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Juvenile Corrections in the Era of Reform:

A Meta-synthesis of Qualitative Studies

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Abstract

In this paper, the authors synthesize knowledge from select qualitative studies examining rehabilitation-oriented juvenile residential corrections and aftercare programs. Using meta-synthesis methodology, the authors extracted and coded content from 10 research studies conducted by five authors across criminology, sociology, and social welfare disciplines. The total number of published works based on those studies analyzed was 18. Collectively, these studies offer insight into three major components of the juvenile correctional experience: therapeutic treatment and evidence-based practices, the shaping of identities and masculinities, and preparation for reentry. This analysis is particularly important as the United States is currently in an era of reform during which policymakers are increasingly espousing the benefits of rehabilitation for youth offenders over punishment. These studies took place before during and after this era of reform, and yet the findings are surprisingly consistent over time, raising key questions about the effectiveness of the reform strategies.

Keywords: Juvenile corrections, reentry, treatment, masculinities, qualitative methods, meta-synthesis

The primary source of knowledge that the public possesses about young people's experiences behind bars comes from journalists and advocacy organizations. While some reports

have focused on the abuse, violence, and deprivations that occur inside juvenile facilities (Beck, Cantor, Hartge, & Smith, 2013; Lewis, 2006; Mendel, 2015), few have engaged in a qualitative sociological analysis of the dynamics of juvenile incarceration. The United States Department of Justice has conducted extensive investigations of a number of juvenile facilities across the country in response to grievances filed by individuals or advocacy groups concerned about the violations of basic civil rights that occur behind bars (Katz Pinzler, 1996; King, 2009; Schlozman, 2005; United States vs. City of Meridian, 2012). Other major sources of knowledge include numerous quantitative evaluations concerning rates of youth imprisonment and the impact of incarceration on young people's recidivism rates (Barton & Butts, 1990; Benda, 2001; Fagan, 1996; Hockenberry, Sickmund, & Sladky, 2011, Loughran et al., 2009; Schneider, 1986). States interested in improving upon their conditions of confinement are often more likely to prioritize quantitative evaluations of their programming rather than qualitative studies about the landscape of confinement. The benefits of quantitative research may be more evident to policymakers because they appear to be more strongly rooted in positivist concerns with obtaining hard data about the relationships between interventions and recidivism rates, even though qualitative studies may be more effective in elucidating context-specific concerns as well as the contradictions and challenges of evidence-based practices.

There are significant barriers to conducting scholarly research inside juvenile facilities (Jeffords, 2007; Trulson, Marquart, & Mullings, 2004). Young people who have committed crimes are a highly protected group of individuals as a result of their age and institutional status. Despite these barriers, the authors of this article have conducted qualitative research in 10 facilities and two aftercare/parole programs in the Northeastern, Midwestern, Northwestern, and Western United States. Our research represents a comprehensive portrait of some of the core

practices and significant concerns about the impact of treatment programs on young people in modern juvenile facilities and how those programs ultimately affect young people's experiences as they reenter their communities.

Through meta-synthesis, this study contributes to existing knowledge about youth confinement by analyzing data from studies conducted in various regions of the U.S. The research collectively points to how these dimensions of facility life and experiences of reentry influence factors related to desistance from crime, such as young people's ability to access pro-social relationships with others, their sense of self-efficacy, and the structural conditions and barriers to change (Mulvey et al., 2004). Rather than focusing on the extremes of abuse, violence, and social control, this meta-synthesis examines some of the softer dimensions of life inside—the meanings of interventions in the lives of young people and their consequences for life after confinement; the role of institutional life in shaping identity; and the unique role that incarceration plays in young people's gender identity and performance.

Background and Significance

Although there have been a number of periods of reform in the U.S. juvenile justice system (Bernard & Kurlychek, 2010), we are currently witnessing a period of significant change, particularly with respect to the treatment of young people in residential correctional facilities. Since the establishment of the first separate correctional institution for children in New York in 1825, to the reformatory movement in the late 19th century, to the deinstitutionalization of juvenile facilities in the 1960s and 1970s, reformers have always critiqued the limits of juvenile justice institutions in meeting the needs of young people (Miller, 1991; Platt, 1969/1977; Rothman, 1980; Schlossman, 1977; Schur, 1973). Today, they challenge the highly punitive approach to young people that emerged during the 1990s. That approach emerged during a

moment in history when youth offending was on the rise, and ‘getting tough’ on juvenile crime was considered to be an appropriate response to such offending; this was an era in which policymakers emphasized “zero tolerance” for youthful indiscretions in schools, on the streets, and in institutions, and this resulted in the amplification of penalties against young people both inside and outside of institutions (Brown, 2002; Giroux, 2009). During the 1990s, youthful lawbreakers, especially young people of color, were characterized as inherently dangerous, calculating and remorseless, and socially and even biologically determined to commit crimes for the rest of their lives. Today, a wide-ranging group of individuals and organizations are challenging the zero tolerance and punitive practices of the 1990s; these critiques are part of a broader national conversation about the limits of mass incarceration (National Research Council, 2014). The media, lawmakers, and everyday citizens are recognizing that young people, especially young people of color, face serious and lifelong consequences in our criminal justice system as a result of its structural and institutional flaws.

Juvenile justice reformers are pressing for states to implement policies that recognize the limited culpability of young people for their participation in crime. Since the birth of the country’s separate courts for young people, adults have acknowledged that they should be held less responsible for their crimes. But in the 1990s tough-on-crime era, nearly all states adopted laws allowing young people to be charged and sentenced as adults. Today, advocates are pushing for those states to reverse or modify these laws (Campaign for Youth Justice, 2014; Chammah, 2015; Commission on Youth, 2015) and to focus on treatment and rehabilitation for youth under the care of the juvenile justice system. We argue that the recent shift in juvenile justice policy and practice calls for a careful examination of past research in light of a new reality. What lessons should we take forward from the past as we reformulate programs and policies? This is

particularly pertinent for our work, which began at the tail end of the punitive era and stretched into the era of new reform.

Approaches to Treatment

Quantitative social sciences have deeply shaped the behavioral interventions that are used inside juvenile facilities and increasingly praised by reformers as positive alternatives to the 1990s-era punitive approaches (Chambers & Balck, 2014; National Research Council, 2012). These interventions are rooted in the idea that there is a clear cause of criminal behavior that is rooted in individual pathology. The most common treatment programs used inside U.S. juvenile facilities include various forms of cognitive behavioral therapy. Cognitive behavioral interventions operate from the premise that people who offend have flawed moral reasoning, limited impulse control, and distorted thinking patterns that contribute to offending (Lipsey, Chapman, & Landenberger, 2001). Cognitive behavioral interventions are specifically aimed at correcting or changing these flawed thinking patterns and replacing them with pro-social thoughts (Lipsey, Chapman, & Landenberger, 2001; Yochelson & Samenow, 1976). Increasingly, juvenile detention and correctional facilities in the U.S. are relying on cognitive behavioral therapies in the context of the popularity of "evidence-based practices" (EBPs) (Abrams, 2013). EBPs in the criminal justice context are interventions that have provided "strong evidence" of an impact on an individual's risk for re-offending, generally measured through repeated experiments or summarized through a meta-analysis process (Drake, Aos, & Miller, 2009; Lipsey & Wilson, 1998). Some scholars have questioned the narrow definition of 'evidence' in EBPs and policymakers' neglect of sociological perspectives and knowledge produced by methods other than quantitative or experimental designs (Goldson & Hughes, 2010; Rex, 2002; Sampson, 2010).

Identity Transformation and Behavior Change

Central to this discussion of the effects of cognitive behavioral interventions is the concept of behavior change. Theoretically, these therapies suggest that a young person with offending behavior must change his or her “inward self” (i.e, identity, motivations, thoughts and triggers) in order to eventually change behavior (Milkman & Wangberg, 2007). While the literature has produced multiple studies of the outcomes of these therapies (i.e., behavioral change), so far research has focused on the process of internal transformation and how that might occur in a correctional setting.

Preparation for the Experience of Reentry

There is a critical gap in our knowledge about a young person’s pathway from confinement-based programs to a life outside of custody. Although the challenges associated with adult prisoner reentry have been well documented in the scholarly and policy literature, youth reentry has received comparatively little attention. Early examinations were focused on improving the system of aftercare, or services provided during the transition back to the community (Byrnes, Macallair, & Shorter, 2002). More recently, youth reentry research has taken a more developmental and experiential turn, pointing to the “dual transition” from facility to community and from adolescence to adulthood (Altschuler & Brash, 2004) and documenting the daily on-the-ground challenges of the transition (Sullivan, 2004). New research links youth reentry to the theoretical literature on desistance from offending, describing the relative success associated with different desistance strategies (Soyer, 2016) and draws together what is known about best practices in service provision (James, Stams, DeRoo, & van der Laan, 2013).

In this era of reform, prominent national experts and activists have renewed calls for the abolition of juvenile imprisonment that were initiated in the 1970s (Annie E. Casey Foundation,

2015; Bernstein, 2014; Phoenix, 2015). Yet still, the idea that young people charged with crimes *must* face serious intervention remains part and parcel of American juvenile justice policy and discourse. With the knowledge the U.S. will not likely abolish all forms of juvenile corrections, advocates have proposed alternative models for residential care – such as smaller facilities with more therapeutic programming. These arguments are partially based on the “Missouri model” – one that still involves confinement but that has shown success in reducing recidivism (Mendel, 2010). The leading national organization advocating for the end of juvenile prisons—the Annie E. Casey Foundation – claims that “state juvenile corrections agencies must abandon the large training school model and undertake aggressive efforts to reform, reinvent and/or replace their facilities to ensure safe, healthy and therapeutic care for the small segment of the youth population who truly require confinement” (Mendel, 2015, p. 29). Yet there are still few published critiques of rehabilitation-oriented facilities, suggesting the need for a greater understanding of the limits of reform within correctional contexts.

Moreover, as a number of states are seeking to raise the age of criminal responsibility (Ryan, 2014) many youth who would be sent to adult prisons under older laws will now be sent to residential facilities designated for minors. Thus it is especially important to query the therapeutic residential facility model at this moment, as those facilities slated for closure in some states will almost inevitably remain open if the age of criminal responsibility is raised in those states.

In this paper, we focus on three themes that continue to have significance in residential facilities for young people: approaches to treatment, the process of identity transformation, and preparation for the experience of reentry. These themes are especially pertinent in the era of reform which is almost exclusively focused on developing smaller facilities and more

therapeutically and developmentally appropriate interventions toward young people. Since much of the public knowledge about juvenile facilities comes from journalistic accounts or outcomes-based evaluations, our work provides a critical contribution to those seeking to "reform, reinvent, and …replace" (Mendel, 2015, p. 29) the juvenile facilities of old. What we present here teaches us that it is critical to spend time in juvenile facilities in order to learn that the effects of institutionalization are often softer and less visible than those related to hardware and hard discipline; indeed, we argue that the core questions about the conditions of confinement that have been raised in the past continue to be salient in the lives of young people in residential care.

Method

This study involves a first-time collaboration amongst five researchers who have done in-depth qualitative research inside of juvenile facilities in different states and regions across the United States.[i] The collaboration was an effort to discuss and synthesize our findings with an eye toward understanding the collective contribution of those findings. We then decided to engage in a meta-synthesis of our research as a way to systematically analyze the core themes within the research for the purposes of broader policy and practice implications.

Schreiber, Crooks, and Stern (1997) define meta-synthesis as "the bringing together and breaking down of findings, examining them, discovering the essential features, and, in some way, combining phenomena into a transformed whole" (p. 314). Meta-synthesis allows researchers to step back from the findings of individual case studies to arrive at larger insights about social phenomena, increasing their relevance and utility for policy (Sandelowski, Docherty, & Emden, 1997). Finfgeld (2003) succinctly defines the goal of meta-synthesis as "produc(ing) a new and integrative interpretation of findings that is more substantive than those resulting from individual investigations" (p. 894).

Our goal in this meta-synthesis is to distill the important common themes of our research and to move beyond “little islands of knowledge” (Sandelowski et al., 1997, p. 367). We are also interested in using the larger understandings provided by this approach to develop policy and practice recommendations. As described above, we are in the midst of a significant moment of change and experimentation in juvenile corrections. Zhao (1991) argues that meta-synthesis is particularly useful when there is a major paradigmatic shift in a discipline (like the introduction of the Theory of Relativity in physics).

While systematic reviews of multiple studies (i.e., meta-analysis) are fairly popular in the quantitative literature, this methodology is relatively less prevalent with qualitative studies. Some social scientists criticize qualitative meta-synthesis because it requires the analyst to pull data and themes out of the context of the original studies. This runs the risk of misconstruing the nuances and richness of contextualized qualitative findings (Paterson, Thorne, Canam, & Jillings, 2001). While we acknowledge that de-contextualization can potentially be a shortcoming of a meta-synthesis approach, we explicitly designed this project to limit this problem. Our research team included all of the primary authors of the analyzed works. This meant that there was a deep awareness of the context surrounding the data. A number of methodological texts on meta-synthesis recommend that analysts validate their findings by asking original authors to review drafts (Britten et al., 2002; McCormick, Rodney, & Varcoe, 2003). We believe that we improved on this methodology by having the authors participate in this synthesis of the research. Moreover, we relied on an outside author (Sankofa) who viewed the studies from a fresh perspective to see in what ways the findings from these multiple studies did or did not fit together. Sankofa also brought a valuable standpoint as a male and as someone with personal experience in the juvenile justice system.

Selection of Studies

The selection of studies is an important component of meta-synthesis methodology. We decided to include nearly all of the peer-reviewed journal articles by the five authors (excluding some that were redundant within the author's own body of work) that involved ethnographic work with incarcerated teenagers or parolees from youth correctional facilities. We also consciously chose not to review other researchers' work. We did this because working with our own studies allowed us to maintain their rich context and each of us provided a continuous check on the themes that emerged from our own work. Because there is so much literature on juvenile incarceration and parole, it would be highly unlikely that any meta-synthesis could include all of it without a considerable sacrifice of validity. By including only our own studies, we have chosen to prioritize context and depth over breadth. We acknowledge that there is some limitation to including only our studies, but our review of the literature revealed that there have only been just a handful (three) other in-depth ethnographic research studies conducted in residential juvenile facilities in the United States since the 1990s (see e.g. Banks, 2008, Reich, 2010, Soyer, 2014).

While there is some debate in the literature about whether analysts should impose quality checks on articles included in meta-syntheses, our team agreed that peer-review was a sufficient quality check. This standard is consistent with Sandelowski et al. (1997) who argue that imposing other types of quality restrictions can be too subjective and may leave out important studies. In addition to our articles, three of us have written books that were also peer-reviewed through university presses, and one of us has a book that has been peer reviewed and is in press. We decided to include two of them (Fader, 2013; Nurse 2010) and exclude three (Abrams & Anderson-Nathe, 2013; Cox, in press; Nurse, 2002). The difference between the excluded and included books involved the repetition of findings. The majority of the material from the

excluded books was already published in the articles included in the meta-synthesis. We wanted to be careful not to overvalue a particular finding just because it appeared repeatedly in one author's work (Finfgeld, 2003). At the same time, the authors of the excluded books made sure that the themes that emerged from the article analysis were consistent with the findings reported in their books. The two books we included were based on studies whose findings were not fully published in article form. This meant that repetition and overvaluation were not an issue.

In all, we selected a total of 18 published works for review and analysis (see Table Two). This number fits within general guidelines laid out by other researchers. For example, Sandelowski et al. (1997) and Britten et al. (2002) suggest that approximately ten studies are an ideal number. Timulak (2009) recommends between ten and twenty. Most of the authors in this meta-synthesis published a number of articles analyzing the same population of individuals but with different research questions. Table One lists the various studies and their characteristics and Table Two matches these studies to the publications included in the analysis.

Study Characteristics

As Table One shows, the publications included in the meta-synthesis cover fieldwork with incarcerated or paroled young men and women between 1996 and 2007. The fact that ethnographic methods were fairly consistent across studies was helpful in reducing variability. An invaluable difference between the studies is the geographical settings of the institutions and the communities that participant populations lived in before and after their release. Each study took place in different states in Midwest, North West, South West, and the Eastern United States. Most facilities were located in rural or smaller regional cities but the majority of the young people incarcerated within them were from urban areas. Because of this, those of us who either focused on reentry or who followed young people after they left the facilities conducted much of

our fieldwork in major cities.

The in-depth interview sample sizes in these studies ranged from 10 to 39, with nearly all of the studies also using participant observation. Additional triangulation methods were also used, including surveys (Nurse, study 1); record reviews (Abrams, study 1, 2, 3; Fader, study 2) and staff interviews (Abrams, study 1, 2; Cox study 1, 2; Fader, study 1) (see Table One). The race and ethnicity of facility residents and interview participants included African American, Latino, White, Hmong, Somali, and Native American youth. The majority of the participants, however, were African American and Latino. All of the studies involved facilities for young men, and one study also included interviews with young women (Cox study 1). The age range of the confined population was varied, with participants as young as 13 and as old as 24.

-INSERT TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE-

-INSERT TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE-

Coding and Analysis

We followed the basic procedures laid out by Noblit and Hare (1988) to code the data. In other words, we treated each of the studies as the data to be analyzed. We used a constant comparative analytical method through which we identified themes, compared them, and sorted them (Barroso & Powell-Cope, 2000). Britten et al. (2002) describe this process as extracting conclusions in the "form of an explanation, interpretation or description" which are then compared across studies (p. 213). The non-researcher member of the team conducted the initial coding of the articles, identifying approximately thirty themes; those themes were then refined into three categories: approaches to treatment, identity transformation, and reentry. The themes were recorded and coded in a graph that encompassed all of the articles.

Noblit and Hare (1988) suggest that the comparison of study findings is best conducted as translation of studies into one another. This can take three forms: reciprocal, refutational, and line of argument. Reciprocal translations are done when studies suggest similar themes or metaphors. These commonalities are extracted and refined to reflect the data across studies. Refutational translations are employed when studies contradict each other. In these cases, the analyst should seek to describe the contradiction and understand why it exists. Finally, building an argument is useful when a study extends the argument of other studies. Because of the policy focus of our article, we primarily focused on reciprocal findings although we also considered contradictions. Sandelowski and Barroso (2007) describe the process we used in a very clear way when they suggest that analysts, “1. eliminate redundancies in the findings 2. refine statements to be inclusive of the ideas researchers conveyed in their findings and 3. preserve the contradictions and ambiguities in the finding” (p. 159). All six co-authors participated in the translation process and worked together to identify policy implications suggested by the themes.

Findings

Practices and Interventions

All of the ethnographies critically examined the practices and interventions used to rehabilitate the youth in residential care while contextualizing these strategies within the overarching punitive milieu of corrections. In other words, all studies analyzed practices that revealed the tensions that are core to juvenile facilities: those between care and control. It is arguable that the studies revealed that despite the implementation of reforms that ostensibly made the juvenile facilities *less* punitive, the punitive philosophy remained. The facilities differed in their approaches to treatment of young offenders depending on the population (older vs. younger, those charged with violent crimes vs. those charged with non-violent crimes, gender

composition, and setting) and level of security of the facility itself. For example, Abrams' study 1 of "Wildwood house" included a multitude of rehabilitative programs ranging from anger management to group therapy and drug and alcohol education. In Nurse's study 1, the interventions were geared more specifically to young fathers as the focal population; in Fader's study 2, the main focus of the treatment was drug and alcohol use and sales.

While differing in specifics, all of the interventions studied were undergirded by a cognitive-behavioral approach. Rather than explaining the details of specific interventions, we will describe the overarching themes that the authors were able to cull out of their fieldwork. The first finding is that all of these practices attempted to mold the residents into an "ideal citizen." Cox (2015) and Inderbitzin (2007a) explain this process as an attempt by correctional staff to produce an ideal of white middle class citizenship. This 'ideal' runs directly counter to the young people's identities, and in fact is in conflict with those identities. Rather than recognizing and embracing the power of young people's racial and social identities and social positions, the programs push young people to *reject* those positions by demanding that they embrace a sanitized version of selfhood, devoid of the complexity of identity shaped by age, race, class and gender. This means that residents are expected to take on and demonstrate identities that are unlikely to conform to those that the youth bring with them into the facility based on race and class positions. Inderbitzin (2007a) presents one example that occurred at Blue Cottage:

> The institution held a gaming day with a fun run and a competition in which each cottage created a float that fit into the day's futuristic theme. While some cottages made floats with spaceships, hydroplanes and other such fantastical creations, the Blue cottage staff members saw this 'Spirit Day' as an opportunity to send a message about conforming aspirations to their own boys and the entire institution. They designed a float focusing on

> the jobs the residents might hold in the future; on one side of the float they had a spray painted sign that said 'Working Men' and the other side said 'Legitimate Money.' A few of the boys rode on or walked beside the float dressed up in costumes meant to represent these images, including a policeman, a garbage man and a fisherman (p. 244).

In addition to the facilities' focus on crafting the ideal citizen, all of the authors found that the rehabilitation practices and programs attempted to instill a particular version of a "reformed" self. Various interventions such as group, individual, or family therapy all attempted to produce the reformed young person. In these studies, the reformed offender is supposed to be law-abiding, empathetic, self-aware, conforming, and able to admit and correct for his or her past mistakes with remorse. The staff members who work with the youth, along with the therapists or contracted mental health providers, attempted to mold the young person through correcting criminal thinking errors, putting them "on the spot" in small groups, and also through direct counseling. Written assignments, contracts, journals, and other forms of therapeutic work are intended to encourage the young person to reflect on the past self and to work toward a new law abiding, moral self (Abrams, 2006; Abrams & Hyun, 2009; Cox, 2011; Fader, 2013; Inderbitzin, 2007b).

The CBT programs used in the facilities are devoid of language about the role of social structure in shaping young people's lives. In fact, these programs sometimes actively discourage young people from discussing the role that socio-structural forces might play in their lives—these might be considered 'thinking errors' in these kinds of programs. By discouraging young people from discussing and recognizing structural barriers, these programs force youth to hold themselves accountable for things beyond their control.

There are several problematic aspects of the production of the reformed offender through rehabilitation or various therapies. For example, Nurse (2010) argues that the skills taught in prison programming, such as victim awareness and anger management, dramatically contradict the messages needed for survival inside a juvenile facility. Survival skills within a violent environment, particularly for the most punitive facilities (i.e., total lock up) often involve a complex navigation of relationships that involve more than just the skills of empathy, peacemaking, or anger management that are taught within facility curricula. Fader's (2013) study of Mountain Ridge Academy also suggests that many of the teachings also directly contradict the skills that these young men have learned in order to survive outside the facilities. For example, the theme of "holding each other accountable" (found in Abrams study 1 and Fader study 2) directly contradicts the taboo against "snitching," which can be a death sentence in an urban community.

Another major theme across studies which relates to the misalignment of the teachings of the treatment programs and the practical realities in the lives of young people is the notion of "faking it" (Abrams et al., 2003), "doing programme" (Cox, 2011), or "fake it 'til you make it" (Fader, 2013). For example, one young man in a rehabilitative residential program explained: "… you have to pretend . . . you have to participate in the program, you have to make them happy. You have to pretend you're doing well and all this stuff. And I am doing well in the program, but you just have to try to prove to them that you're not going to be bad on the outs" (Abrams, Kim, & Anderson-Nathe, 2001, p. 20). Other studies found that within a punitive context focused on rules, structure, and the goal of earning release, there is an incentive for young people to fake, pretend, or merely perform their change in order to please the program staff (Cox, 2011; Fader, 2013; Inderbitzin, 2007b). Many youth would readily admit this

practice to the ethnographers. Yet even if the staff were aware of the tendency to fake it, they either would turn a blind eye or suggest that it was merely part of the process of change as a whole (Abrams, 2005). Even at graduation ceremonies, youth performed elaborate fictions of success in their lives after release, which staff members made a point not to contradict (Fader, 2011). It is worth noting that despite the putative expansion of treatment interventions in the era of new reform, all of the researchers found that treatment was nonetheless still experienced as punitive for the young people. Despite the fact that these studies spanned the punitive and the rehabilitative era, the researchers found surprising consistency in the use and experience of programs as a form of punishment.

As Cox (2011) suggested, faking it can also be seen as a way to subvert or resist the rehabilitative practices that are contained in a punitive facility. These young people are indeed *involuntary* clients in that they did not ask for or choose to participate in the interventions that are required of them to earn their release or to earn privileges in the program. Thus they must constantly negotiate how they wish to view and project themselves in relation to the facility or staff requirements. Abrams and Hyun (2009) identify this as a process of “negotiated identity,” meaning that while youth are incarcerated, there is an ongoing inner dialogue of an internalized view of self versus the rehabilitative ideal. Faking it, doing program, and other ways of conforming to program expectations thus may eventually give way to authentic and positive change, but many of the rehabilitative strategies employed with youth ironically result in the reinforcement of criminal thinking patterns (i.e., lying and manipulating).

The last major finding concerning treatment is the use of Evidence Based Practices (EPBs). Several authors found that cognitive behavioral therapy and other EPBs were delivered haphazardly in correctional facilities. For example, Inderbitzin’s (2007b) study found that staff

members felt unsupported by the institution and had limited training in developing treatment objectives. Instead, they were forced to use their own ingenuity and creativity to offer treatments such as life skills programs or other programs. Abrams' study of Wildwood House (study 1) and Inderbitzin's at Blue Cottage both found that, although staff members were expected to deliver evidence-based programs, many felt unprepared to do so alongside their role as "rule enforcers." This dual role prevented, in their view, the formation of a working therapeutic alliance with the youth. Thus there were several structural issues in these facilities that prevented the staff from carrying out what they viewed as potentially beneficial programs or treatments for the young people in their care. This role conflict, which has been documented in previous studies of juvenile confinement, reveals the consistency of the punitive content in programming over time.

The studies raise important questions about the efficacy of the practices and interventions used in the juvenile facilities, particularly as they are intended to exert a seemingly less punitive and more therapeutic set of practices on young people. Ultimately, they raise questions about the impact of practices aimed at facilitating desistance from crime; if cognitive behavioral interventions are intended to facilitate young people's exercise of self-control in the community in the face of criminogenic opportunities, but are not actually adopted by young people, and raise fundamental questions about identity, culture, and community, then these practices may ultimately be unsuccessful.

Masculinity and Identity

In each of our studies, institutionalized young men were forced to grapple with issues of identity, masculinity, and stigma. The ethnographic studies analyzed clearly show that incarcerated youth are still growing, maturing and developing their identities during their time inside. They are young adults in process, and their self-appraisals largely derive from their peers

who have also been labeled as delinquent or criminal and the staff members who are paid to watch over them and prioritize security concerns over rehabilitative ideals.

Most facilities are located in rural areas, making family visits difficult and cutting young people from familiar routines and behavioral repertoires. Hegemonic masculinity develops and thrives in such settings; there is a general lack of exposure to counter-normative ways of "being a man," and the young men's perceptions of masculinity, often developed as adolescents raised in the "street code" (Fader, 2013) or "street mentality" (Cox, 2011), were likely exaggerated by their time inside. The masculine ideals prioritized within the facilities we observed were filled with misogynistic messages, devaluing women and girls, both by staff and young people. Many of the young men in our studies spent a good deal of time talking about women, often in very negative and demeaning terms (Abrams, Anderson-Nathe, & Aguilar, 2008) Their attitudes about women were undoubtedly complicated by their own insecurities. Many incarcerated young men felt uncomfortably dependent on their girlfriends; they were at the mercy of the women in their lives to visit them and to remind them (and others) of their masculine prowess, yet they were unable to monitor or control the young women's behavior in the larger community. Distrust, worries about fidelity, and rumors added to the angst of being locked away from their loved ones (Nurse, 2001).

The young men in correctional facilities frequently tested each other in sports and competitive games to find and keep their own place in the pecking order of the masculine milieu. The intermingling of rival gang members in one setting only amplified adolescent issues with peer pressure and may have exacerbated the need institutionalized young males felt to demonstrate toughness and masculinity. Staff members intentionally and/or unwittingly

displayed and rewarded hegemonic and hierarchical masculinity by reinforcing values of competition, stoicism, sexism, and homophobia; as Abrams et al. (2008), explains:

> Messages about appropriate and inappropriate masculine social roles and responses were also made explicit at Wildwood. We observed many conversations among youths, in the presence of staff, that reinforced sexist expectations of feminine beauty and behavior, supported homophobic attitudes and humor, and stressed expectations for young men to be unflinchingly brave and strong (p. 32).

The young men growing up behind bars had to navigate the “usual” identities as sons, brothers, boyfriends, and young fathers, but they had to do so long distance and from a very constrained setting. Negotiating the inherent struggles of young fatherhood was compounded by the limited contact with their children and, at times, contentious relationships with the children’s mothers. Bureaucratic obstacles and relationship struggles made visits with children difficult, and even then some fathers were ashamed to have their children see them while they were locked up (Nurse, 2001). Some institutions offered parenting classes inside and support for the young men who chose to embrace identities as involved fathers, but the challenges of parenting from institutional settings were immense.

The young men in our studies keenly felt the stigma of institutionalization and incarceration, and they worried about the possibility of stunted growth while locked away from their communities. They felt cast aside and expressed a belief that society expected them to fail. They felt the censure even inside, frequently casting judgment upon each other and ultimately fearing for their own futures (Inderbitzin, 2007a)

If the facilities had such profound impacts on young people’s sense of identity, both in terms of their masculinity but also their ability to navigate complex and difficult circumstances

and challenges in the world beyond confinement, a key question for our research to address was this: who would they be when they emerged from facilities and had to embrace new identities while bearing the stigma of incarceration?

Youth Reentry and Reintegration

Collectively, our ethnographic research inside juvenile institutions highlights the disjuncture between the geographical and social milieus of residential facilities and the communities to which youth must return. This is an important tension to explore, because the facilities and programs themselves are focused on young people at the height of their emotional and physical development, and juvenile facilities, unlike prisons, involve relatively short stays and are focused on preparing young people for survival in their communities. Thus, an analysis of young people's ability to navigate the world beyond confinement reveals a great deal about the efficacy of programs within the facilities.

A great deal of young people's time on the inside is spent fantasizing about freedom and their post-release futures (Abrams, 2007; Abrams & Hyun, 2009; Fader, 2013; Nurse, 2010). Hope is tempered by great fear (Inderbitzin, 2009) and they use varied approaches to planning for new lives on the outside. An analysis of exit narratives in one study suggests that motivation and openness to change leads to more clearly articulated future goals (Abrams, 2007). Because time spent inside therapeutic facilities often leads to self-reflection, youth may be disappointed to return to their communities of origin and realize "nothing's changed but me" (Fader, 2013, p. 77).

The facility staff, who are often drawn from neighboring communities, are unlikely to have shared experiences with urban youth (Cox, 2015; Fader, 2013). The inability of staff members to relate to structural features of inner-city neighborhoods or to appreciate cultural

adaptations to these conditions leads youth to dismiss their counselors' lessons as irrelevant. Sometimes, staff members make negative predictions about kids' futures, a message that lasts long after their return to the community. As they leave the program, some staff "cut the cord," (Inderbitzin, 2009) preferring not to know about their status after discharge.

Once they return, young people must navigate a minefield of challenges to maintaining their commitment to law-abiding lives. The researchers found that in their almost absolute focus on cognitive behavioral programming without attention to issues surrounding residential and employment services, many of the residential placement facilities studied are ill-prepared to tackle the structural issues that youth face, particularly in urban communities. These young people, who are disproportionately youth of color, are more likely than their non-institutionalized counterparts to lack the hard and soft skills that make them attractive job candidates (Inderbitzin, 2009). They face significant barriers to finding steady employment that pays more than minimum wage, including racial discrimination, lack of access to job networks, and spatial disconnection from well-paying jobs (Fader, 2013; Nurse, 2010). These deficits are rarely addressed during their period of confinement. Many experience pressure to get a job, but use a "scattershot" approach to applying for positions. Once they find work, they discover that daily conditions involve a lack of respect from customers and supervisors (Nurse, 2010). The drug economy, and peer groups who remain tethered to it, are easily available to draw upon in times of financial crisis (Fader, 2013). Youth identified "old friends and influences" as one of the most difficult challenges for reentry; those who surmounted it engaged in "selective involvement" in old peer groups whereby they made conscious choices around when they could or could not be in the company of these old friends and influences (Abrams, 2007).

Young people returning from residential facilities must also negotiate new roles as emerging adults (Inderbitzin, 2009). As identified above, the programming offered in the residential facilities does little to assist young people in making sense of these identities; instead, when pressured to succeed in the programming by ‘faking it to make it’ and presenting a sometimes inauthentic masculine self, the young people are arguably stunted in their development. Since crime-involved youth are likely to experience precocious adulthood, those committed to “falling back” from their old offending trajectories often feel as if they have lost ground, becoming newly dependent upon those around them to meet their basic needs, such as housing and food. Males who achieved early masculine status in the underground economy must now find a way to rationalize their masculinity with an inability to care for themselves (Fader, 2013). Moreover, they must learn to structure their own daily schedules after a period of intense structure inside juvenile facilities (Abrams, 2006).

A disproportionate number of recently released young men are new fathers, many of whom missed their children’s births or rites of passage while they were incarcerated (Inderbitzin, 2009; Nurse, 2001). Some hope to be in their children’s lives; the thought of fatherhood gives them confidence and is one of the most rewarding processes of self-reflection (Shannon & Abrams, 2008). New family ties bring new motivation to join the mainstream economy, but also additional pressures to contribute financially to their children’s care, which can push them back into crime (Fader, 2013).

Although many youth describe the educational programming inside facilities in positive terms (Fader, 2013; Nurse, 2010), they often face obstacles to completing their high school diplomas after their return. System-involved youth are often prevented from re-enrolling in their old schools and diverted into alternative schools of questionable quality. Others become

discouraged when they learn they have fallen behind in school while incarcerated or do not have transfer credits that can be used toward graduation (Nurse, 2010). Information system gaps between the juvenile justice system and school districts are an additional obstacle for those wishing to complete their education after returning to the community (Fader, 2013). Thus, despite apparent ‘success’ in treatment, many young people face obstacles or barriers to success in the outside world, especially in the case of attaining higher education

Implication and Directions for the Field

In this moment of significant juvenile justice reform, it is important to synthesize our knowledge about treatments and interventions in young people’s lives. Qualitative research contains rich information about the nuances and culture of the experience of juvenile corrections that can be crucial for policy makers and practitioners. Our meta-synthesis revealed that, despite the variation across states in the size of facilities, the level of security of those facilities, and state laws regarding criminal responsibility, there are striking similarities in young people’s experiences of custody, programming, and reentry particularly with respect to their relationship to the programming intended to address their putative criminality. This has significant consequences not only for our scholarly knowledge about the role that juvenile justice interventions play in young people’s lives and their development, but also more broadly for residential facility practices. Much of our scholarly knowledge about the effects of interventions in particular, but also the experiences of reentry, does not take into account the fuller sociological perspectives that our collective analysis offers.

The results of our meta-synthesis suggest that reformers should be cautious in their framing of EBPs as a panacea for reforming juvenile justice. Rather, our work shows a need to examine how EBP programs are carried out in an involuntary setting. Staff training and roles and

EBPs interact with the culture youth encounter in the facility and in their home neighborhoods. Programs that have proven effective in one context may not be transferable to another, especially if they are insufficiently funded or do not have staff and youth buy-in.

Our work also shows the contradictions involved when programs require youth to adapt their self-presentation into a remorseful middle class white model. Although there has a been significant decline in the number of youth in residential placements across the U.S. over the last fifteen years, residential facilities for young people charged with crimes continue to be relevant: they are the end of the road for the youth who are, in many ways, the most marginalized and impoverished citizens, those who have limited rights and responsibilities because of their age but also because of their social status and their status as institutionalized people. Increasingly, the young people who remain locked up are disproportionately young people of color charged with serious offenses – and in spite of attempts to remedy disproportionate minority confinement, these racial disparities are actually *on the rise* (Davis & Ziedenberg, 2014). Moreover, although the size, status, and significance of these facilities has shifted over the years, reforms have never fully eradicated the notion that so-called “bad kids” must be placed in institutions in order to change. Although notions about who is “bad” have changed over the years, facilities housing the so-called “trouble makers” remain. Many youth who are asked to conform to white middle class behavioral repertoires are well aware that it could be ineffective or dangerous in the facility or on the street and reject it on that basis. When privileges or release require a successful presentation of this new self, however, it encourages youth to “fake it,” thereby teaching the wrong set of skills for lasting change.

One way to reshape programs to avoid some of the issues that lead to rejection or to faking it is to actively acknowledge the contradictions inherent in the programs that demand that

young people embrace an identity which is sometimes at odds with their sense of self, particularly their racialized social identities and selves. In promoting an ideal middle class selfhood, the programs force young people to suppress or disavow their identities; those young people who resist such norms often face negative consequences within facility life. The young people are forced to see themselves through the eyes of the predominantly white system administrators, which arguably causes a false sense of their ideal reformed self. Institutional administrators should embrace rather than be threatened by young people's histories and trajectories; in fact, researchers have recognized the developmental benefits of teaching young people their history.

Without recognizing not only the structural pathways that lead young people to incarceration, but also the structural questions inherent in the foundations of the juvenile justice institutions themselves (e.g. Platt, 1969/1977), it is arguable that the facility administrators are actually sustaining the institutions as racialized forms of social control.

We argue that different contexts require different behaviors and have different norms. Code switching, or "cultural straddling" (Carter, 2005) grants the usefulness of the street code in urban contexts but can also teach young people about how to “read” the situational context and be able to adapt to “mainstream” settings and their behavioral prescriptions. For example, staff can acknowledge that prolonged eye contact in street encounters can lead to conflict but is an expected behavior of a trustworthy job candidate. Code switching is different from traditional ‘life skills’ because it does not attach racial or cultural stigma to the street code and acknowledges its role in helping young people survive violent terrain.

Masculinity is another area that needs to be addressed in programming. As our work shows, young men are expected to actively perform and maintain their masculinity because

status (and safety) tends to be based on the achievement of hegemonic masculinity. There is little programming that is provided to young men which recognizes how gender shapes their lives; in fact, the cognitive behavioral programming, despite being highly gendered in its expectations of selfhood, largely *ignores* issues of gender in its content. Facilities should also try to provide alternative routes to status and feelings of achievement than sports activities and trades, such as greater opportunities for creative and artistic expression and for academic advancement. Young men's friendships should also be actively encouraged and nourished; in some juvenile facilities, these friendships are viewed as toxic and conflict-ridden; as researchers have recognized, friendships between young men can be deeply important for their development (Way, 2011). Finally, staff members need to be trained not to engage in, and to actively discourage misogynistic discussion.

It is crucial that aftercare or reintegration services begin at the point of placement and involve continuity of care. There is a need to do intensive pre-release planning, including that which is attentive to young people's needs in the domains of school, work, mental health and physical care, and housing. This planning should recognize that young people are in a particularly precarious situation with respect to housing, employment, and education: as they are coming of age, it is absolutely developmentally necessary for them to have housing, job and educational security – without those three needs met, reentry will never be successful. Yet, this planning is often done after they leave the facilities, rather than being integrated into the programming itself. This reflects the facility priorities of cognitive behavioral programming and the disavowal and rejection of structural critiques; it suggests to young people that their employment, education and housing is within their own control, without recognizing the real barriers that exist for them as a result of their age, criminal justice experience, and poverty. The

‘bootstrapping’ mentality, however, arguably results in young people developing a false sense of hope about what is achievable when they return to their communities. When staff members themselves are not trained to recognize and acknowledge the real structural barriers that exist to housing, employment, and education stability, then they fall back on the familiar ideologies of bootstrapping; training and equipping staff with knowledge about the collateral consequences of incarceration will arguably help those staff to better understand the obstacles that exist in young people’s lives. Although much has been written about the best practices for youth reentry and aftercare (Altschuler & Armstrong, 2004), jurisdictions vary widely in the quality of these services and many provide none at all. Reintegration workers are low paid, receive little training, and experience high rates of turnover (Fader & Dum, 2013).

It may appear that we are entering a completely new era in juvenile corrections, but the reality is that there will be many commonalities between the new system and the old. For example, while states have signaled a commitment to reduce residential placements, there is little likelihood that it will be phased out altogether. In fact, if proposals to roll back the number of youth sentenced as adults succeed, it is possible that the juvenile justice system may actually be under pressure to increase residential placements. We must acknowledge that just because we call the new residential settings “therapeutic” does not necessarily make them so. Such places may adhere on the surface to therapeutic interventions but our work suggests that this does not always make them more humane or less institutional. While achievements have been won, now is not the time to rest. It is crucial that we analyze how reform is playing out on the ground in the cultures and programming of the new settings.

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Table One

Characteristics of Studies Included in Meta-synthesis

Author/ Study #	Years	Gender/Age of Facility Residents	Ethnicity of Facility Residents	Interview Sample Size	Facility Setting /Type	Method and Timing
Abrams, L. S.						
Study 1	2001-2002	male 14-17	AA, Hispanic Hmong, NA, White	12 youth/ 10 staff	Urban, midwest, residential corrections	Prospective: longitudinal, semi-structured and in-depth interviews, participation observation, and record reviews over 16 months
Study 2	2002-2003	male 15-18	AA, NA, White	7 youth/ 8 staff	Rural, midwest, secure lockup	Prospective: longitudinal, semi-structured and in-depth interviews, participation observation, and record reviews over 9 months
Study 3	2004-2005	male 15-17	AA, African (Somali) White, NA	10 youth	Urban midwest, residential corrections	Prospective: longitudinal, semi-structured and in-depth interviews, participation observation, over 12 months
Cox, A.						
Study 1	2007-2009	male and female 13-21	AA, Latino, White	39 youth	Rural, East Coast, 3 locked facilities with varying security levels	Prospective: longitudinal, focus groups, individual interviews, and observations over one year
Study 2	2010-2012	male 13-21	AA, Latino, White	15 staff	Rural, East Coast, 3 facilities with varying security levels	Study of facility staff and observations over one year
Fader, J.						
Study 1	2003-2004	male and female 11-20	AA, Latino, White	25 staff	Urban, cast coast community-based aftercare	Participant observation over 15 months and interviews with staff
Study 2	2004-2007	male 17-19	AA, Latino	15 youth	Rural, east coast, secure correctional facility and urban reentry setting	Prospective: longitudinal, participant observation, unstructured, semi-structured interviews over three years; criminal record checks

Inderbitzin, M.						
Study 1	1998-2000	male 15-20	AA, Latino, White	22 youth/ 8 staff	Rural, northwest, secure facility	Prospective: longitudinal, informal interviews, participant observation over 15 months
Nurse, A.						
Study 1	1996-1997	male 15-25	AA, Latino, White	20 youth interviewed /258 surveyed	West, urban parole	Prospective: longitudinal, triangulation methods, survey, in-depth interviews, observational data over one year
Study 2	2002-2005	male 14-19	AA, White	40 youth	Midwest, two locked facilities, one urban and one rural	Prospective: longitudinal, semi structured interviews. Three points over 2.5 years.

Note: AA = African American; NA= Native American

Table Two

Publications Reviewed Matched to Studies

Author and Articles	**Study #**
Abrams, Laura S.	
Abrams, L. S., Kim, K., & Anderson-Nathe, B. (2005). Paradoxes of treatment in juvenile corrections. *Child & Youth Care Forum, 34*(1), 7-25.	1
Abrams, L. S. (2006). Listening to juvenile offenders: Can residential treatment prevent recidivism? *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, *23*(1), 61-85.	1, 2
Abrams, L. S. (2007). From corrections to community: Youth offenders' perceptions of the challenges of transition. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 44*(2/3), 31-53.	3
Shannon, S. K., & Abrams, L. S. (2007). Juvenile offenders as fathers: Perceptions of fatherhood, crime and becoming an adult. *Families in Society*, *88*(2), 183-191.	1, 2, 3
Abrams, L.S., Anderson-Nathe, B., & Aguilar, J. (2008). Constructing Masculinities in Juvenile Corrections. *Men and Masculinities, 11* (1), 22-41.	1, 2
Abrams, L. S., & Hyun, A. (2009). Mapping a process of negotiated identity among incarcerated male juvenile offenders. *Youth and Society, 41*(1), 26-54.	1, 2, 3
Cox, Alexandra	
Cox, A. (2011). Doing the programme or doing me? The pains of youth imprisonment. *Punishment & Society, 13*(5), 592-610.	1
Cox, A. (2015). Responsible Submission: The racialized consequences of neoliberal juvenile justice practices. *Social Justice, 41* (4), 23-3.	1, 2
Fader, Jamie J.	

Fader, J. J. (2011). Conditions of a successful status graduation ceremony: Formerly incarcerated urban youth and their tenuous grip on success. *Punishment & Society, 13*(1), 29-46.	1
Fader, J. J. (2013). *Falling back: Incarceration and transitions to adulthood among urban yout*h. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.	2
Fader, J. J., & Dum, C. P. (2013). Doing time, filling time: Bureaucratic ritualism as a systemic barrier to youth reentry. *Children and Youth Services Review, 35*(5), 899-907.	2
Inderbitzin, Michelle	
Inderbitzin, M. (2005). Growing up behind bars. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, 42*(3), 1-22	1
Inderbitzin, M. (2006). Lessons from a juvenile training school: Survival and growth. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 21*(1), 7-26.	1
Inderbitzin, M. (2007b). A look from the inside: Balancing custody and treatment in a juvenile maximum-security facility. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, 51*(3), 348-362.	1
Inderbitzin, M. (2007a). Inside a maximum-security juvenile training school: Institutional attempts to redefine the American Dream and `normalize' incarcerated youth. *Punishment & Society, 9*(3), 235-251.	1
Inderbitzin, M. (2009). Reentry of emerging adults: Adolescent inmates’ transition back into the community. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 24*(4), 453-476.	1
Nurse, Anne M.	

Nurse, A. M. (2001). The structure of the juvenile prison: Constructing the inmate father. *Youth & Society, 32*(3), 360-394.	1
Nurse, A. M. (2010). *Locked up, locked out: Young men in the juvenile justice system.* Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University.	2

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Endnotes

[i] According to our review of current studies, there are four other researchers who have published on their research inside of contemporary juvenile facilities in the United States. They are: Adam Reich (2010), who conducted research inside of a Rhode Island juvenile facility as part of an undergraduate research study; Bortner and Williams (1997), who did a study of a therapeutic unit in a youth prison in Arizona; and Cyndi Banks (2008), who conducted an ethnographic study of Alaskan youth in detention.