us/Communications/pr/2009/pr061709.html

Florida Senate (2009). SB 1540. Retrieved June 28, 2009, from http://www.flsenate.gov/data/session/2009/Senate/bills/billtext/pdf/s1540.pdf.

Florida statutes. (2007). Title XLVIII, K-20 Education, § 1006.13 Support for learning. Retrieved April 12, 2008, from http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm

Florida statutes. (2008). Title X, Public officers, employees, and records, §119.01 Public records. Retrieved July 1, 2009, from http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm

Fries, K., & DeMitchell, T. A. (2007). Zero tolerance and the paradox of fairness: Viewpoints from the classroom. *Journal of Law and Education, 36*(2), 211-229.

Gardner, M., & Steinberg, L. (2005). Peer influence on risk taking, risk preference, and risky decision making in adolescence and adulthood: An experimental study. *Developmental Psychology, 41*, 625-635.

Giroux, H. A. (2001a). Mis/education and zero tolerance: Disposable youth and the politics of domestic militarization. *Boundary 2, 28,* 61-94.

Giroux, H. A. (2001b, March/April). Zero tolerance: Creating a generation of suspects. *Tikkun, 16,* 29-32, 58-59.

Giroux, H. A. (2003a). Racial injustice and disposable youth in the age of zero tolerance. *Qualitative Studies in Education, 16,* 553-565.

Giroux, H. A. (2003b). Zero tolerance, domestic militarization, and the war against youth. *Social Justice, 30*(2), 59-65.

Gladwell, M. (2006, September 6). No mercy. *The New Yorker*, p. 37.

Gleuck, S., & Gleuck, E.T. (1950). *Unraveling juvenile delinquency*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. New York: Prentice-Hall.

Goodman, E. (2000, January 4). 'Zero tolerance' means zero chance for troubled kids. *Centre Daily Times*, p. 8.

Gordon, R., Della Piana, L., & Keleher, T. (2000). *Facing the consequences: An examination of racial discrimination in U.S. public schools*. Oakland, CA: Applied Research Center.

Gough, H. G., Wenk, E. A., & Rozynke, V. V. (1965). Parole outcome as predicted from the CPI, the MMPI, and a base expectancy table. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 70,* 432-441.

Graham, S., & Lowery, B. (2004). Priming unconscious racial stereotypes about adolescent offenders. *Law and Human Behavior, 28,* 483-504.

Greenberg, M. T., Weissberg, P. P., O'Brien, M. U., Zins, J. E., Fredericks, L., Resnick, H., et al. (2003). Enhancing school-based prevention and youth development through coordinated social, emotional and academic learning. *American Psychologist, 58,* 466-474.

Greene, A. (1986). Future-time perspective in adolescence: The present of things future revisited. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 15,* 99-113.

Guadagno, R. E., Okdie, B. M., & Eno, C. A. (2007). Who blogs? Personality predictors of blogging. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *24*(5), 1993-2004.

Hare, R. D. (1996). Psychopathy: A clinical construct whose time has come. *Criminal Justice and Behavior, 23,* 25-54.

Harris, M. (1998). *Basic statistics for behavioral science research* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Hawkins, J. D., Catalano, R. F., & Miller, J. Y. (1992). Risk and protective factors for alcohol and other drug problems in adolescence and early adulthood: Implications for substance abuse prevention. *Psychological Bulletin, 112,* 64-105.

Hawkins, J. D., Catalano, R. F., & Morrison, D. M. (1989, April). *Seattle Social Development Project: Cumulative effects of interventions in grades 1-4*. Paper presented at the Society for Research in Child Development, Kansas City, MO.

Hawley, A. (1950). *Human ecology: A theory of community structure*. New York: Ronald.

Hayden, C., Sheppard, C., & Ward, D. (1996). Primary exclusions: Evidence for action. *Educational Research, 38,* 213-225.

Haynie, D. L. (2005). Reconsidering peers and delinquency: How do peers matter? *Social Forces, 84,* 1109-1130.

Herring, S. C., Scheidt, L. A., Kouper, I., & Wright, E. (in press). A longitudinal content analysis of weblogs: 2003-2004. In M. Tremayne (Ed.), *Blogging, citizenship and the future media*. London: Routledge.

Hirschi, T. (1969). *Causes of Delinquency*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hoge, R. D., & Andrews, D. A. (1996). *Assessing the youthful offender: Issues and techniques.* New York: Plenum.

Hoge, R. D., Andrews, D. A., & Leschied, A. W. (1994). Tests of three hypotheses regarding the predictors of delinquency. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 22,* 547-559.

Hooper, C., Luciana, M., Conklin, H., & Yarger, R. (2004). Adolescents' performance on the Iowa Gambling Task: Implications for the development of decision making and ventromedial prefrontral cortex. *Developmental Psychology, 40,* 1148-1158.

Jenkins, P.H. (1997). School delinquency and the school social bond. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 34*(3), 337-367.

Johnson, D. (1999, November 17). Jackson arrested in protest over expulsions of students. *New York Times*, p. A16.

Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher*, *33*, 14-26.

Jussim, L., Palumbo, P., Chatman, C., Madon, S., & Smith, A. (2000). Stigma and self-fulfilling prophecies. In T. F. Heatherton, R. E. Kleck, M. R. Hebl, & J. G. Hull (Eds.), *The social psychology of stigma* (pp. 374-418). New York: Guilford.

Kaeser, S. C. (1979). Suspensions in school discipline. *Education and Urban Society, 11*, 465-484.

Kahn, T. J., & Chambers, J. J. (1991). Assessing reoffense risk with juvenile sexual offenders. *Child Welfare, 70*, 333-345.

Karp, D. R., & Breslin, B. (2001). Restorative justice in school communities. *Youth and Society*, *33*(2), 249-272.

Kauffman, J. M., & Brigham, F. J. (2000). Zero tolerance and bad judgment in working with students with emotional or behavioral disorders. *Behavioral Disorders*, *25*(4), 277-289.

Kaufman, A. S., & Kaufman, N. L. (1998). *Kaufman test of educational achievement brief form manual: 1998 edition*. Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service.

Kubler-Ross, E. (1969). *On death and dying.* New York: Macmillan.

Lenckus, D. (2007). Zero tolerance policies can increase risk for schools. *Business Insurance*, *41*(24), 19, 21-22.

Lenhart, A., & Fox, S. (2006). Bloggers: A portrait of the Internet's new storytellers. *Pew Internet and American Life Project*. Retrieved September 6, 2008, from http://www.pewinternet.org.

Leone, P. E., Mayer, M. J., Malmgren, K., & Meisel, S. M. (2000). School violence and disruption: Rhetoric, reality, and reasonable balance. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, *33*, 1-20.

Loeber, R., & Farrington, D. P. (1990). Development and risk factors of juvenile antisocial behavior and delinquency. *Clinical Psychology Review*, *10*, 1-41.

Losen, D. J., & Edley, Jr., C. (2001). The role of law in policing abusive disciplinary practices: Why school discipline is a civil rights issue. In W. Ayers, B. Dohrn, & R. Ayers (Eds.), *Zero tolerance: Resisting the drive for punishment in our schools* (pp. 89-113). New York: New Press.

Luna, B., Garver, K., Urban, T., Lazar, N., & Sweeney, J. (2004). Maturation of cognitive processes from late childhood to adulthood. *Child Development*, *75*, 1357-1372.

Martin, R. C. (2001). *Zero tolerance policy*. Retrieved April 24, 2009, from http://www.abanet.org/crimjust/juvjus/zerotolreport.html

Martinez, S. (2009). A system gone berserk: How are zero tolerance policies really affecting schools? *Preventing School Failure*, *53*(3), 153-157.

Mayer, M. J., & Leone, P. E. (1999). A structural analysis of school violence and disruption: Implications for creating safer schools. *Education and Treatment of Children*, *22*, 336-356.

McCarthy, J. D., & Hoge, D. R. (1987). The social construction of school punishment: Racial disadvantage out of universalistic process. *Social Forces, 65*, 1101-1120.

McFadden, A. C., Marsh, G. E., Price, B. J., & Hwang, Y. (1992). A study of race and gender bias in the punishment of school children. *Education and Treatment of Children, 15*, 140-146.

McNeely, C. A., Nonnemaker, J. M. , & Blum, R. W. (2002). Promoting school connectedness: Evidence from the national longitudinal study of adolescent health. *The Journal of School Health, 72*, 138-146.

Michie, G. (2001). Ground zero. In W. Ayers, B. Dohrn, & R. Ayers (Eds.), *Zero tolerance: Resisting the drive for punishment in our schools* (pp. 89-113). New York: New Press.

Mihalic, S., Irvin, K., Elliot, D., Fagan, A., & Hansen, D. (2001, July). *Blueprints for violence prevention* [Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Bulletin]. Retrieved September 6, 2008 from http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/jjbul2001_7_3/contents.

Morrison, G. M., & D'Incau, B. (1997). The web of zero-tolerance: Characteristics of students who are recommended for expulsion from school. *Education and Treatment of Children, 20*, 316-335.

Mosca, F. J., & Hollister, A. (2004). External control and zero tolerance: Is fear of our youth driving these policies? *Educational Horizens, 83*(1), 2-5.

National Center for Education Statistics. (1998). *Indicators of school crime and safety*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Noguera, P. A. (2003). Schools, prisons, and social implications of punishment: Rethinking disciplinary practices. *Theory into Practice, 42*(4), 341-350.

Nowson, S., Oberlander, J., Gill, A. J. (2005). Weblogs, Genres, and Individual Differences. Proceedings of the 27th Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society, Stresa, Italy, 1666-1671. Retrieved September 6, 2008, from http://csjarchive.cogsci.rpi.edu/proceedings/2005/docs/p1666.pdf

Obama's speech to congress focused on economy. (2009, February 24). Retrieved April 9, 2009, from http://www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/02/24/sotn.obama.transcript/

Olweus, D., & Limber, S. (1999). Bullying prevention programs. In D. S. Elliot (Ed.), *Blueprints for violence prevention*. Denver, CO: C and M Press.

Olweus, D., Limber, S., & Mihalic, S. F. (1999). *Blueprints for violence prevention: Book nine--bullying prevention program*. Boulder, CO: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence.

Osgood, D. W., Wilson, J. K., O'Malley, P. M., Bachman, J. G., & Johnston, L. D. (1996). Routine activities and individual deviant behavior. *American Sociological Review, 61,* 635-655.

Peebles-Wilkins, W. (2005). Zero tolerance in educational settings. *Children and Schools, 27,* 3.

Piers, E. V. (1984). *Piers-Harris children's self-concept scale revised manual*. Los Angeles: Western Psychological Services.

Raffaele-Mendez, L. M. (2003). Predictors of suspension and negative school outcomes: A longitudinal investigation. In J. Wald & D. J. Losen (Eds.), *New directions for*

youth development: Vol 99, deconstructing the school-to-prison pipeline (pp. 17-34). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Raffaele-Mendez, L. M., & Knoff, H. M. (2003). Who gets suspended from school and why: A demographic analysis of schools and disciplinary infractions in a large school district. *Education and Treatment of Children*, *26*, 30-51.

Raffaele-Mendez, L. M., Knoff, H. M., & Ferron, J. F. (2002). School demographic variables and out-of-school suspension rates: A quantitative and qualitative analysis of a large, ethnically diverse school district. *Psychology in the Schools*, *39*, 259-277.

Rethinking Schools (2000). An interview with Jesse Jackson: First class jails, second-class schools. Retrieved April 9, 2009, from www.rethinkingschools.org.

Robbins, C. G. (2005). Zero tolerance and the politics of racial injustice. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *74*, 2-17.

Robbins, C. G. (2008). *Expelling hope: The assault on youth and the militarization of schooling*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Rosenberg, M. S., & Jackman, L. A. (2003). Development, implementation, and sustainability of comprehensive school-wide behavior management systems. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *39*, 10-21.

Schone, M. (2001, March 25). Putting on kid gloves: Should zero tolerance policies be overturned in an age of school shootings. *New York Times*, 30.

Schwandt, T. A. (2001). *Dictionary of qualitative inquiry, second edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sheets, R. H. (1996). Urban classroom conflict: Student-teacher perception: Ethnic integrity, solidarity, and resistance. *Urban Review*, *28*, 165-183.

Shields, I. W., & Whitehall, G. C. (1994). Neutralizations and delinquency among teenagers. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, *21*, 223-235.

Skiba, R. J. (2000a). *Zero tolerance, zero evidence: An analysis of school disciplinary practice* (Policy Research Rep. #SRS2). Retrieved March 30, 2009, from http://www.indiana.edu/~safeschl/ztze.pdf .

Skiba, R. J. (2000b). When is disproportionality discrimination? The overrepresentation of black students in school suspension. In W. Ayers, B. Dohrn, & R. Ayers (Eds.), *Zero tolerance: Resisting the drive for punishment in our schools* (pp. 89-113). New York: New Press.

Skiba, R. (2004). Zero tolerance: The assumptions and the facts. *Education Policy Briefs*, *2*(1), 1-8.

Skiba, R. J., Michael, R. S., Nardo, A. C., & Peterson, R. L. (2002). The color of discipline: Sources of racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment. *The Urban Review*, *34*, 317-342.

Skiba, R. J., & Peterson, R. L. (2000). School discipline at a crossroads: From zero tolerance to early response. *Exceptional Children*, *66*, 335-347.

Skiba, R. J., & Rausch, M. K. (2006). Zero tolerance, suspension and expulsion: Questions of equity and effectiveness. In C. M. Everston & C. S. Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook of classroom management: Research, practice and contemporary issues* (pp. 1063-1089). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Skiba, R., Rausch, M. K., & Ritter, S. (2004). "Discipline is always teaching": Effective alternatives to zero tolerance in Indiana's schools. *Indiana Youth Services Association Education Policy Briefs*, *2*(3), 1-12.

Smothers, R. (2000, September). When school rules cheat kids. *Redbook, 195*(3), 88.

Souza, T. J. (1999). Communication and alternative school student socialization. *Communication Education*, *48*, 91-108.

Springen, K. (2001, February 12). Rethinking zero tolerance: A few schools are inching away from 1-strke policies. *Newsweek*, 46-47.

Stefanone, M. A., & Jang, C. Y. (2007). Writing for friends and family: The interpersonal nature of blogs. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *13*(1), 124-140.

Thornberry, T. P., Lizotte, A. J., Krohn, M. D., Farnworth, M., & Jang, S. J. (1994). Delinquent peers, beliefs, and delinquent behavior: A test of interactional theory. *Criminology*, *32*, 47-83.

Thorson, S. (1996). The missing link: Students discuss school discipline. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, *29*(3), 1-12.

Tobin, P. H., Sugai, G., & Colvin, G. (1996). Patterns in middle school discipline records. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, *4*(2), 82-94.

Tolan, P. H., Guerra, N. G., & Kendall, P. C. (1995). Predictions and prevention of antisocial behavior in children and adolescents. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *63*, 515-517.

Tollett, C. L., & Benda, B. B. (1999). Predicting "survival" in the community among persistent and serious juvenile offenders: A 12-month follow-up study. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, *28*(3/4), 49-76.

Townshend, B. (2000). Disproportionate discipline of African American children and youth: Culturally-responsive strategies for reducing school suspensions and expulsions. *Exceptional Children, 66,* 381-391.

Tulman, J. B. (2008). Time to reverse the school-to-prison pipeline. *Policy and Practice of Public Human Services, 66*(1), 22, 27.

Vavrus, F., & Cole, K. (2002). "I didn't do nothin": The discursive construction of school suspension. *Urban Review, 34,* 87-111.

Verdugo, R. R. (2002). Race-ethnicity, social class, and zero-tolerance policies: The cultural and structural wars. *Education and Urban Society, 35*(1), 50-75.

Wagner, M., Kutash, K., Duchnowski, A. J., Epstein, M. H., & Sumi, W. C. (2005). The children and youth we serve: A national picture of the characteristics of student with emotional disturbances receiving special education. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 13,* 79-96.

Watt, B., Howells, K., & Delfabbro, P. (2004). Juvenile recidivism: Criminal propensity, social control, and social learning theories. *Psychiatry, Psychology, and Law, 11,* 141-154.

Wehlage, G. G., & Rutter, R. A. (1986). Dropping out: How much do schools contribute to the problem? *Teachers College Record, 87,* 374-393.

Wierson, M., & Forehand, R. (1995). Predicting recidivism in juvenile delinquents: The role of mental health diagnoses and the qualification of conclusions about race. *Behaviour Research and Therapy, 33,* 63-67.

Wu, S. C., Pink, W. T., Crain, R. L., & Moles, O. (1982). Student suspension: A critical reappraisal. *Urban Review, 14,* 245-303.

Zernike, K. (2001, May 17). Crackdown on threats in school fails a test. *New York Times* (Late New York Edition), pp. A1, B9.

Zweifler, R., & De Beers, J. (2002). The children left behind: How zero tolerance impacts our most vulnerable youth. *Michigan Journal of Race & Law, 8,* 191-220.

APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This study involves research on the zero tolerance policy. This study is being conducted in order to further understand your experience and thoughts regarding the zero tolerance policy. You will be interviewed through a maximum of six e-mail exchanges. During the e-mail interview, you will be asked questions about your expulsion and the zero tolerance policy. There are no known risks or benefits to you as a result of participating in this research. Your identity will be kept confidential and private. A fictitious name will be used in place of your real name on all research materials. In addition, you will choose how much identifying information to disclose during the e-mail interviews. Your participation in this research is strictly voluntary. You have the right to refuse or discontinue participation at any time. The e-mail interviews will be conducted by April Glenn, a University of West Florida education doctoral candidate. She holds a master's degree in counseling psychology and a bachelor's degree in psychology. If you have any questions about the research or your rights as a participant, you can contact April Glenn at 850-261-4242.

I comprehend the research study procedures, risks, benefits, and my rights as a participant. I understand that my participation is voluntary and can be terminated at any time. I chose to participate in this study with no coercion or undue influence.

Participant Signature_____

Date_____

Appendix B

Community Drug and Alcohol Council (CDAC) Research Agreement

Community Drug and Alcohol Council Inc.

Agreement for Research

This agreement is entered herein between the Community Drug and Alcohol Council, Inc. of Pensacola, Florida hereinafter called The Agency and April Glenn hereinafter called the researcher.

In consideration of the mutual agreements, covenants, terms, and conditions herein contained, the parties agree as follows: The Agency Board of Directors' Privacy Board grant permission to the researcher to access Beta II client files from 2008 to 2001 for the purpose of the dissertation research detailed in this agreement. The agency acknowledges that the researcher is an employee of the agency as the coordinator for the Beta II program.

Research Project Description

Dissertation Title Effects of Zero Tolerance Policies on First Time Offenders

Researcher April Glenn

Research Objectives The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of alternative school attendance on the grade point average (GPA), academic achievement, behavior, and overall self-concept of first time offenders expelled due to the zero tolerance policy. Since expulsion and alternative school attendance labels students, reduces protective factors, and increases interactions with delinquent peers, these experiences might negatively affect first time offender's academic achievement tests, GPA's, behavior, and overall feelings of self-worth. My mixed methods study focuses on first time offenders who have been expelled and referred to an alternative school. The study revolves around three research questions:

1. How do the GPA and Kaufman Test of Education Achievement (K-TEA) pre and post test scores of these offenders compare with those of students with chronic behavior problems attending an alternative school who are participating in the same semester long prevention program?
2. How does the behavior, as measured by the Burks' Behavior Rating Scale pre and post test, of these offenders compare with that of students with chronic behavior problems attending an alternative school who are participating in the same semester long prevention program?
3. How does self-concept, as measured by the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, of these offenders compare with that of students with chronic behavior problems attending an alternative school who are participating in the same semester long prevention program?

4. What can we understand about the more diffuse effects on zero tolerance first time offenders and their families by looking at themes in clinical progress notes on students and blogs about zero tolerance expulsions?

Participants Recruitment

The quantitative part of this study includes two groups of students: a first time offender experimental group and a chronic behavior problem control group. The data in this study will come from 50 pre-existing client charts for the 2000-2001, 2001-2002, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007, and 2007-2008 school years. The client charts include 25 first time offender middle school students and 25 chronic behavior problem students.

Confidentiality of Data

Student participants had been previously informed verbally and through HIPAA forms of the confidentiality of their client files. All participants signed HIPAA forms during their admission into the prevention program. The HIPAA from explains that their program records may be used for research purposes. Participant client records are confidential, and no personal identifying information will be available to anyone besides me. This study will not adversely affect the privacy rights or welfare of participants. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants to protect their confidentiality and anonymity. All client records will be kept in a locked facility, on-site at the prevention program. No client records will leave the premises of the prevention program office. Client identifying information will not be reused or disclosed to any other person or entity except as required by law. There are no known risks to participants.

Method and Procedures

The data will be collected for this study through pre-post data analysis of client's charts for GPA, assessment results (K-TEA, Piers-Harris Self-Concept Scale, Burk's Behavior Rating Scale), and clinical progress note themes.

The agency Board of Directors' Privacy Board requires that the client files be kept on site at the Beta II unit where most are currently stored. No client identifying information may be kept in any form outside of the client files. Client identifying information may not be kept in any electronic means associated with the research. No client identifying information may be kept in any form outside of the client files that

would allow access to that information by a third party or allow someone to identify a client through comparison of that data and the research report.

This agreement shall begin August 21, 2008 and end December 31, 2008. There will be no compensation for either party. It is understood that as an employee of the agency, all research will be conducted on the researchers own time and not during time the researcher would be paid for completing agency duties. If the Agency finds that the services are not being or have not been performed in a manner which satisfactorily fulfills the terms of this agreement the agreement may be revoked.

It is expressly understood by and between the parties hereto that it is the researcher's responsibility to fulfill this contract. Neither the Agency nor the Consultant owes any further contracted obligation to the other after the aforementioned agreement period except as stated. The Agency reserves the right to terminate this agreement with cause. The researcher understands and agrees that the execution of this agreement does not grant the researcher any expectancy of future access to agency and client data.

The researcher expressly understands and agrees that no legal cause shall be required of the Agency, its board, Executive Director, Management, or Staff. The researcher agrees to abide by all rules and regulations of the Agency, as communicated verbally and/or in writing; and shall be subject to Agency/Board policies and regulations now existing or hereafter lawfully enacted or promulgated especially as required for the protection of client data.

The researcher agrees to hold harmless, indemnify, and defend the Community Drug and Alcohol Council Board, officers, agents, servants and employees in their official and individual capacity against any demand, claim, suit, loss, expense or other damage which may be asserted against the Community Drug and Alcohol Council Board, its officers, agents, servants or employees in their official or individual capacity, by reason of any damage to property or injury to or death of any person which arise out of or in incident to any act or omission of the researcher in the performance or attempted performance of this agreement. Nothing in this paragraph shall be construed to require the indemnification for any damage or injury resulting directly from any act or omission of the Community Drug and Alcohol Council Board, its officers, agents, servant or employees.

Signed by all parties on the 22nd day of August, 2008 at Pensacola, Florida.

April Glenn
Researcher

Gail E Howe
Executive Director/CEO

Appendix C

University of West Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

University of West Florida

Research and Sponsored Program
11000 University Parkway, Bldg. 11
Pensacola, FL 32514-5750

Ms. April Glenn
6201 Chablis Lane
Pensacola, FL 32504-4706

February 03, 2009

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Research Participants Protection has completed its review of your proposal titled "Effects of the Zero Tolerance Policy on First-Time Offenders," as it relates to the protection of human participants used in research, and granted approval for you to proceed with your study on 02-03-2009. As a research investigator, please be aware of the following:

* You will immediately report to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems involving risks to human participants.
* You acknowledge and accept your responsibility for protecting the rights and welfare of human research participants and for complying with all parts of 45 CFR Part 46, the UWF IRB Policy and Procedures, and the decisions of the IRB. You may view these documents on the Research and Sponsored Programs web page at http://www.research.uwf.edu. You acknowledge completion of the IRB ethical training requirements for researchers as attested in the IRB application.
* You will ensure that legally effective informed consent is obtained and documented. If written consent is required, the consent form must be signed by the participant or the participant's legally authorized representative. A copy is to be given to the person signing the form and a copy kept for your file.
* You will promptly report any proposed changes in previously approved human participant research activities to Research and Sponsored Programs. The proposed changes will not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the participants.
* You are responsible for reporting progress of approved research to Research and Sponsored Programs at the end of the project period 05-31-2009. If the data phase of your project continues beyond the approved end date, you must receive an extension approval from the IRB.

Good luck in your research endeavors. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact Research and Sponsored Programs at 850-857-6378 or irb@uwf.edu.

Sincerely,

Richard S. Podemski

Dr. Richard S. Podemski, Associate
Vice President for Research and
Dean of Graduate Studies

Dr. Terry Prewitt, Chair
IRB for the Protection of Human
Research Participants

CC: Mary Rogers , Joyce Nichols

Phone 850.474.2824 Fax 850.474.2802
Web research.uwf.edu

Appendix D

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

1. How were you involved with the zero tolerance policy?
2. Looking back at your experience, how do you think that the zero tolerance policy affected you personally?
3. How did this experience affect your family?
4. Were you referred to an alternative school? If so, tell me about your experience at the alternative school.

   4a. Tell me about your experience with teachers at the alternative school.

   4b. Tell me about your experience with peers at the alternative school?

   4c. Tell me about your experience with teachers and peers when you returned to a traditional school?