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"This Ain't My School!" Criminality, Control, and Contradictions in Institutional Responses to School Truancy

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Abstract While previous research has explored the causes and consequences of school truancy, few studies have considered the meanings of institutional responses. This paper offers an ethnographic analysis of a pilot program promoted as a "progressive" form of truancy intervention. Midvale Truancy Center claimed to focus on education, rather than punishment. In practice, however, the crime control tactics used to capture, isolate, and discipline truants often overshadowed the Center's educational objectives, locating the Center in a liminal space between school and detention facility. The Center's competing goals—revenue creation, truancy deterrence, and organizational survival—resulted in rehabilitation being pushed aside in favor of normalization and behavioral control. These findings illustrate a recent larger cultural turn toward control and punishment (Garland 2001), and the encroachment of crime control tactics into the civil sphere.

Keywords Truancy · Social control · Education · Criminology · Organizational behavior

Introduction

Most researchers agree that truancy is a serious problem for school districts across the nation. Truancy is a leading predictor of dropout, and has been referred to as "dropout in slow motion," due to the fact that chronically truant students tend to fall so far behind in their classes that they cannot catch up (Fallis and Opotow 2003, p. 104). School disengagement and a lack of educational credentials are correlated with increased rates of poverty, early parenting, unemployment, and a host of other personal and social ills (Bell et al. 1994; Fine 1990, 1991; Galloway 1985; Reid 1987; Riehl 1999). Apart from the obvious detrimental effects to students and families, high rates of truancy result in a significant loss of funding for schools in states where a large percentage of school resources is tied to Average Daily Attendance (ADA) numbers. Consequently, high rates of truancy lead to an additional source of loss for communities in underfunded public school districts.

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The negative effects that stem from school truancy necessitate a thorough understanding of the experience of truancy, including causes and consequences, how truancy is perceived, and institutional responses to truancy. Understanding institutional responses, in particular, can help schools evaluate whether their efforts are achieving results. However, much of the extant literature focuses solely on the causes and effects of truancy. Examples include research that suggests interventions (Bell et al. 1994; Brown 1983; Galloway 1985; Reid 1987), addresses truancy as a symptom of dropout or delinquency (Finn 1989; Fry 2003; Rhodes and Reiss 1969), or investigates whether truancy and efforts to combat it affect rates of juvenile crime (Ball and Connolly 2000; Dohrn 2002; Hansen 2003; McCluskey et al. 2004). Despite the slow but steady growth of centralized truancy centers as a method of truancy response (cf. Bazemore et al. 2004a, b; Steinhart 1996; White et al. 2001), there is a dearth of critical analyses of such methods.

Although the existing research contributes to our overall understanding of truancy as a social problem, most studies fail to examine how issues of power, social control and normative order affect and inform institutional responses to school truancy.[1] I argue that a thorough analysis of "the problem of truancy" involves more than research on causes, consequences, and programmatic solutions. What we can learn about the meanings of truancy comes not just from individual students, families, and schools, but is also communicated by the methods of response adopted by districts, schooling institutions, and the criminal justice system. "Going truant" is too often dismissed as an example of youths' apathy toward education. But truancy also represents a means by which youth refuse to accept school as the prescribed site of socialization. Institutional responses are important because they signal—to truants, and to the community—the meanings of these refusals to society as a whole.

The need to examine and critique institutional responses to school truancy led me to investigate a pilot program in the management of school avoidance. The research site, Midvale Truancy Center[2] (MTC), located in an urban school district in California, was a new program designed and marketed as a progressive response to "older," more punitive methods of dealing with truancy. The Center's approach is more akin to rehabilitative models found in the criminal and juvenile justice systems (Bortner and Williams 1997). Midvale School District officials, community leaders, and police officers have lauded the Center as a visionary effort to combat delinquency and truancy—its visionary element being that it claimed its primary function as educative, not punitive.

In reality, however, very little education takes place at MTC. Instead, students and staff tend to act out a fractious jailor-captive relationship punctuated by boredom, fear and hostility. Despite this negative atmosphere, a day spent at the Center was probably more pleasant for students than most typical school days. While all Center students were responsible for completing some minimal educational tasks, favored students were often pulled away from doing schoolwork to run errands, water plants, watch films, or surf the Internet. The ease with which students were able to trade good behavior for preferential treatment further complicates the Center's mission of restoring students to regular school attendance; when the Truancy Center is "fun," what incentive do students have to return to school? At MTC, schoolwork was primarily used as punishment for those who resisted the Center's explicit requirement that students submit to authority, and its tacit requirement that

[1] A few exceptions exist, though primarily in the US literature addressing school dropout: see, for instance, Fine (1991), Bowditch (1993), and Riehl (1999). The British literature has been more prolific, but still lags behind other topics in education (Pratt 1983).

[2] Pseudonyms are used throughout for place names and individuals.

they do so cheerfully. Given that MTC aimed to be a "new kind" of truancy recovery program, and was well positioned among Midvale public schools to deliver quality curricula—the Center boasted ten new computers and numerous educational materials, a credentialed teacher, and an enviable staff-to-student ratio—why did it so seldom fulfill its educational promises? One clue lies in the Center's inability to measure its impact on levels of truancy in Midvale School District. In short, the Center was unable to demonstrate whether or not its new model was actually encouraging more students to go back to school. What, then, did the Center's "new" practices accomplish?

Based on an ethnographic analysis of Midvale Truancy Center, including participant observation and interviews with MTC staff and school district personnel, I examine the meanings and motives behind the Center's practices. Given the available resources and stated mission of the Center, why does so little education take place? If student education is not the primary product, why does the Center take on an educative façade? What do centralized, institutional methods of truancy response signify about the meanings of truancy? Though this last question cannot be answered definitively with the case of MTC, I use the Center as an empirical example with which to explore the implications of institutional responses to truancy and social deviance.

Truancy, School Disengagement, and Social Control

Like most states in the US, California requires students to attend school between the ages of 6 and 18. According to the California Education Code, a truant is a student who, "without a valid excuse, is absent from school for three full days in one school year, or is tardy or absent for more than 30 minutes during the school day on three occasions in one school year…." (Legislative Analyst's Office 2004). Truancy is considered a status offense, similar to underage drinking or running away from home (Steinhart 1996). Status offenses describe behavior considered lawful for adults, but punishable in children. In the 1960s and 1970s, the courts began to refer status offenders to social service agencies, replacing its previous practice of placing endangered and delinquent juveniles in institutions. The contemporary return to harsher sanctions, including truancy centers and parental fines for children's offenses, is largely due to the public's increased fear of juvenile crime and corresponding impatience with "touchy-feely" techniques (Hirschfield 2008; Steinhart 1996).

Many researchers have explored the individual and family factors that lead students to lose interest in school, including academic failure (Rhodes and Reiss 1969); an oppositional standpoint to schooling (Ogbu 1987); mismatched school and home cultures (Boykin 1984; Ferguson 2001; Vélez and Saenz 2001); the perception that schooling will not pay off (MacLeod 2004); and individual disposition (Alexander et al. 1997; Fine 1986; Fine 1991). However, few have considered important changes in institutional responses to truancy. Instead, the majority of truancy research is focused narrowly on causes of, variations in, or consequences of truant behavior. Issues of power are largely ignored. Though some researchers discuss the meanings of "push" tactics that schools use to rid themselves of difficult students (Bowditch 1993; Fallis and Opotow 2003; Fine 1991), none satisfactorily engage the "pull" tactics schools and communities employ to try to keep them, nor do they explore what such "pull" strategies signal about the meanings of truancy and school disengagement.

Researchers who do offer a more critical view can be roughly divided into two lines of inquiry: the "technocratic" orientation, which assumes that the current social structure is just and that truant students are flawed; and the "social control" orientation, which views

schooling institutions as vehicles of control and inequality, and sees the current social structure as flawed. Examples of technocratic solutions include: preschool and early elementary interventions (Alexander et al. 1997; Ford and Sutphen 1996; Fine 1991), school, community and police partnerships (Pritchard 2001; White et al. 2001), and curricular and institutional changes (Fallis and Opotow 2003; Fine 1991; Finn 1989; Galloway 1985). The technocratic orientation presumes that what goes on in schools is valuable, and that efforts to recapture truants are benevolent in intent. The social control orientation, in contrast, tends to question whether what schools deliver is useful or effective for students most likely to go truant (Carlen 1992; Fallis and Opotow 2003; Gleeson 1992), and examines issues of power and social control that may underlie organizational responses to school truancy (Carlen 1992; Gleeson 1992; Mulvaney 1989; Pratt 1983; Wardhaugh 1990, 1991). From this point of view, truancy may be considered a rational response to an unfriendly environment, indicating the need for changes in the ways schools and society are structured.

The truancy-based social control orientation succeeds in questioning the power struggles that result as institutions try to rein in disengaged students. However, this approach too often over-simplifies the meanings behind institutional responses. The "big brother" aspects of schooling institutions are condemned, truant students are seen as victims, and the very real problems that result from lost educational opportunities are given comparatively little attention.

Studies of punishment practices that draw on the work of Michel Foucault offer a more nuanced view of institutional responses to deviant behavior. For Foucault, institutional power focuses on the achievement of normalization and regulation of its subjects, rather than direct control or dominance (1977). Conformity to the norm is enforced through constant surveillance. Through the training received at disciplinary institutions, citizens learn to discipline themselves, in effect becoming ideal prisoners. Moreover, institutions do not simply *forbid*; they also coerce subjects to engage in and accept sanctioned activities in order to achieve their objectives of normalization and regulation (Clegg 1998). Of course, sanctions may not be applied equally. Males and members of minority groups are subject to increased surveillance and disproportionate punishment (Engen et al. 2002; Morris 2005). Ferguson's (2001) study of school punishment practices found that black male elementary students' delinquent actions were systematically marked as intentional and dangerous, while white students' were not, leading to a loss of engagement by minority males. To save their sense of culture and race, black boys marked as "Troublemakers" disengaged from a schooling culture that threatened their sense of self through the enforcement of unreasonable behavior expectations. Thus, school disengagement resulted in part from prejudicial punishment practices that overlap and meld with those of the criminal justice system.

Recent studies have further explored this overlap, or "criminalization" of school discipline, defined by Hirschfield (2008) as "the shift toward a crime control paradigm" in identifying and responding to student misbehavior (p. 80). Kupchik and Monahan (2006) link the use of crime control tactics in schools to the normalization of incarceration and reduced societal expectations of privacy. The outcome of these tactics, they argue, is the "production of compliant bodies for the demands of postindustrial life" (p. 620). Taken together, these findings lend support to Garland's (2001) conception of a "culture of control," wherein crime is normalized as a social fact and emphasis is placed on maintaining social order. In such a climate, schools may increasingly adopt the criminal justice methods of deterrence and incapacitation, while eschewing rehabilitation, in a society Garland argues has lost faith in the "rehabilitative ideal" (p. 8).

Lastly, education delivery itself may be pressed into service as a means of controlling student behavior. Regulation may be obtained by watering down the curriculum, as in McNeil's (1986) finding that public comprehensive high schools disseminate "school knowledge" instead of real learning. "School knowledge" is artificial, divorced from real life, and ultimately unsatisfying. However, school knowledge keeps students busy and is unlikely to be controversial. In effect, knowledge transmission is made subordinate to the need for a "smooth-running" school.

Teachers and school personnel interviewed by Ferguson (2001) and McNeil (1986) meant to do well by their students. Certainly, schools work to show that they value learning and disapprove of obstructions to the educational process. However, as I will show, the methods schools and communities choose to communicate their abhorrence of deviant behavior speak louder than their accompanying rhetoric. In my discussion of the empirical case, Midvale Truancy Center, I detail how the methods chosen for identifying, capturing and "treating" truants set the stage for conflict and encourage even greater emphasis on behavioral control. I consider how the Center's techniques for maintaining control both cloud and subvert the educational goals of MTC, while providing a rationale for its disciplinary and punishment objectives.

Data and Methods

Midvale is a large urban center in California, with a population of about 400,000 (Census 2000). Though the city population is demographically diverse, like many other urban cities, Midvale's schools and neighborhoods are largely segregated by race/ethnicity. Midvale public schools have struggled to raise test scores and balance budgets. From the school district's perspective, reducing truancy would accomplish two objectives: retaining funds needed to support the district and return it to fiscal solvency, and making sure students receive the classroom instruction necessary for grade promotion and performance on standardized exams.

Primary data collection took place at Midvale Truancy Center, where I worked as a volunteer for a year and a half, including the entire 2004–2005 school year. I approached the school district in October 2004 to offer my services as a volunteer, but the process by which I was approved was very informal; I was encouraged by school district officials to simply "show up" at MTC to see if they wanted my help. I did so, and was promptly approved as a volunteer. Ms. Sanders, MTC's site coordinator, required that I bring in a copy of my teaching certificate (my previous career was as a seventh grade teacher) and I began regular visits immediately. I began volunteering at the Center with the specific purpose of exploring an ethnographic project about the program, though I did not immediately reveal my intent to complete a formal project. However, staff members knew from the beginning that I was a doctoral student in sociology, and that I was interested in studying truancy. After about 6 months in the field, I asked permission to interview staff members and revealed my desire to pursue a formal study of MTC. Ms. Sanders immediately gave permission, and I began formal interviews in the fall of 2005.

My observations began 2 weeks after the Center opened its doors for the first time. I visited the center twice a week, for full- or half-days. My jobs as a volunteer were varied. I checked and refilled work folders, ran errands for Ms. Brown, the Center's sole teacher, wandered through the class offering help and encouraging students to do work, supervised the class so that Ms. Brown could run out to her car or visit the

intake area, tested educational computer programs, administered the POSIT survey[3] in both Spanish and English, translated for Spanish-speaking students, troubleshot computer problems, worked in small groups or one-on-one with students, washed desks with disinfectant, worked on projects for Ms. Brown to display in the classroom or give to her teacher friends, and helped take out the trash. On one occasion, I was called upon to help control disruptive students. Because I was a credentialed teacher, I was also occasionally hired as a paid substitute teacher at the Center when Ms. Brown was out.

Based on my year and a half of participant observation, I collected approximately 280 typed pages of fieldnotes, covering all aspects of work done at the Center. During the day, I jotted down notes when I had the time to do so. I typed detailed, narrative fieldnotes upon returning home. During research collection, I observed approximately 530 students. Though the daily student population ranged from zero to 45 students per day, the average daily attendance consisted of about 12 to 18 students, about a third of whom were repeat offenders.[4] I provide a fuller description of MTC and its surroundings in the sections that follow.

In the last 3 months of data collection I conducted semi-structured, formal interviews with seven of eight regular staff members at the Center. Staff members included the lead teacher (Ms. Brown), two security guards (Mr. Dixon and Ms. Goodlander), two administrative assistants (Ms. Norbert and Ms. Freeman), an instructional assistant (Ms. Kingston, who declined to be interviewed[5]), an employee who collected demographic information from each student (Mr. Ingalls), and the site coordinator (Ms. Sanders). All staff members self-identified as African American or black, with the exception of Ms. Sanders, whose ethnic identification I was unable to determine. Interviews ranged in length from half an hour with Ms. Norbert, the front-office administrative assistant, to over an hour and a half with Ms. Sanders. I tape-recorded and transcribed each interview. I did not interview students as part of this study. Due to my role as a volunteer at the Center, students viewed me as an authority figure, which would likely have introduced bias into student interview data. Therefore, my data on students come from fieldnotes and informal conversations, which were more effective in gaining an inside perspective on the students and their time at MTC.

I also interviewed a senior staff member of the California Department of Education, who provided me with valuable background information on official truancy policy and practices. Through my connection with this staff member, I was able to attend a statewide teleconference on truancy policies. To learn more about how MTC had come into existence, I spoke with the coordinator of the school district's department of Student, Family, and Community Services, and with an assistant district attorney for Midvale County, in addition to my informal conversations and interviews with MTC staff members. Finally, I collected artifacts and documents from MTC itself, as well as journalistic accounts of the Center.

[3] The POSIT, or Problem Oriented Screening Instrument for Teenagers, assesses ten functional areas, including mental health, educational status, family relationships, and drug use (Assessments.com n.d., retrieved 3/29/06).

[4] The majority student population at MTC was African American and Latino/a, and overwhelmingly male. During my observational period, I met fewer than ten students who appeared to be of white or Asian heritage (I say "appeared" because I did not ask students to report their race/ethnicity during informal conversations). I estimate that fewer than 20 percent of the Center's students were female. Although minority males were likely overrepresented at MTC, the nature of the study, as well as the method of capturing truants, made it difficult to ascertain the source and degree of overrepresentation. In other words, while previous research has shown that minority males may be more likely to skip school than other groups, police may also be more likely to target minority males for apprehension.

[5] Ms. Kingston had limited interactions with students. Two months after my formal observation period ended, I learned that Ms. Kingston had been reassigned to another position.

During the analysis phase of my research, I developed analytic codes and categories from both the interview transcripts and my narrative accounts of each day's activities, using a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1994). I pored over these materials, compiling loose descriptions of common interactions and activities. Replication of this process led to the creation of simplified codes and categories, such as "justification" and "getting through the day," allowing me to discern patterns in the data. While interviews with staff members were wide-ranging and I had established a great deal of rapport based on my volunteer activities, I found that I gained greater insight from everyday observations. Moreover, as I will show, staff members' accounts of Center activities sometimes contradicted their actual practices.

My status as a former classroom teacher who maintained a teaching credential helped me to gain access to the field. As previously mentioned, staff members at MTC were informed that I was working on a doctorate in sociology and wanted to study truancy. However, as time went on, most assumed that I was working on my master's in education, since that was more common to their experience. My 3 years of experience as a seventh-grade teacher was also valuable for gaining rapport with students (to the extent possible in that environment), as well as for my role as teacher-like volunteer. While this status helped me gain entrée, it also made it difficult at times to manage my official role as volunteer, assumed by both staff and students to be "siding" with MTC, while maintaining a degree of critical objectivity.

I was also aware that, as a white woman and graduate student, I enjoyed a level of privilege and status that both MTC students and most staff members did not. Although I was unpaid, I was more similar to the MTC supervisors and director in that I could come and go as I pleased, and largely behave as I pleased since I was not dependent on MTC for a paycheck. As far as most students were concerned, I was no different than the other adults in their schooling environments. Some students considered me a novelty and tried to teach me slang; some asked why I wasted my time with "these bad kids;" a few asked me out on dates; others referred to me as "that white bitch." Since students spent just a short time at the Center, there was very little I could do to alter their perceptions of me. Thus, the kinds of interactions afforded by the organization of the Center more consistently identified me with MTC staff than as an objective observer. This reality was unavoidable, though unsought, and necessarily shaped my analysis.

In the sections that follow, I present my findings and analysis of the contradictions and competing objectives of Midvale Truancy Center. First, I outline the typical practices found at the Center: how students are brought to the Center, what happens to them when they arrive, and how even routine behaviors and practices become fraught with tension by the constant struggle for control. I use "thick description" (Geertz 1973) as a means of familiarizing the reader with the Center by providing a narrative account of its usual routines. MTC pamphlets and community outreach aim to present the Center as a legitimate school, and a fair substitute for a day at a truant's "regular school." Most parents of students brought to the Center, as I will show, are thus persuaded. Contextual description of what actually happens at the Center—good, bad, and benign—helps set the stage for an analysis of the Center as a means of short-term control rather than student rehabilitation. Following this description, I investigate each of the four primary—and often competing—aims of the Center: maintaining control, educating students, deterring truancy, and organizational survival. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the meanings of truancy communicated by the Center's attempts at attaining its contradictory goals, how those goals are experienced and interpreted by staff and students, and suggestions for future research.

Contextual Description: Institutional Practices and Goals

On a typical day at Midvale Truancy Center, between 12 and 18 students are brought to the Center by various means. While most arrive in the back of a police car, students may also be brought by the Sheriff's Department, transit police, Park Rangers, housing authority officers, California Highway Patrol (CHP), and police officers from Northpoint, a neighboring city. Certain days are "sweep days," when designated CHP and Midvale police officers earn overtime pay to spend all day filling their backseats with truants and dropping them off at MTC.

The small campus is surrounded by a 12-foot security fence, which contains a freestanding two-story building consisting of two connected classrooms, an intake area and multipurpose room, and offices upstairs. During intake procedures, truant students' belongings are confiscated and searched, and students must either sign a behavior contract or be sent to Juvenile Hall. Students' parents and schools are notified, usually via a phone call from Ms. Norbert, MTC's intake receptionist, and students must stay at the Center until the close of the school day. When a truant is signed in at MTC, Ms. Norbert sends an e-mail with the student's ID number to their "home" school. Students are "enrolled" at the Center for the day, while ADA funds are awarded to the student's home school.[6] Truants start arriving at about 9:15 a.m., and drop-offs taper off shortly after noon.

Staff members are alerted by radio when students arrive. Once finished with the intake procedures, students are walked over to the classroom area by security guards, who oversee their seat assignments. Either Ms. Brown or Mr. Ingalls (or myself) seats the students as far away from each other as possible and recites the rules. This process is almost always tension-filled, as I noted in my fieldnotes on several occasions:

> One [student] was twisting his hair as he came in, and Mr. Ingalls was immediately very hard on him. He tried to sit down, and Mr. Ingalls told him no one told him where to sit yet. He said, 'I can't sit down?' Mr. Ingalls said that wasn't the point, he had to wait to be told, unless he 'wanted to go to jail today. Do you want to go to jail today? 'Cause they can take you up out of here and take you there, if that's where you want to go.'…The boy finally sat down where [he was told to.]…. (Fieldnotes, 9/2/2005)

> The kids came in and I seated them. One of the boys immediately said, 'Oh, we can't sit where we want?' Ms. Brown jumped on this and said, 'Don't say things like that.' The boy started, 'I was just asking…' Ms. Brown said, 'Don't ask that. Sit where you're told.' They did. (Fieldnotes, 9/21/2005)

Once students are seated, they are informed of the rules. The requirements are simple: students must complete at least three assignments from the provided folders, which contain photocopied worksheets on various subjects. They must complete the work in pencil, on separate sheets of ruled paper. Students may "request" a grade at the end of the day, which will be communicated to their school. Most students either ignore or do not notice this rule, which is stated on intake forms.

The daily count is sent over to the neighboring elementary school, and Ms. Norbert picks up a state-provided "free lunch" for each truant at noon. Lunchtime often stretches to more than an hour, as staff members take this time to go out for lunch, catch up on paperwork, or conduct personal business. Students spend the extended lunch hour playing basketball and chatting, supervised by a security guard or Mr. Ingalls.

[6] Ms. Norbert refers repeat offenders to the SARB (Student Attendance Review Board), which will set up an attendance and behavior contract with the student and their family.

After lunch, students are often allowed to play on the computers and are then shown "the video," an 18-minute-long documentary-style piece about MTC that was commissioned by truancy center administrators. In the video, the Midvale schools superintendent informs viewers of the goals of the Center: "1) Increase attendance; 2) Lower truancy; 3) Get students back in school, focused on achievement; 4) Take care of their social and emotional needs; 4) Reduce crime in North Midvale."[7] The superintendent also asserts that he and "a task force" planned the Center, with the cooperation of the Midvale mayor and local law enforcement, to be able to serve more students than previous programs had, and to recoup ADA funds more effectively.

Typically, students are asked to report "three things I learned" from the video as an end-of-the-day assignment. This assignment has occasioned more than one standoff between angry students and MTC staff. Many students view truancy policies as "hypocritical" and use the facts stated in the video to protest the unfairness of the truancy center and the "three things" assignment. For example, I recorded the following on November 7, 2005:

> [After the video,] I had the kids go around and share….We had to skip Larry, who said he did not know and shrugged his shoulders. We finished and went back to him, and he [still] said he did not know. It was 12:15 by this time, and Ms. Brown [came] back. Larry said, 'Can I ask you something?' She said sure. He said, 'When you were a kid, were you ever late for school?' She said that was a personal question. He said, 'Okay, but how can you sit here and be a hypocrite, when you know you've been late, and pick us up for being late?' She said, forcefully, 'That's *your* opinion. That's what *you* think.' He said, 'Okay, okay.'…Larry still had not given any facts…He said, 'To be honest, I wasn't paying attention.'…Ms. Brown said we were past our time, and he had to remember something. He still shrugged, and Ms. Brown said, 'Okay, here's what we'll do then, we'll rewind the video and watch it again.' A bunch of kids groaned, 'No!' and Larry said, quickly, 'Okay, okay, I'll just make up something.'

Once the day is over, students are dismissed and provided with bus tokens. Students claim their belongings, minus any contraband substances. Waiting for their turn to be dismissed—which is determined by staff favoritism—is usually a time for students to display a sort of reckless bravado. Students curse and make plans to "light one up" once they leave, or joke about how they will run away from the police the next time. These displays are mostly ignored; staff members use the time to joke around with one another, chat about the day, and clean up.

Findings

Maintaining Control

Given the push-pull between conflicting institutional objectives, staffers' immediate need to establish and maintain control tends to supersede the long-term and less well-defined aims of eliminating truancy and providing human services support. In other words, the criminal justice methods of deterrence and isolation perhaps lead to a greater emphasis on an MTC "culture of control" than on rehabilitation or learning (Foucault 1977; Garland 2001). Of course, most instructors would agree that maintaining classroom control is important; learning is difficult to accomplish in a chaotic environment. However, to an outside

[7] Midvale Truancy Center is located in North Midvale, which is widely known as a high-crime area.

observer, control of the student population is the *only* goal Center staff members consistently work toward.

Staffers use a variety of strategies to navigate the yawning gulf between the Center's stated goals (deterring truancy, providing educational and human services) and actual practices (a prison-guard mentality and high-tech babysitting). Feeling chronically short-changed, many staffers blame scant resources and training on their failure to achieve the Center's aspirations. Ms. Brown, the main instructor, told me she was unhappy with several aspects of how the Center was run.

> I do like my job; one of the advantages is that I will meet a lot of students and get a chance to touch bases with many individuals from various backgrounds and school settings. The disadvantage is that I only get to work with these young people for a day, a few hours, and…the majority of the students I've never met before. And I think another disadvantage is that, although we have a consistent staff, I think there are times when we don't have enough staff because of the number of students that are brought here. Another concern would be staff being prepared and ready to adapt to the differences that we meet in students. There's a multicultural aspect that I don't feel has been met yet.[8] (Interview, 10/31/2005).

Another way of coping with the lack of measurable progress toward eliminating truancy was for staff members to limit their expectations. Instead of aiming for real change, staffers "make do," providing what help they can along the margins. According to Ms. Brown, the Center was helpful for school "cutters," who might skip a period or two, even if it didn't do much (by her own admission) for chronic truants.

> I think in the case of the students who have ducked out for a period or gone to the store, the Center is a service to them, it may be just a few hours during the day that the student would have missed some instruction, maybe a few minutes, and so I think it does fill that void. But for students who are…thinking about dropping out of school…the one day that they spend here is still not making a difference as far as their decision to return to school the following day. (Interview, 10/31/2005).

Mr. Ingalls was also frustrated at the lack of follow-through for students, lamenting that when a troubled child crosses their paths, staffers "might know what he needs, [but] that next step is not there." Staff members cannot do it on their own, he said, so they are stuck wondering what the outcome of their exertions will be:

> It's like, we tell 'em, you know, 'Gotta go to school, gotta go to school,' but they're not seeing us as—not until the second or third time are they seeing us as people who [they] really need to listen to. Like, *outside* of school, listen to. Like wake up in the morning and think about what Mr. Ingalls said to you. You know, not yet. It doesn't happen instantly, you know, 'cause they're—the kids are just so in tune to whatever it is that's got 'em cutting. (Interview, 11/18/2005, emphasis his.)

Students, for their part, either treat the Center as "one bad day" that will not be repeated, or as yet another example of police and school persecution of Midvale youth. I met very few students who believed that MTC staff members really wanted to help them, or who harbored optimistic feelings about receiving a "daily grade" for the schoolwork they completed at the Center. Despite the Center's rhetoric, most of MTC's clients were

[8] Ms. Brown is referring to the fact that a promised Spanish-speaking staff member had yet to be hired, even a year and a half after the Center opened its doors.

embittered by their experience at the Center—if not already jaded by what many perceived as a broken educational and policing system. Surprisingly, students are seldom asked *why* they were truant from school. Angry students often loudly protest their innocence, but no formal attempt is made, from intake to dismissal, to engage students in a discussion of the importance of education and regular school attendance. The lack of staff engagement with the very reason for students' attendance at the Center stands out, and reinforces the perception of the Center as a place of punishment.

In effect, MTC's methods of truancy response signify that truancy represents a loss of control over minor students' lives. This response works to reinforce the institutional power of the school district through punishment of deviant behavior, rather than rehabilitation (Foucault 1977). Despite MTC's widely advertised focus on education, care and social services, the student experience at the Center is one of constant supervision and discipline, emphasizing a "crime control paradigm" (Hirschfield 2008). The focus on control begins with the pickup process. Police detain school-aged kids walking around town. Upon arrival at the Center, students face heightened security and personal searches, which are not the norm at area schools.[9] MTC has the power to access and update student records. Students' belongings are confiscated and they spend the day behind locked doors. Students' values and participation in crime are assessed using the POSIT questionnaire, which, through its 139 yes/no questions on moral attitudes, family behavior, and substance abuse, demonstrates to students the behaviors and opinions adults expect.[10]

Throughout the day, students' movements are highly regulated and restricted, and completing schoolwork—in the form of non-interactive "seatwork" worksheets—is enforced. Limited information about what will happen to them that day, and even their precise whereabouts, is distributed only at the whim of MTC staff. If students deviate in any way from these controlling features of MTC's system, they are met with intimidation and redoubled controlling efforts, which are sometimes physical in nature. While I never saw an adult hit a student, adults at the Center—especially males—use their bodies to "get in students' space" by blocking them up against walls or yelling into their faces. Students' movements and activities are also controlled by the "soft" methods of favoritism and pacification; in short, students are shown that if they follow the rules, they will receive preferential treatment. The outcome is an atmosphere of carceral control (Foucault 1977; Ferguson 2001), rather than an educational environment, particularly when educational delivery itself is shaped to the task of student control (McNeil 1986).

Students are expected to be submissive, disciplined, and to defer to adults' authority. When students fail to comply, adults offer myriad types of justification for whatever action is being taken, keeping students constantly on the defensive. For example, students who complain that they were picked up unfairly have their records scrutinized, and the punishment is often justified with the observation that, "Well, maybe you didn't cut today, but you do cut sometimes, and today you got caught."

Nearly everything students do at the Center is controlled and monitored by staff members; therefore, the activities that students may engage in fall within a severely limited range. Still, staff members routinely describe what students do at the Center as a series of "choices." While staff members "hope" that students will make "good" choices, they are prepared for the times

[9] Unlike other high-crime urban areas, Midvale schools do not have metal detectors, nor do they systematically search students at the conventional public school sites.

[10] Questions such as "Do you refuse to go to parties if you know there will be no drugs or alcohol available?" clearly signal adults' expectations for student behavior.

when students instead make "bad" choices. For Mr. Ingalls, the Center simply does not have enough staff to waste time with students who make bad choices:

> How do you deal with an uncooperative kid? Uh, you could say, [we] explain to him his directions, so what he needs to do to get through the day on a positive note, and let him make them choices [sic]. If he doesn't wanna make the correct choices, our staff is not—we don't have enough staff to be able to worry about that person and what he's doing today. He wants to be upset, he'll be upset as far away as possible. Sometimes they never really get okay. (Interview, 11/14/2005)

The always-present threat of Juvenile Hall usually supports staff members' view of what constitutes a "good" choice in this forced "choice-making" process. Ms. Goodlander, a security guard, described for me how this process works:

> I never had a problem with violence, but I had problems with uncooperative childrens [sic] a lot of times. And basically all I do is, you know, I talk to 'em, and then if they —by me talking to 'em, if they don't comply, I go to the next stream. I mean you gonna either listen to me, or you going somewhere else where you *have* to listen. And you know that, you hate—so that's why I try to use my technique first, 'cause I don't call on myself trying to threaten 'em, but then you have some that you *have* to threaten. And so if my technique don't work, then I go to the threat technique. And basically, it works! [laughs] (Interview, 12/7/2005, emphasis hers)

"Good" choices, then, are simply those that comply with staff members' expectations, and do not land the student in Juvenile Hall.[11] Making "good" decisions, though, is not always in the best interest of the student. Many students, for example, wish to retrieve their "real" schoolwork from their backpacks in the intake area. This desire does not lie within the accepted range of student choices; such students are told, "You are at this school, so you must do the work of *this* school." Due to students' lack of "good" decisions, I several times witnessed the irony of students being punished for demanding to be allowed to do their schoolwork.

The Center's tenuous social location—existing in a grey area between school and juvenile detention center—tempers its ability to rely exclusively on crime control tactics for discipline. Though it may lack substance, the "seatwork" commonly given out (elementary-level worksheets, "journal" entries, completing times tables) is tailored toward the practice of good schooling habits, which includes submission to institutional authority. Such activities represent an excessively watered-down version of McNeil's (1986) "school knowledge," disseminated largely to keep students busy. The practice of these highly regulated and disciplined, but ultimately non-educational activities implies that skipping classes deprives students of the schooling processes of educational institutions. What students do at the Center could fairly be described as mimicking the *shapes and forms* of the educational process. The Center's practices replace the missed schooling opportunity with a day of intensified discipline, regulation and normalization (Foucault 1977).

In effect, the educational aspects of the Center are not emphasized when control, a top priority, has been established. This was made evident by many long afternoons spent supervising what Ms. Brown called "nice groups" of students, who were allowed to paint

[11] I witnessed (or was told of) students being transferred to Juvenile Hall only a handful of times. All of these incidents involved students carrying weapons or drugs. Transferring a student to Juvenile Hall was resource- and time-intensive. Therefore, sending students to Juvenile Hall was to be avoided, but remained a powerful tool for enforcing behavioral expectations.

Christmas ornaments or complete color-by-numbers "quilts" with poster paints. During the times when seatwork is emphasized, education delivery is used as a means of gaining decentralized control with combative students. Thus, the Center's practices suggest that truancy signifies an important loss of control over students viewed as placing themselves outside institutional boundaries. As Gleeson (1992) contends, truants' "failure to comply signals evidence of faulty socialization which, in turn, legitimates surveillance and sanction..." (p. 450).

Making the Time Fly: Learning at MTC

The majority of my time in the field was spent watching students do anything *but* learn. "Nice" students who had completed the minimum number of worksheets were allowed to watch movies, play on computers, or sleep. Students who either argued against or otherwise resisted MTC's three-assignment rule were disciplined for their behavior, but many still failed to complete any assigned work. However, several times during my period of active field research, Ms. Brown planned and taught an active lesson. Some of these lessons were upon the occasion of an important visitor, such as the district superintendent. Other active lessons, though, lacked any discernable external motivation.

Most active lessons involved a single text, *Our America*, by LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman. The book is based on the experiences of the two authors, 13 years old at the time, who lived in a housing project on the south side of Chicago (Jones and Newman 1998). Ms. Brown typically assigned students portions of the book to read aloud, and a short class discussion would follow. Occasionally, the round-robin reading was followed by a short assignment, such as writing down "ten things about your neighborhood" or "look up three things about Chicago on the Internet."

Students at MTC were often drawn to *Our America.* I recorded notes about a successful lesson on January 10, 2005 with an all-male group of about 25 African-American students:

> Much of the book-reading is accompanied by whistles, shouts of 'Dang!' and 'That's for real!' and other such appreciative comments. The boys relate to the story. Four boys near the computers are especially vocal, passing a book around and laughing at the photos...We read several sections out of the book, and Ms. Brown bargains with the boys: if they do a good job, they will only have to complete their ['ten things' exercise], any other work they have started in the folder, an illustration to go along with the book, and complete the chapter on LeAlan's family. After all of that, they can spend the rest of the time until 2:45 shooting hoops outside. The boys readily agree. Some of the formerly disruptive boys encourage their reluctant classmates: 'C'mon now, let's keep it flowing!' Ms. Brown repeatedly remarks on how fast the time is flying, and some of the boys agree: 'It *is* flying, she's right!' One boy also remarks to me, as an aside, 'Books like this make you *want* to read them!'…After the chapter is completed, we collect their work. Nearly everyone has done something, if only the illustration to go with the book. We end at 2:35, giving the boys just 10 minutes to shoot hoops until it is time for dismissal.

As in the example above, this lesson was sometimes quite effective, even with traditional teaching methods and a disaffected student population. Why, then, did Ms. Brown so seldom teach active lessons, especially when it "made the time fly" and fulfilled the Center's educational objectives?

Though MTC claims that one of its missions is to provide truants with the educational experience they would otherwise have missed, the activities provided show

that education is secondary to control. As in McNeil's (1986) comprehensive high schools, education is secondary to a "smooth-running" schooling environment. A real lesson might "make the time fly" once in a while, but did not, on a daily basis, serve the more pressing goals of MTC. For several reasons, providing educational content is not only a low priority, but actually conflicts with several of MTC's other aims: maintaining control, truancy deterrence, and organizational survival. I will elaborate on these latter points in the next section.

Keeping the Lights On: Truancy Deterrence and Organizational Survival

I asked each of the Center staff members to describe for me their ideal truancy deterrence program. Mr. Ingalls' response indicates a central irony in MTC's program: its services may actually *encourage* some students to be truant again.

> I would have something that would be a little bit more unliked [sic] by the children. 'Cause they come in here, and a lot of times, this is the best classroom they've ever been in. Some of the most polite people they've ever spoken to. Or, you know, people who actually give 'em attention or give 'em what they were looking for in their school but they couldn't find. I would take that out, just have 'em go somewhere that they couldn't stand being at, and we can keep 'em there for the whole day, up until like maybe 8, 9 o'clock at night, you know, um, *holding* cell, almost. So that when they get caught up they *know* that it's going to be a long, bad day, as opposed to them coming and saying, 'Okay, well we're going to the Truancy Center, we might have some fun.' A lot of the kids end up leaving and saying, 'Oh, I'll be back tomorrow.' And they mean it! When they go back to their regular school they're not gonna *have* the computer access, or me telling 'em stuff about bettering yourself, or Ms. Brown telling 'em stuff that's about being a better person, you know. Yeah, I would definitely make it a little bit more meaner. [laughs]. (Interview, 11/18/2005, emphasis his)

In contrast to Mr. Ingalls, I would not have used "polite" to describe staff members' manner of approaching most students. However, my conversations with students at the Center support Mr. Ingalls' observation that certain students prefer MTC's program to those at their home schools. Students who were quiet and well behaved were allowed to do fun activities with little supervision. Even more substantive educational activities, such as the *Our America* lesson, were still likely to be more enjoyable than most students' regular school assignments—especially for chronic truants who are disengaged from school. MTC lessons were not challenging, were not graded, and involved interesting, salacious materials (*Our America* includes foul language). One student I observed liked the Center so much he returned on his own for four more school days despite several phone calls to his house to insist that he attend his regular school.

Students who are invested in gaining an education will usually prefer their regular schools; in any case, such students are not likely to wind up at MTC in the first place. However, the Center's main constituents—students who are disaffected and chronically truant—may find that truancy does pay. If they are not caught, they get to spend their day as they please. If they are caught, as long as they cooperate, their day may still be more pleasant than one spent at their regular school.

MTC staff members thus have good reason to make the time students spend at the Center as unpleasant as possible. Why not make Mr. Ingalls' dream program a reality? First of all, making MTC a "meaner" place would present a public relations problem. Ms.

Sanders explained that they discovered early on the importance of making it clear that MTC is a *school* and not a detention facility:

> So we…let the parent know, we tell them, 'Your child such-and-such was picked up by Midvale Police Department, or whatever agency for being truant. They were not in school today, and so therefore they're here at the truancy center. *It is part of Midvale School District.*' We've learned to add, 'It's part of Midvale School District,' we didn't say that in the beginning, and we learned that that caused a lot of, um, hostility from the parents, 'cause they didn't know if they were in jail, in Juvie [Juvenile Hall], you know, what kind of facility it was, and who was over it, and so we do say that we're part of the Midvale School District, and, 'We hold class, so they are in class, and they will be here until 2:45, at the end of the day they'll get a bus pass and they can go home from here. Or, you're welcome to pick them up.'…The majority of parents that I've spoken to have said, 'Keep 'em! *They should have been in school; you brought 'em to a school, make 'em stay in school.*' (Interview, 12/5/2005, emphasis added)

Hirschfield (2008) and Kupchik and Monahan (2006) have argued that schools increasingly use criminal control tactics for student discipline; however, MTC, as a new and separate facility, exists in a liminal space between school and detention facility. Students are brought to MTC in lieu of harsher punishment such as Juvenile Hall, but also in lieu of *school*. Tellingly, MTC more often identifies with schools when defining its mission to parents and other potential skeptics.

The Center has a carefully crafted set of objectives that it makes public, primarily through presentations at schools and the videos[12] featured at the Center, or what Ms. Sanders refers to as "a continuous dog-and-pony show." The publicized goals signal that MTC aims to address a blend of educational and criminal justice problems, including: reducing truancy rates, returning ADA funds to the schools, keeping kids safe, fighting crime, providing a positive educational environment, and providing links to social services.

I heard this list over and over in interviews with MTC staff members. MTC staff members say that they are committed to working toward these objectives, and many profess that the Center makes great strides toward achieving them. However, returning ADA funds to the schools is the *only* goal in this list with which the Center can claim measurable success. Because the Center does not have the tools or resources to disentangle its particular influence from all other possible motivators (and because acquiring the necessary resources would be difficult), it does not know whether its efforts have resulted in lowered truancy rates, safer kids, or fewer crimes.

The Center's staff is aware that its publicized aims are difficult to measure, and compensates for this frustration by lauding MTC's *potential*. MTC staff repeatedly told me that since the Center *could* help kids, it is a necessary part of the schooling landscape:

> Ms. Sanders: So, I definitely think that the Center's worthwhile, I mean, 'cause there's so much that we don't know that we actually *do* accomplish. 'Cause sometimes it's defeating, it's like, 'God!' [laughs] Every day you're just like, 'Oh, my God, I can't do this anymore!' But it's actually—you just don't know what you've done. Do you know what I mean? *You never know what difference you've made.* (Interview 12/5/2005, emphasis added)

[12] Ms. Sanders (MTC's site coordinator) is featured in a second video, created in 2006. This video also features interviews with local district attorneys, a parent advocate, and a site coordinator for a truancy prevention after-school program.

Staff members are able to work through their uncertainty by telling themselves that the Center *is* effective; it is just impossible to know *in what way* the Center is making a difference. As long as the Center continues to provide needed ADA monies, its continued existence is justified for its funding source. A more punitive environment, like that envisioned by Mr. Ingalls, would likely attract unwanted attention. The assumed provision of its other services, including an educational experience, helps to satisfy any objections raised by parents. The ongoing lack of resources—Ms. Sanders detailed with anger the many cuts she had been obliged to make—deprive MTC of the actual provision of human services that might make substantial reductions in truancy rates. The failure of such services to materialize, in turn, keeps morale low and contributes to the flagging of educational ambitions. Such a climate of lowered expectations and role uncertainty perhaps contributes to an increased focus on the maintenance of control. In Morris' (2005) study, middle school teachers projected a "façade of control" in part through regulating students' clothing. MTC staff members, for their part, may nurture the appearance of control and regulation of truants through orderly rows of police-escorted teenagers completing times tables or crafting holiday decorations.

In the same vein, the soft educational practices adopted by MTC staff may also facilitate the long-term survival of the Center. As several staff members have remarked, MTC *needs* students to survive. Ms. Brown often told groups of students, "We need kids to run this center, but I hope *you* don't come back." Adopting harsher punishment techniques at the Center might serve to reduce truancy, but may not increase student attendance. Truants might just stay in their houses or better evade police, creating a lose-lose situation for schools and MTC. As Ms. Brown remarked to me following a day during which only eight students were brought to MTC, low numbers of truants "[don't] pay the electrical bill."

Finally, while working at MTC may be difficult, it is certainly easier than working in a harsh boot-camp-style environment, or, for that matter, teaching in a regular classroom. Despite their stated commitment to helping kids and reducing truancy, several staff members had few other employment choices when they agreed to work at MTC.[13] In fact, most of the staff members do not have formal training in education, counseling, or any other discipline that might prepare them for working with at-risk students. The few times I observed Ms. Brown teaching an active lesson, she was visibly fatigued afterward. Even successful lessons necessitated strong disciplinary measures, including repeated efforts to quiet rowdy students and frequent exasperated exhortations for students to participate. In short, dragging reluctant students through an educational lesson takes dedication and effort. At the other end of the spectrum, creating a harsh, negative environment is taxing for the jailor as well as the prisoner. Taking a middle road —making the day pass pleasantly for the students—tends to make the day pass pleasantly for the staff as well, while preserving a minimum level of job security. Behavioral control is thus achieved mainly through coercion and student acceptance of the Center's unique style of regulation (Clegg 1998), maintaining MTC's precarious position somewhere between school and detention center.

[13] Both security guards were assigned to the Center. Ms. Brown had worked at the same building in its previous incarnation as a classroom for students awaiting expulsion hearings. She transferred to MTC when that program was discontinued. Mr. Ingalls also worked at a group home for boys. The group home did not pay well, and he had taken on the MTC position as a second job.

Discussion and Conclusion: "This is Not a Bad Place"

In my exploration of the meanings communicated by Midvale Truancy Center, I asked three research questions. First, given the available resources and stated goals of the Center, why does so little education take place? Second, if student education is not the primary product, why does the Center take on an educative façade, and what are the implications of this form of truancy response? Lastly, what does this centralized, institutional model signify about the meanings of truancy?

The Center's practices signal that truancy represents an escape from the boundaries of institutional control. The weak educational features of MTC demonstrate that, for the Center, schooling processes, by which students are normalized into their expected "student" role, are more important than true learning. Consequently, increased social control and enforced normalization are the main treatments MTC adopts in its attempt to discipline its student population (Foucault 1977). In this sense, my findings align more closely with the "social control" orientation to truancy response, in that truants who are brought to Midvale Truancy Center are more likely to identify MTC as detention center than as a source of help. Despite staff members' stated efforts at community outreach, the rhetoric cannot obscure the reality that students experience the Center as a form of punishment, echoing Hirschfield's (2008) "shift toward a crime control paradigm" more so than the rehabilitative model MTC aspires to embody.

The lack of attention to the underlying *reasons* for students' truancy is perhaps the most telling indication that education and rehabilitation are not the primary aims of MTC. The majority of truants are never even asked *why* they went truant, or engaged on a personal level to confront their reasons for skipping school. As with Ferguson's (2001) "Troublemakers," the urge to misbehave is *assumed* for MTC's student population. If rehabilitation is out of reach, and yet a reaction is required, punishment becomes the de facto response. Punishment, at least, communicates through "example and exclusion" what behaviors are to be abhorred and avoided, thus working to reinforce the rules of the prevailing social order (Ferguson 2001; Garland 2001). Moreover, if the Center cannot convert truants into Ferguson's school-focused "Schoolboys," it can at least convert their unwilling presence into ADA revenues.

The Center's activities are aimed more at behavior modification and having a "smooth-running" day than education (McNeil 1986). When schoolwork is required, it becomes the equivalent of decentralized control. A day at the Center largely consists of symbolic activity that forces individuals to shape themselves into the ideal student: obedient, grateful, and chastened by the experience. Any protest on the part of students is seen as further evidence of their noncompliance, and disagreements often quickly escalate into power struggles between staff and students that students cannot win. As Foucault has argued, noncompliance may be taken as evidence that controlling measures are warranted (Clegg 1998). Though students may disagree, MTC holds the implicit threat of Juvenile Hall.

Midvale Truancy Center's educational and disciplinary objectives first appear as puzzling inconsistencies in staff behavior. Why would Ms. Brown pull students away from schoolwork to complete non-academic tasks? Staff members continually tell students that they are not "in trouble," but also treat students as criminals with pat-downs and confiscation of their belongings. Why not offer a solid educational lesson every day of the week? These inconsistencies can be resolved if we consider them as symptoms of the Center's internal conflict: how to deter truancy while, at the same time, ensure MTC's survival as an organization. As Bowditch (1993) found, schools' decisions for how to handle troublesome students are not always made with the student's interest in mind; preservation of institutional authority may be

the underlying objective. Adding a veneer of education allows MTC to present itself as a legitimate reform project. Ironically, offering a crowd-pleasing educational environment may work against the Center's goal of reducing truancy. The Center walks a fine line: make MTC educational enough to please its potential critics, unpleasant enough to deter repeated attendance, and valuable enough (through returns to ADA funds) to ensure its ongoing survival.

Though most of the Center's publicized goals cannot be measurably attained, the existence of these objectives helps to legitimize MTC as a valuable organization. Staff members also rationalize the Center's failures with a strong belief in the *potential* of MTC. MTC staffers' multiple roles as teachers, counselors, and disciplinarians complicate how we understand their place along the continuum between school and prison. Like Bowditch's (1993) "disciplinarians" at DuBois High, MTC staff members utilize discipline as a means of maintaining institutional authority. Unlike DuBois' disciplinarians, however, who admitted that many of the methods they employed "help the school" but "don't help the kid" (p. 504), the people who work at Midvale Truancy Center believe in the importance of MTC's mission. All staff members report that they like their jobs, and they feel that they are accomplishing something important. As one security guard noted, even seeing one kid helped by the Center made her job worthwhile.

Perhaps the Center's admirable aspirations could be achieved if the organization was set up according to its original plans. However, it would be naïve to ignore MTC's objectives of behavioral control, fund-raising, and simple self-preservation, which I argue are its most pressing aims. After all, Midvale's new emphasis on truancy reduction is born partly out of a need to control its main source of funding. Monetary returns from education, provision of social services, and reform may take years to realize. Behavior modification and control is a more efficient way of maintaining discipline and accruing revenue. In this sense, the power play—not education—becomes the driving force behind MTC. A technocratic orientation toward truancy response is therefore not sufficient to explain the Center's disparate goals. As Clegg (1998) and Ferguson (2001) have similarly argued, MTC's displays of institutional power are aimed at coercing students to self-regulate. A well-controlled student population leaves staff members free to pursue the school system's more pressing needs. In addition, the school district's collaboration with police and use of crime control tactics help achieve the law enforcement goal of assuaging the public's worries about crime rates in a city that suffers from a reputation as an incorrigibly high-crime environment (Hirschfield 2008; Kupchik and Monahan 2006).

My research illustrates some of the complexities that arise in the study of truancy response. More than just an individual or family problem, truancy exists in an undefined space between child's play and criminal behavior. The responses to truancy proposed and carried out by schools and the criminal justice system speak volumes about the meanings of truancy. The Center's de facto criminalization of truants tells us that these students are viewed as a threat; therefore, these individuals must be disciplined and punished for the sake of a more orderly society (Foucault 1977). We also learn that organizations fear losing their power over adolescent bodies, and that they will band together to reinforce that power. The outcome, as Ferguson (2001) and Kupchik and Monahan (2006) argue, may be the growing normalization of incarceration for one of the district's most vulnerable student populations.

I argue that MTC exemplifies a larger cultural turn toward control and punishment (Garland 2001). Garland argues that as crime has come to be seen as an immutable "social fact," the penal-welfare system, focused on rehabilitation and individualized services for criminals, fell into disfavor. Rehabilitation quickly became perceived as naïve and insufficiently deterrent (2001). How, then, should deviance be controlled? This predicament opened the door to a new paradigm of crime control, emphasizing isolation,

containment, and expressive punishment, and the encroachment of crime control tactics into organizations—such as education—previously viewed as belonging to a separate field altogether.

The case of MTC illustrates a larger problem: schools are increasingly viewed through a crime control lens, and are expected to themselves grapple with crime control as a result. The conflicting needs of those with a stake in reducing truancy—return revenues to schools, reduce local crime, redirect truants toward education—help set the conditions for the introduction of crime control tactics into the educational sphere. The assumption, communicated by school districts, law enforcement, and parents, that "nothing works" to stop truancy make containment and punishment seem reasonable solutions. The inability to fulfill its rehabilitative goals leads MTC to focus on easier short-term solutions that rely on punishment and behavioral control, mirroring the larger cultural emphasis on control. Furthermore, the desirability of obtaining measurable results for public dissemination leads to an emphasis on numbers of truants "captured" and ADA revenues earned, rather than whether or not truants are actually being helped.

In particular, the partnership between Midvale Police and the Midvale School District illustrates how society views truants less and less as a "class" of troubled *children* whose needs must be addressed by parents and the school system. Rather, truants are viewed as individual *wrong-doers*, adultified criminals-in-the-making who are making a rational choice to flout the law. Such partnerships between schooling systems and the penal system may not only transform what we think of as "criminal" activity, but also how we think about the proper role of schools in creating, maintaining, and enforcing social order. Increasing criminal control tactics in schools achieves short-terms goals such as "getting kids off the street" and maintaining school revenues. However, these tactics target only the symptoms of the problem of troubled students, and ignore the causes. Having schools take on a dimension of crime control by sequestering and punishing those students already least likely to succeed does little to achieve the long-term societal benefits that would accrue from increasing educational attainment.

Future research should further explore the links between education, policing, institutional control, and legitimacy, and how these conflicting desires inform organizational structure. As public schools continue to perceive that they are under attack due to budget cuts, increased testing requirements, and competition from charter schools and other alternative forms, how will they survive and maintain their authority? As the debate in the truancy and dropout literature continues its shift from the individual to the institutional level, what accommodations, if any, will schooling and criminal justice institutions make? These and other questions would be valuable additions to the ongoing struggle to understand the objectives and intentions of schooling institutions, as well as organizational responses to change and uncertainty.

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