

A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF JUVENILE OFFENDERS

A Dissertation

by

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This dissertation meets the standards for scope and quality of  
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of adolescents at a juvenile justice boot camp facility and to provide counselor educators, counselors, and other professionals with a deeper awareness of juvenile offenders. This research study addressed (1) perceptions of the adolescents' struggles before entering the juvenile detention system, (2) experiences within a juvenile justice boot camp facility, and (3) the adolescents' future plans.

In order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the juveniles' experiences and perceptions, a qualitative phenomenological approach was employed. The primary investigator conducted this study with a sample of youth cadets ( $n = 10$ ) currently enrolled in a juvenile boot camp facility. Participants for the study were selected using purposeful sampling. Of the ten participants, there were three females and seven males. Participant ages ranged from 15 to 17 years old.

Data sources were used to create emerging themes: five core themes were identified by the researcher and two outside data analysts. The emergent themes were centered on the lived experiences of participants. Themes included: (a) Compounding Offenses, (b) Relationships, (c) Debilitating Factors, (d) Lessons Learned, and (e) The Future.

Findings of this study gave voice to individuals in a juvenile justice boot camp facility. This study provided a perspective on juveniles' personal feelings and views during their sentenced time in a boot camp. Future recommendations were suggested for counselors, counselor educators, and others working with individuals involved in the juvenile justice system. One recommendation was to include life skills such as career counseling, interpersonal skills counseling, communication skill building, and work ethics training in a boot camp setting. A

second recommendation was to be cognizant of individual differences of each offender in the boot camp. In addition, future research should involve the adolescent's parents/guardians with an emphasis on their relationship.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the adolescents who have faced hardships and struggles; may you endeavor and succeed in your dreams. To the counselors and individuals working with these adolescents, may we always remember the impact we can have on them.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Juvenile offenders have received increased attention in the past two decades. Each year in the United States, police make over two-million arrests of juveniles who are younger than 18 years of age (Ramchand, Morral, & Becker, 2009). In 2002, 23% of those who were previously arrested and processed were ordered to residential placement, and of these, 40% were held in detention centers (Ramchand et al., 2009).

Adolescents in juvenile detention centers are considered one of the most challenging populations in a multicultural society (Ameen & Lee, 2012). In 2008, approximately 81,000 adolescents were detained in correctional facilities across the United States, with the average placement of about 68 days (Ameen & Lee, 2012). Of the young offenders, 85% were male, 40% were Black, 35% were White, 21% were Hispanics, and 71% aged 15 to 18 years (Ameen & Lee, 2012). Of the 81,000 adolescents detained in correctional facilities, 35% committed personal offenses, 29% committed property offenses, and 23% committed drug offenses (Ameen & Lee, 2012). Due to the widespread delinquency and conduct problems among juveniles, many professionals assume that young offenders have difficulty learning and acquiring new skills to better their lives (Koyama, 2012).

Juveniles are believed to have not reached psychological maturity, and therefore, have difficulty in regulating moods, impulses, and behaviors due to their developmental level (Lambie & Randell, 2013). Adolescents are also susceptible to peer influence, impulsivity, provocation, and stressful situations due to the influence of peers, social rewards, and need for approval (Lambie & Randell, 2013). Juvenile offenders are considered to be a disadvantaged population often coming from backgrounds of family dysfunction and maltreatment (Ou & Reynolds, 2010).

Treatment for juvenile offenders has involved interventions focused on individual and environmental programs in order to enhance cognitive skills, build moral development, and enhance change (Ryals, 2004). Treatment of the offender cannot alleviate the impact of crime on victims and communities as criminal activity involves the victim and the community (Ryals, 2004). Restorative justice and counseling is needed to restore balance to the victims' lives, their community, and also, the lives of offenders (Ryals, 2004). Counselors working with cases involving juvenile offenders conceptualize clients through a developmental lens and view problems as systemic and reparable (Ryals, 2004). Counselors use a variety of methods to enhance change in individuals and are trained to work with multicultural populations according to the social structures that affect each individual (Ryals, 2004).

There is a substantially high recidivism rate involving juvenile offenders. Offending behavior is the result of complex interactions of risk and protective factors (Put, Creemers, & Hoeve, 2014). Certain risk factors increase the chances of offending behavior. Risk factors include characteristics of the individual and social environment, including the family, peers, and community (Put et al., 2014). Risk factors include high truancy, low academic achievement, high parental stress, running away, anti-social behavior, and living in a bad neighborhood (Put et al., 2014). Research had documented high recidivism rates along with high rates of mental health and substance abuse disorders, low vocational and educational attainment, and high mortality rates among those who spent time in correctional facilities (Ryan, Abrams, & Huang, 2014). According to Lambie and Randell (2013), over a third of juvenile offenders have special educational needs and are below their chronological age level in terms of cognitive abilities such as reading, spelling, and comprehension.

Adjustment difficulties often lead to major mental health problems that potentially have negative outcomes among adolescents. According to Reynolds (2001) and Nock, Kazdin, Hiripi, & Kessler (2007), previous ideas such as “this is just a phase of adolescent turmoil” or “they’re just going through a stage” are no longer appropriate conclusions. Early studies by Bock and Goode (1996) noted that criminal and antisocial behavior was the result of biological, genetic, and environmental factors. There is not a clear understanding of how psychological processes influence juvenile delinquency (Nock et al., 2007).

Texas is the leading state in uninsured children with one of the largest population of youth living in poverty (Sanborn, 2011). A variety of factors lead to ongoing poverty and insufficient health care which impacts the development of youth and children. Educational opportunities, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and chronic physical abuse are some of the factors affecting children’s development (Sanborn, 2011). Many adolescents incur undue illness, injury, and death as a result of unhealthy living conditions.

The developmental asset framework, an evidence-based strategy, has been used to increase health protective factors (Chew, Osseck, Raygor, Eldridge-Housedr, & Cox, 2010). The framework consists of external assets (positive experiences adolescents need) and internal assets (positive values youth need for themselves). The assets include support, commitment to learning, positive value, and positive identity (Chew et al., 2010). Adolescents who lack protective qualities are three times more likely to have health problems and develop unhealthy habits leading to risky behaviors (Chew et al., 2010). Juveniles who commit criminal offenses and enter the juvenile justice system lack resiliency skills necessary for overcoming adversity (Chew et al., 2010). The ability to identify problems and provide adequate interventions for these juveniles and their families is an important part of the juvenile justice system (Chew et al., 2010).

Juvenile delinquency negatively effects all youth and their families. Identifying and providing interventions to youth who are likely to become chronic criminals is an important goal of both the criminal justice system and our society (Alltucker, Bullis, & Close, 2006). There is evidence that young juvenile offenders have a criminal developmental process which takes place over a period of time. Contextual variables influence the developmental process. Knowledge regarding the effects of these contextual variables and their effect on one's first arrest are important (Alltucker et al., 2006). Identifying different pathways experienced by juveniles perhaps can help inform both the practice of counseling and policies pertaining to adolescents (Loeber, Loeber, Wei, Farrington, & Wickstorm, 2002). According to Lancaster, Balkin, Garcia, and Valarezo (2011), there have been inconsistent outcomes of counseling programs implemented to reduce recidivism of juvenile delinquents. Lancaster et al. (2011) suggested further research including a qualitative component to examine programs, refine current programming, and isolate critical features of counseling programs that clients perceive as helpful. The role of the counselor is both a prevention/intervention specialist and a program evaluator (Lancaster et al., 2011).

Ikonomopoulos (2014) in a study using narrative therapy found that juveniles at a boot camp facility experienced common risk factors before entering treatment. Juveniles shared similar histories of mental health issues, poor academic achievement, sexual risk behaviors, teen pregnancy, and substance abuse. Juveniles had negative expectations about themselves, a limited understanding of their strengths, and low self-esteem related to self-identity (Ikonomopoulos, 2014). Research findings suggest that adolescents who are involved with the juvenile justice system continue to have trust issues with mental health professionals and a fear of disclosing information (Ikonomopoulos, 2014). The purpose of the study was to find whether

a narrative therapy intervention would help cadets gain insight and potentially improve their overall functioning. Ikonomopoulos (2014) suggested that counselors use narrative therapy to explore the meaning of stories and to explore alternative meanings of stories.

Abrams (2008) conducted a qualitative study which analyzed a series of 27 semi-structured, qualitative interviews of 10 juveniles who were released from a 12-month therapeutic correctional institution. The purpose of the study was to investigate the adolescents' perceptions in transitioning from the correctional institution into the community. Abrams (2008) found that some of the challenges for juveniles in their community included logistical hurdles (i.e., jobs, transportation, school) and a lack of coping strategies when encountering negative influences. Abrams (2008) suggested that further research related to the transition period of community reentry including coping strategies adolescents employ to overcome obstacles should be conducted.

Gaining a deeper understanding about the lived experiences of juvenile offenders perhaps can help counselors gain the trust with this population and identify factors that need to be addressed when attempting to help juvenile offenders. By studying programs attempting to help juvenile delinquents, counselors and counselor educators can position themselves to provide the most useful and effective methods of enhancing youth functioning and improving their coping skills.

### **Statement of the Problem**

United States law enforcement officers arrested 1.6 million juveniles in 2010. The average cost per day for juveniles in treatment is \$241 (Pew Center on the States, 2008). Recidivism rates are high and yet not reliable due to the variation of delinquency in each state. Texas reported a re-arrest rate of 85% in a five-year longitudinal study (Trulson, Marquart,

Mullings, & Caeti, 2005), and low rates of educational and vocational attainment as well as minimal continuity of mental health and substance abuse treatment seems to be rampant.

A number of studies have focused on juvenile offender recidivism (Mulder et al., 2012). Studies continue to report recidivism rates to be high for juvenile offenders. Ameen and Lee (2012) and Kohler and Reese (2008) reported the recidivism rate of youth ranged between 30 and 80 percent, indicating the failure of juvenile boot camps. Furthermore, the military models of boot camps appear to neither improve victims' situations nor make the community a safer place (Lutze, 2006). In response to the high rate of recidivism and the lack of success of outcomes of boot camps for victims and society, Lutze (2006) and Ryon, Early, Hand, and Chapman (2013) asserted that juvenile boot camps need to change their policies and structure from a traditional military model to a less restrictive therapeutic setting to improve the interaction between staff and adolescents. Engaging in a needs assessment of adolescents and balancing needs for control and support in the facilities has also been recommended.

Due to high rates of drug and alcohol use as well as engagement in risky sexual and violent behavior, juvenile offenses are a serious health concern. However, little is known about juveniles' ongoing involvement with child protection services and the risk of re-offending (Ryan, Williams, & Courtney, 2013; Lambie & Randell, 2013). According to Mulder, Vermont, Brand, Bullens, and Marle (2012), research on juvenile offenders has mainly focused on finding risk factors for reoffending. A vast number of quantitative research studies have examined juvenile recidivism, psychological symptoms, and characteristics of at-risk juveniles. However, there is a dearth of qualitative investigations related to juvenile adolescents' perceptions of their lived experiences prior to being arrested, struggles they may have had during detainment, and goals after being released from the juvenile facility.

The majority of studies examined delinquent behavior through quantitative methods at a macro level (Wester, MacDonald, & Lewis, 2008). Extant studies have excluded important aspects of juveniles' experiences that perhaps could assist counselors attempting to facilitate behavioral change (Wester et al., 2008).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to provide an understanding of the lived experiences of adolescents at a juvenile justice boot camp facility. The rationale for conducting the study was to gain an understanding of the struggles that adolescents experienced and to provide counselor educators, counselors, and other professionals with further understanding of juvenile offenders. This research study addressed (a) perceptions of the adolescents' struggles before entering the juvenile detention system; (b) the experiences of juveniles within a juvenile justice boot camp facility, and (c) the adolescents' future plans.

### **Significance of the Study**

A qualitative study of juvenile offenders is considered significant for several reasons. First, the study gives voice to juveniles who are detained at a juvenile boot camp facility. Qualitative methods are a way to provide an in-depth description in the participants' language (Wester et al., 2008). Although quantitative studies have been conducted with juvenile offenders, a limited amount of qualitative investigations attempting to gain an in-depth understanding of juvenile offenders in a residential treatment program have been undertaken. Qualitative studies can provide insight into current and past influences of adolescent choices and perhaps guide counselors to more effective interventions (Wester et al., 2008).

A study conducted by Wester et al. (2008) suggested using a method to address resistance and denial among juvenile offenders that made use of the adolescent's history and past trials that influenced behavior. The current study sought to understand juveniles' lived

experiences. Understanding juveniles' lived experiences can perhaps help in policy making, theory building, and in the practice of those who work with adolescents. In order to be effective, counselors' structure their interventions to meet the needs of the client based on the client's subjective reality (Weinrach & Thomas, 2004). Individuals create their own subjective reality through their perceptions and meaning they construct about themselves, others, and the universe (Weinrach & Thomas, 2004). Potential for abuse may occur when service providers only use statistical findings to identify, understand, and categorize juveniles based on gender, race, age, and religion due to misinterpretation of findings and overgeneralization (Weinrach & Thomas, 2004).

In a study on individual and contextual characteristics of juvenile delinquents conducted by Armstrong and Rodriguez (2005), differences were found in treatment of juvenile delinquents in pre-adjudication detention centers. The likelihood of detention is not merely attributed to the individual characteristics of the juveniles, but also to the context in which the court operates and the racial composition of the county. It is important to recognize that juveniles are different in certain ways and are influenced to some extent by the specific subculture in which they are raised. It is inappropriate to assume that all juveniles are raised in the same subculture, have similar characteristics, or feel the same (Weinrach & Thomas, 1996). According to Rigazio-DiGilio, Concalves, and Ivey, (1996) one cannot generalize about a person's characteristics to all members of a group, since there are differences within ethnic groups and among ethnic groups. According to Lancaster, Balkin, Garcia, and Valarezo (2011), investigations have been proposed that examine community agencies working with court-referred youth. The voices of juvenile offenders can add information about their culture, struggles, goals, and barriers. Findings can provide valuable information for counselors, counselor educators, school counselors, and other



mental health professionals. Several quantitative studies related to the transition of juveniles from detainment into the community have been undertaken (Abrams, 2008; Brubaker & Fox, 2010; Abrams, Terry, & Franke, 2014). However, a limited number of qualitative investigations of juvenile delinquents' experiences in treatment have taken place.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching research question directing this inquiry was “What are the experiences of juvenile offenders who were detained in the juvenile justice system?”

The secondary research questions are:

1. What is the juvenile's history and background prior to detainment?
2. What are the experiences of juvenile offenders during detainment?
3. What are the future plans of juvenile offenders upon release from detainment?

### **Population and Sample**

The primary investigator conducted this study with a sample of youth cadets ( $n = 10$ ) currently enrolled in a juvenile boot camp facility. Participants for the study were obtained using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is used when subjects are intentionally selected based on a variety of criteria such as information-rich cases where one can learn about the issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (Patton, 2002). The cadets' estimated age ranges were from 15 to 17 years of age. The selection of participants was on a voluntary basis with the approval of the facility director. A letter of permission from the director of the juvenile boot camp facility authorized the researcher to use the facility for the study. The researcher provided the boot camp staff with written information that explained the study. The letter of permission from the director of the juvenile boot camp allowed approval for the researcher to contact the legal guardians of participating cadets for consent as well as requesting assent of the cadets. The legal guardians of the cadets who consented to the study completed a consent form

and permitted their adolescents to participate in the study. Cadets were also given written information. There were no monetary incentives, and participants were given the option to opt out from the study at any time.

### **Methodological Approach**

To gain an in-depth understanding of the juveniles' experiences, a qualitative phenomenology approach was used. The phenomenological methodological approach provided a deep understanding of the nature of experiences. The phenomenon or the focus may be an emotion, relationships, a program, or culture in which people describe things and experience them through their senses (Patton, 2002). In this qualitative study, data was gathered through demographic surveys, the Reynolds Adolescent Adjustment Screening Inventory (RAASI) (Reynolds, 2001), face-to-face interviews, and a focus group session.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The counselor and the director of the Juvenile Justice Facility upon approval of an Institutional Review Board solicited participants on site. The counselor of the Juvenile Justice Facility met with cadets to ask for volunteers. A list of cadets who volunteered was given to the primary investigator. The primary investigator met with potential participants' parents during visitation days and provided them with information about the study and a consent form. Upon consent from parents, the principle investigator gave potential participants information about the study provided them with a consent form. Those who were interested signed the consent form. However, individuals were not required to participate in the research study, and their decisions to participate or not participate did not affect their status in boot camp.

A time for face-to-face meetings was set with consent of the director of the Juvenile Justice Facility. During the face-to-face meeting, the primary investigator reviewed the consent form, including participant rights and addressed questions. Following the participants' assent, the

primary investigator administered the RAASI and demographic survey. The RAASI was scored by the primary investigator after leaving the facility. The RAASI scores were used as a data source to enhance credibility of the interview findings. The RAASI is a 32-item self-report measure taken by paper and pencil (Reynolds, 2001). The primary goal of the RAASI is to measure four broad constructs of adolescent behavior: antisocial behavior, anger control, indications of anxiety and depression, and positive self (Reynolds, 2001). The test takes approximately five minutes to complete and is at a third-grade reading level (Reynolds, 2001). The RAASI provides a fast and simple way to screen for early signs of distress in adolescents by measuring internal and external symptoms. (Reynolds, 2001). Examples statements on the RAASI include: I felt that everything was ok in my life; I had fun with friends; and I felt lonely (Reynolds, 2011). The results from the questions associated with the RAASI instrument supplemented emerging themes from the qualitative interviews. The demographic survey was used to provide detailed information for the results.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted (see Appendix D) a week after the RAASI and demographic survey. The interviews lasted approximately between 30 to 45 minutes and were held in a visiting area similar to a classroom setting. A guard was present outside of the classroom to ensure safety of the primary investigator and participant. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the primary investigator. Each participant received a copy of the transcription in order to be able to validate or clarify the transcripts for the purpose of member checking. Member checking is the process of participants validating and clarifying their responses (Hays & Wood, 2011). After interviews were verified, the primary investigator provided the transcripts to two outside analysts.

The primary investigator and two outside analysts separately read and re-read the transcripts by using initial coding to develop preliminary ideas about themes. Initial coding is the basic unit of analysis (Patton, 2002). A focus group was scheduled in order to validate the themes. The investigator and analysts then read and re-read all material and used initial coding to identify emerging themes. Axial coding was used to look at distinct concepts and categories in the data which formed the basic units of analysis (Biddix, 2009). Transcripts and audiotapes will be kept in a locked cabinet file in the primary investigators home office for three years.

A number of methods were used during this study to assure rigor. A detailed researcher journal that incorporates personal observations and reactions allowed for bracketing of the researcher's own experiences and biases. The journal also included notes about decisions made throughout the research and data analysis process, which provided an audit trail. Member checking was utilized to ensure accuracy of reporting the participants' voices. Two outside data analysts were utilized for analytic triangulation. Methods of data triangulation included one-to-one interviews, a focus group, and the RAASI instrument.

### **Basic Assumptions and Researcher Bias**

A major assumption of the current study was that participants provided necessary and honest information during the interviews and focus group. A second assumption was that the principle investigator established rapport for participants to engage fully in sessions and to answer instrument and qualitative inquiry to their maximum potential. The researcher taught a psychoeducational class for a year, building rapport with some of the cadets. It was important for the researcher to address working at the juvenile facility and any factors relevant to the study. This study was also based on the assumption that all subjects were willing participants, and that interviews and focus groups provided the information necessary to interpret the data through a qualitative methodological approach.

## **Limitations**

There are limitations to the current study. First, the presence of the researcher may have affected the subjects' responses. Second, the researcher assumed that participants were being truthful in their responses.

## **Key Concepts and Definitions**

Several terms were used throughout the writing of this study:

*Adolescent*: an individual who had gone through puberty, but had not yet reached adulthood. For the purpose of this study, adolescent refers to any person between the ages of 13 and 17.

*Delinquency*: a social term referring to criminal behavior (Kurtz, 2002).

*Juvenile Boot Camp Facility*: refers to the facility in which the study is being conducted.

A juvenile boot camp facility is publicized and popular for an intermediate form of punishment.

Juvenile boot camps are a form of shock incarceration and have a military atmosphere that is believed to change behaviors (Gultekin & Gultekin, 2012).

*Juvenile Offender*: a child or young person who had been found guilty of some offence, act of vandalism, or antisocial behavior before a juvenile court.

*Reynolds Adolescent Adjustment Screening Inventory (RAASI)*: a 32-item, self-report inventory that rates behaviors and attitudes of adolescents over the past six months (Reynolds, 2001).

*Recidivism*: repetition of criminal behavior (Synder & Sickmund, 2006).

## **Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter II of this study presents a review of the literature of the problem investigated. Chapter III includes details of the methodological approach used in the study, including data collection and analysis. Findings are reported in Chapter IV. Chapter V contains the discussion of findings, implications, summary, and recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

### **History of Juvenile Court System**

Before the juvenile justice system was created, juveniles who were 14 and older were penalized and treated the same way as adults in the criminal justice system. Children under the age of seven were immune from persecution for an alleged crime, and children seven to fourteen were assumed innocent by the court (McMillan, 2014). The adult justice system appeared to be inadequate for juveniles needing specialized attention which led to the development of the juvenile court system. The first juvenile court system created was established in Chicago, Illinois, in 1899 (Sanders, 201; McMillan, 2014). The adult and juvenile court differ in that the adult court system focuses on incapacitation, punishment, and retribution, whereas the juvenile system's goal is the reformation of the individual rather than punishment (McMillan, 2014).

The juvenile court sought to evaluate and determine the juveniles' needs according to the best rehabilitative solution (McMillan, 2014). In order to determine and evaluate juveniles, child psychologists and social workers were utilized. Following the Illinois Act during the mid-1800s, Texas law makers passed legislation exempting juveniles from certain crimes and focused more on a rehabilitation system instead of incarceration (Sanders, 2011).

The juvenile court system operates under *parens patriae*, which allows the court to have greater social control over juvenile's lives, keeping their best interest in mind (Feldmann, 2014; McMillan, 2014). The state addresses juveniles' needs and implements appropriate interventions. A standard practice in addressing *parens patriae* includes placing juveniles into institutions, training schools, and industrial schools (Shoemaker, 2009).

## **Theoretical Framework**

There are a variety of theories attempting to address criminal behavior. General Strain Theory and Social Learning theory are presented to provide a foundation when discussing juvenile delinquency.

### **General Strain Theory**

General Strain Theory (GST) was proposed by Andrew Agnew (1992) as a social psychological explanation of criminal behavior and represents one of the most important theoretical developments in criminology (Watts & McNutly, 2013). Strain is considered the impact that stressors have on an individual. The focus of GST is on the individual's inability to achieve economic goals which results in stress. According to Agnew (2006), there are three types of strain that will lead to deviant coping: the loss of someone or something important, the presentation of a harmful experience such as childhood abuse, and the failure to achieve positively valued stimulus (Grothoff, Kempf-Leonard, & Mullins, 2014). Individuals cope differently when presented with a negative experience with some individuals using deviant methods. Agnew (2006) identified one's living situation as a high level of strain which is seen as producing criminal coping. High-level strains are those that occur more frequently, recently, and last for a longer period of time (Grothoff et al., 2014).

An individual who associates with delinquent peers may be more likely to engage in deviant coping (aggression), while an individual who had a support system and a close family may be less likely to engage in deviant coping. Individuals with low self-control may be less likely to cope with strains than those who have effective coping mechanisms. GST asserts that males and females experience strain differently (Watts & McNutly, 2013).

GST offers three conclusions for why some individuals are more likely to commit a crime when dealing with strain. The conclusions are as follows: (a) some individuals do not cope in a

legal manner, (b) criminal coping costs are low, and (c)) some people are inclined to crime (Grothoff et al., 2014). Individuals who do not cope in a legal manner may have low intelligence and may not have good problem-solving skills. Individuals who cope through low cost of criminal acts are likely to use drugs as an alternative coping method due to feeling that their situation will not change (Grothoff et al., 2014).

### **Social Learning Theory**

Social learning theory has been one of the main criminological paradigms over the last four decades (Pratt, Cullen, Sellers, Winfree, Madensen, Daigle, Fearn, & Gau, 2010). Crime is learned through social interactions. Juveniles are exposed to a variety of behavioral and normative patterns within our society (Pratt et al., 2010). As cited by Pratt et al. (2010), Akers held that crime could be influenced by imitation.

Social learning theory was developed by Bandura (1977) and is characterized as behavior that is continuous and reciprocal between the environmental determinants, behavior, cognition, and social learning concepts (Feldman, 2014; Tittle, 2012). Tittle (2012) noted that social learning concepts include differential reinforcement (instrumental learning through a schedule of rewards and punishments) and imitation (learning through observation and modeling of others' behavior) According to social learning theory, people learn by observations and experience. Bandura (1977) proposed that individuals do not inherit knowledge when they are born; rather behavior is something individuals learn. Observational learning happens through four processes: attentional (perception), retention (remembering), motor reproduction (converting the thoughts into actions), and motivational (Bandura, 1977). Behaviors or acts that are reinforced by a reward or avoidance are likely to be repeated, whereas behaviors that are punished are less likely to be repeated (Pratt et al., 2010).

Tittle (2012) stated the core behavior-shaping mechanism is differential reinforcement. A history of differential reinforcement appears to be critical because it can influence misbehavior and



directly affect an individual's chances of misconduct by formation of habitual behavioral patterns (Tittle, 2012). As cited by Pratt et al., (2010) Akers noted that the most influential reinforcements are social (those coming from direct individuals of juvenile's social group). A child's sense of self-efficacy regarding a situation can come from other's verbal influence, personal, overt, and bodily experiences (Bandura, 1977). By observing parents or significant others, children may learn a behavior where misconduct is reinforced or imitated according to their social surrounding (Pratt et al., 2010). There is a significant amount of evidence that suggests children learn different responses by observing others (Ikonomopoulos, 2014).

### **Texas Juvenile Justice Department**

The Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) had a vision of providing safety for citizens of the State of Texas through partnership with communities and the delivery of a continuum of services and programs to help youth enrich and value their lives and the community by focusing on accountability of their actions and planning for a successful future. (TJJD, 2012)

State law requires all counties to have a juvenile board, which is in charge of overseeing the juvenile probation system of its county. The board includes juvenile judges and chiefs of the juvenile probation officer. The board is responsible for setting the policy and budget for the juvenile department. The Texas Juvenile Justice Department works with the juvenile boards and probation department to support and improve their services throughout the state by providing the following services: funding, technical assistance, training, analyzing information, disseminating information, facilitating communications between state and local entities, creating and enforcing standards, and over-seeing operations in detention facilities. TJJD provides treatment and services for juveniles who have chronic delinquency problems or have utilized all of their options in the county for state-operated facilities and halfway houses.

Each juvenile has a different path through the juvenile justice system and a variety of factors determine their individual journey. In general, the juvenile justice system uses the progressive and intervention models which are designed to begin with the least amount of interventions and sanctions and move toward more intensive interventions in order to help juveniles. The Texas Juvenile Justice Department's goal is to build and strengthen juveniles to be productive citizens (TJJD, 2012). Juveniles in the justice system are not placed in a punitive environment, but rather a protective one designed to educate adolescents about discipline, value, and work. According to the TJJD, a juvenile is one who is between the ages of 10 to 16 and had committed an offence otherwise known as "delinquent conduct," or is "conduct in need of supervision." Delinquent conduct is generally a behavior that if committed by an adult, would result in jail. Conduct in need of supervision (CINS) is behavior by which if committed by an adult would not be a violation. Adjudicated or a convicted individual is when a juvenile had engaged in delinquent conduct or CINS.

A juvenile can be referred to the court after engaging in delinquent conduct or CINS (TJJD, 2012). The court can then decide to deal with the juvenile informally, further review the case, or charge him/her with delinquent behavior. It is important to note that juveniles are afforded the same legal rights as an adult when charged with a crime. In some cases, the court may decide to have the youth certified as an adult. In these instances, the juvenile is considered an adult for criminal purposes and will not be treated within the juvenile justice system.

Once a juvenile is adjudicated or convicted, several dispositions may occur: (a) a juvenile may be placed on probation; (b) the juvenile may be sent to the Texas Juvenile Justice Department with an indeterminate sentence, or (c) may be given a determinate sentence (TJJD, 2012). A juvenile who is on probation must be discharged by the time he/she turns 18, and a

juvenile sent to TTJD with indeterminate sentence must be discharged by the time he/she turns 19. A juvenile who had a determinate sentence could potentially be transferred to an adult prison depending on behavioral progress while in TJJD programs.

### **Juvenile Crime Rates**

Adolescents in juvenile detention centers are considered one of the most challenging populations to address in a multicultural society (Ameen & Lee, 2012). In 2008, approximately 81,000 adolescents were detained in correctional facilities across the United States with the average placement of about 68 days (Ameen & Lee, 2012). Of the young offenders, 85% were male, 40% were African Americans, 35% were Caucasians, 21% were Hispanics, and 71% were aged 15 to 18 years (Ameen & Lee, 2012). Of these juvenile offenses, 35% were personal offenses, 29 % were property offenses, and 23% were drug offenses (Ameen & Lee, 2012). Due to juveniles' delinquency and conduct problems, it had been assumed that young offenders have difficulty learning and acquiring new skills to better their lives (Koyama, 2012).

### **Crime Rates in Texas**

In the state of Texas, more than 100,000 arrests and referrals are made yearly to the TTJD with 1,500 to 2,000 of the arrests being serious or chronic. According to Parks (2013), in 2010, 116,305 arrests were made in the following categories: 21,788 violent, 26,398 property destruction, 13,349 drugs/alcohol, 18,051 curfew/runaway, 17,547 disorderly conduct, and 19,172 other types of offenses. In 2011, 98,805 juvenile arrests were made with the offense category being as follows: 18,605 violent offenses, 21,929 property destruction, 11,566 drug/alcohol, 15,220 curfew/runaway, 14,645 disorderly conduct, and 16,840 other.

## **Types of Offenses**

There are two categories of juvenile offenses: status offenses and criminal offenses. Status offenses are acts considered wrongful only when committed by a minor (Feldmann, 2014). They involve restrictions placed on minors, so that they may continue their regular activities such as attending school and avoiding drugs and/or alcohol. Status offenses vary from state to state but primarily focus on truancy, running away, violating curfew laws, or possessing alcohol or drugs (Godsoe, 2014). According to Arthur & Wuagh (2009), juveniles who engage in status offenses tend to come from broken homes, have unmet mental health and educational needs, and may have suffered from childhood trauma.

A crime, whether committed by an adult or juvenile, is classified according to the severity of the offense (Roberts, 2014). A felony is considered the most serious crime and can include property crime, assault, murder, sex offenses, and a possession of illicit substance or use (Roberts, 2014). Of the 2.2 million juveniles arrested each year, 92,300 are arrested for violent crimes, and 463,300 for nonviolent or property crimes. Individuals under 18 represent about 25% of the United States population and account for approximately 16% of all arrests (15% of male arrests and 20% of female arrests). Approximately 71% of all juvenile arrestees are male, and 68% of juvenile arrests are between 16 and 17 years old (Roberts, 2014).

Crimes are referred to as either violent or non-violent crimes. A violent crime involves the use of force or harming the body of another individual (Izzi, n.d.). Violent crimes include murder, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault (“U.S. Department of Justice,” 2015). Non-violent crimes do involve the use of any force or injury to another individual and usually involve property crime (Izzi, n.d.). Property crimes include burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson. Other offenses include simple assault, vandalism, weapons law violation, drug

abuse violation, driving under the influence, liquor-law violations, drunkenness, disorderly conduct, curfew, and loitering, and running away (“U.S. Department of Justice,” n.d.).

### **Risk Factors**

There is a substantially high recidivism rate among juvenile offenders (Feldmann 2014). Offending behavior is the result of complex interactions of risk and protective factors (Put, Creemers, & Hoeve, 2014). Juveniles have not reached psychological maturity and have difficulty regulating moods, impulses, and behaviors due to their developmental level (Lambie & Randell, 2013). Anatomic and functional changes continue to occur in the brain into early adulthood. Identifying juveniles who are likely to become chronic criminals is an important goal for our society, given that adolescents who are arrested before age 14 are three times more likely to become chronic offenders (Altucker, Bullis, Close, & Yovanoff, 2006).

The involvement of risky behavior increases as a child enters adolescence. The risk of being involved in delinquent behavior is three times higher in males than in females, and males are five times more likely than females to engage in criminal activities (Simoes, Matos, & Batista-Foguet, 2008; Feldmann, 2014; Loeber et al., 2002). A recent study by Feldmann (2014) examined the rate of recidivism for adolescents arrested in 2010 and identified factors that may explain juveniles’ reoffending behavior. Participants in Feldmann’s study included 337,182 juveniles of which 302,113 live in Corpus Christi. Data was collected using the Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument-Version 2 (MAYSI-2), which is a mandated inventory in the Texas Juvenile Probation system. Upon intake, juveniles are required to complete the assessment (Feldmann, 2014). Feldmann (2014) found that the model produced statistical significance in predicting recidivism. Statistically significant predictors found for reoffending behaviors on the MAYSI-2 subscales were as follows: (a) alcohol/drug use, (b) gang affiliation, (c) number of siblings, (d) age, (e) school type, and (f) legal guardians. Hispanic juveniles were 83% more

likely to reoffend as compared to non-Hispanics. Juveniles in high school were 69% more likely to reoffend than those in different grade levels. Juveniles who live with a guardian other than a parent have a 127% chance of reoffending (Feldmann, 2014).

Certain risk factors increase the chances of offending behavior. Risk factors include characteristics of the individual and social environment, including the family, peers, and community (Put et al., 2014; Feldmann, 2014). Adolescents are susceptible to peer influence, impulsivity, provocation, and stressful situations due to the influence of others, social rewards, and approval (Lambie & Randell, 2013).

Additional risk factors that increase offending behavior are high truancy, low academic achievement, parental stressors, running away, anti-social behavior, and living in a violent neighborhood (Put et al., 2014). Exposure to community violence increases the risk of behavioral, psychosocial, and academic problems (Jain, Buka, Subramanian, & Molnar, 2012). In a study using narrative therapy by Ikononomopoulos (2014) found that juveniles at a boot camp facility experienced common risk factors prior to entering treatment. Juveniles shared similar histories of mental health, academic achievement, sexual risk behaviors, teen pregnancy, and substance-abuse. Juveniles had negative expectations about themselves, a limited understanding of their strengths, and low self-esteem related to self-identity (Ikononomopoulos, 2014).

### **Substance Use**

Substance use is a factor related to offending behavior. Substance use offenses have doubled during the past 15 years (Caldwell, Silver, & Strada, 2010). Arrigona, Prescott, and Trusty (2002) analyzed social factors that may have characterized juvenile offenders. Approximately 1,595 juveniles were sampled based on their disposition (Arrigona et al., 2002).

Juveniles in this study were categorized as 1) high need (major substance abuse and sex offender), 2) high risk (school problems and criminogenic associations), and 3) low stability (family/ home stability and parental supervision). Arrigona et al. (2002) found that 31% of juveniles categorized as high need engaged in alcohol and drug use. Approximately 49% of juveniles' had criminogenic associations with gang membership as a factor that elicits substance use and had a negative impact on adolescents' behavior (Arrigona et al., 2002).

### **Family**

An adolescent's family may be one of the most influential and important factors in criminal behavior. Adolescents who come from a family with negative relationships and influence have been linked to poor adult health outcomes, risk of drug abuse, and risk of suicide (Bramlett & Radel, 2014). Arrigona et al. (2002) noted 33% of juveniles with an indicator of low stability were associated to a gang and/or had a household member with a history of gang activity and/or had a family member with a history of criminal activity or incarceration. Of the 33% of juveniles categorized as low stability, 20% had low family stability and 19 % had low parental supervision.

Bramlett & Radel (2014) examined findings from the ASPE Brief Research regarding adverse family experiences, health and well-being for children living with two biological parents, living with one parent, and living with no biological parents. Data was drawn from the 2011-2012 surveys conducted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP) and National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). A total of 95,677 interviews were completed by a parent or guardian in the household who was knowledgeable about the child's health (Bramlett & Radel, 2014). Comparisons were made of the number of biological parents living in the child's household and among subgroups of children without parental care (Bramlett & Radel, 2014).

Bramlett and Radel, (2014), found that 2.25 million, or 3.1%, of children lived in nonparental care, and amongst those children living in nonparental care, 15% were in foster care, 25.2% lived with their parents(s), 37.9% lived with grandparent(s), and approximately one-quarter were being raised by other relatives or nonrelatives. Children living with only one biological parent were 3 to 8 times as likely to have experienced neighborhood violence, caregiver abuse, caregiver incarceration, or have lived with a caregiver with a drug or mental health problem as compared to those living with two biological parents (Bramlett & Radel, 2014). Children with nonparental care were between 5 and 17 times more likely to experience the five adverse factors (Bramlett & Radel, 2014). Approximately 70% of children living with both biological parents did not experience the five adverse factors (Bramlett & Radel, 2014). Approximately 20% of juveniles in the Texas juvenile justice system did not have contact with either parent according to Arrigona et al. (2002).

Children in the foster care system are more likely to experience child abuse or maltreatment. Child maltreatment, including emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, is a variable associated with negative development outcomes along with future violent behavior (Atlucker et al., 2006). The U.S. National Library of Medicine defines child abuse as “doing something or failing to do something that results in harm to a child or puts a child at risk of harm” (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2013). Most children who have been abused suffer greater emotional rather than physical damage.

In 2007, 30% of children entering foster care had experienced parental alcohol or drug abuse as a contributing factor for entering the system, one half of the children in foster care had experienced caregiver violence or incarceration, and two-thirds had lived with someone who had an alcohol or drug problem (Bramlett & Radel, 2014). In 2008-2009, children living in foster



care or with a nonparental relative were more likely to have a history of child maltreatment, caregiver incarceration, caregiver drug and mental health issues, and economic deprivation (Bramlett & Radel, 2014).

Along with adolescents who do not have a stable caregiver, family criminality is another predictor for juvenile delinquency (Atlucker et al., 2006). Studies examined by Atlucker et al., (2006) found that the 8% of families with a family history of criminal behavior accounted for 43% of arrests. Adolescents with a parent or sibling criminality was a significant factor related to juvenile offending.

Child maltreatment, family criminality, and adolescents living without their biological parents had the potential for negative effects on children who are in the foster care system or living without biological parents experience negative academic achievement, behavior problems, and have a higher risk of juvenile delinquency (Atlucker et al., 2006).

## **Education**

Juvenile offenders share many social factors related to delinquency. Academic difficulties and failure in school have been the most prevalent factors with 74 % of juveniles having a history of enrollment in an alternative program, dropping out of school, or having a failing grade (Arrigona et al., 2002). Atlucker et al. (2006) noted that 30% to 50% of juvenile offenders have a disability. Out of the juvenile offenders, 40% have a learning disability. Lambie and Randell (2013) noted that over a third of juvenile offenders have special education needs and are below their chronological age level in terms of cognitive abilities such as reading, spelling, and comprehension.

## **Socio-Economic Factors**

Historically and theoretically low socioeconomic status had been associated with a broad spectrum of negative health outcomes, including higher rates of chronic illness, greater mortality and morbidity, and engagement in risky behavior (as cited by Hanson & Chen, 2007).

Individuals with low SES are at risk for poorer health due to the lack of health care, living conditions, lack of knowledge, and greater stress. There had been an increasing amount of research that does not support economic-circumstances factors of the household with socio-economic status having an indirect effect on juvenile delinquent behavior (Noyori-Corbett & Moon, 2010).

## **Mental Health**

A large proportion of incarcerated juveniles suffer from mental health problems such as depression; and suicidal ideations. According to the Center of Disease Control and Prevention (2013), mental health in children under the age of 18 is defined by the accomplishment of development and emotional milestones, healthy social development, and effective coping skills. Children who have a positive quality of life are said to be mentally healthy and can function well in school, at home, and in their communities. Mental disorders are described by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, (DSM) as serious deviations from anticipated cognition, social, and emotional development. Mental disorders may result from difficulties at home, with peers, with relationships, and in the community environment.

Behaviors are generally divided into two categories: externalizing and internalizing behaviors. Externalizing behaviors usually cause distress to others and are behaviors that can be seen or are obvious. Internalizing behaviors are inner feelings. Examples of internalizing disorders include depression and anxiety that includes symptoms experienced subjectively.

Symptoms may include worry, unhappiness, and loneliness. Internalizing adjustment problems are not always noticeable and present challenges related to diagnosis (Ikonomopoulos, 2014).

Research findings suggest high rates of mental health and substance abuse disorders and high mortality rates among those who spent time in correctional facilities as well as low vocational and educational attainment (Ryan, Abrams, & Huang, 2014). Mental health issues often arise with youth in the juvenile justice system due to the presence of substance abuse. Over sixty percent of juveniles involved in the criminal justice system meet the criteria for substance use according to Shufelt and Coccozza (2006). Female juvenile offenders display higher rates of both internalized and externalized problems such as depression, anxiety, mood disorders, and suicidal ideations (Feldmann, 2014).

Juvenile offenders are a disadvantaged population who often come from backgrounds of family dysfunction and maltreatment (Ou & Reynolds, 2010). Ryan and Testa (2005) found that adolescents who had been victims of violence and maltreatment had an increased rate of delinquent behavior. Youth violence and anger-related issues have heightened the awareness of mental health problems among the general population.

In the United States, it is estimated that a total of 13%-20% of children have a mental health disorder. Suicide was the second leading problem among adolescents whose ages ranged from 12-17 in 2010 (CDCP, 2013). Suicide may result from mental disorders and other compounding factors. Shufelt and Coccozza (2006) reported that 70% of adolescents in the juvenile justice system have a diagnosable mental disorder.

A study conducted by Whitted, Delavega, & Lennon-Dearing (2013) examined the social, emotional, and behavioral issues of 670 children, aged 3-11, who were involved in the juvenile justice system and/or welfare system. The researchers used the Strength and Weaknesses

Questionnaire to assess the children's mental health needs. The researchers found that 81% of children in the sample had a high prevalence rate of mental health problems. Out of the 670 children, 84% of them had conduct problems, 74% had hyperactive scores, and 50% had peer and emotional problems. Simoes et al. (2008) stated that males are at higher risk of developing attention-deficit and hyperactive disorders, learning disabilities, and delayed communication skills. The findings also suggested consistent results of gender differences with males scoring higher on conduct disorders, hyperactivity, and peer problems.

Children in association with a mental health disorder have a higher risk for themselves developing such a disorder as they enter adulthood. Many mental health problems are not identified during incarceration (Lambie & Randell, 2013). Juveniles who have mental health problems are at greater risk of harming themselves or others and have certain needs that must be addressed while incarcerated (Feldman, 2014). The frequency of emotional and behavioral problems among incarcerated juveniles is greater than that of the general population (Lambie & Randell, 2013).

Mental health disorders include behavioral problems. Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) had a high rate of occurrence in adolescents. Oppositional defiant disorder includes antisocial personality and conduct disorder (Ikonomopoulos, 2014). Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), major depression, and anxiety disorder are also associated with behavior disorders. The most common behaviors in which parents seek interventions include aggression, noncompliance, and oppositional behaviors (Ikonomopoulos, 2014).

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is one of the most commonly diagnosed behavioral disorders (Miller, 2012). As cited by Miller (2012), ADHD's role in juvenile

delinquent behavior is its relationship with conduct disorder. Children with ADHD show impaired attention and concentration, demonstrate disruptive behavior, have hyperactivity, demonstrate impulsive behavior, are easily frustrated, and have mood swings. Along with ADHD, children often show comorbid conduct disorder or oppositional defiant disorder and are at a greater risk for substance abuse and antisocial behavior (Miller, 2012). Children diagnosed as ADHD who do not have the hyperactivity component seem to be more passively inattentive. The combination of ADHD characteristics puts these children at a disadvantage in an academic environment (Miller, 2012).

Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) is a consistent behavioral pattern of temper tantrums, disobedience, hostility, and defiance toward authority figures (as cited by Miller, 2012). Children who exhibit ODD symptoms are described as stubborn, willful, and defiant by family and teachers. Children diagnosed with ODD may be perceived as bossy, intimidating, rarely taking responsibility for their disruptive behavior, and tending to externalize blame (Miller, 2012).

Conduct disorder (CD) is commonly associated with ADHD and is a frequent behavior where rights of others and societal norms or rules are violated (Miller, 2012). Individuals who exhibit symptoms of conduct disorder are aggressive toward other individuals and/or animals such as bullying or threatening other children, using weapons, starting fights, stealing, forcing sexual activity, and engaging in physical cruelty.

### **Protective Factors**

Protective factors decrease the probability of an adolescent engaging in risky behaviors that may affect their health (Put et al., 2014; Chew et al., 2010). Protective factors are categorized into two groups: external assets (positive experiences) and internal assets (positive traits adolescents need) (Chew et al., 2010). Assets include support, empowerment, boundaries,

commitment to learning, social life, and a positive self-image. Adolescents who lack protective factors or assets are approximately three times more likely to have health problems and develop unhealthy habits (Chew et al., 2013). When adolescents have positive assets, they are more likely to achieve higher grades in school, higher self-esteem, and have higher levels of coping skills.

A qualitative study by Unruh, Povenmire-Kirk, & Yamamoto (2009) examined the perceptions of adjudicated youth regarding the risk and protective factors associated within ecological domains. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on 51 juvenile offenders in order to understand the perceptions of the adjudicated youth. Juveniles who participated in this study were those who a) had left the facility, re-offended, and returned to the facility; b) adolescents who had not been released from the facility; and c) adolescents who had been placed on probation for a minimum of one year but had not been placed in long-term lock-up. Upon completion of the interviews and coding analyses, seven emerging themes were identified and are as follows: individual, family, peers, community, education, employment, and independent living.

### **Individual**

Unruh et al. (2009) found that adolescents identified their personal choices as an important protective factor with 43 (86%) identifying themselves as having a successful transition into adulthood with decreased criminal activity. Furthermore, 38 (76%) identified their “bad choices” as a barrier to succeeding in life. Unruh et al. (2009) noted that these adolescents described the relationship between family and peers as having a negative influence in their delinquent actions and antisocial behavior.

## **Family**

According to Unruh (2009), family was viewed as an important factor with 36 (72%) of the participants describing the need for a strong emotional support in order to be successful. Adolescents viewed positive family relationships as crucial factors in reducing negative behaviors. Contrary to having positive family support, 19 (37%) of adolescents reported that the lack of emotional support had a negative impact on their success in the developmental process (Unruh et al., 2009). Adolescents in this study identified their families as barriers to their success due to family members being involved in gangs, drugs, alcohol, and other crimes. Adolescents voiced a strong need to have a supportive and healthy place to live. According to Simoes et al., (2008), a family environment that had a strong attachment, good communication, democratic rules, and parental supervision is considered a protective environment. A family without rules, parental supervision, and having poor communication is considered to have a potential for delinquency development.

There are a limited number of studies on the effect of parental involvement on delinquent behavior (Noyori-Corbett & Moon, 2010). Parental involvement is an important part of adolescent development. Pearce, Jones, Schwab-Stone, and Ruchkin (2003) in their study that adolescents who had high levels of parental involvement had less conduct problems. Findings from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health Support noted that adolescents who feel a connection to adults and their community are less likely to engage in delinquent behavior (Chew et al., 2010).

## **Peers**

Peers have an influence on the wellbeing of adolescents as 24 (47%) of adolescents have identified peers as an important factor. Adolescents often have cited the importance of having

support from other peers, enjoying school, and positive social relationships. Adolescents also identified peers as a negative influence with 41 (87%) identifying barriers such as continued involvement with gangs, antisocial behavior, and substance abuse. Peer influence is important during adolescence. Adolescents who have supportive peers often will have good school performance and healthy relationships with teachers and classmates. Adolescents who have peers who exhibit negative behaviors are at risk for conduct problems (Simoes et al., 2008). Peers as well as the family appear to be major factors in an adolescent's development.

### **Community**

Almost half of participants, 24 (47%), in the Unruh study identified community as a factor in succeeding in life. Adolescents identified a range of amenities or activities they would like to see in their communities such as a gym, church, hunting, fishing, and reading (Unruh et al., 2009). Being involved in positive community activities decreases the chances of adolescents engaging in re-offending and antisocial behavior. Out of the 40 incarcerated adolescents, 30 reported that educational programs can have a positive influence (Unruh et al., 2009). Juvenile correction facilities offer opportunities for adolescents to complete high school and earn diplomas, begin college coursework, and enhance their academic skills (Unruh et al., 2009). Adolescents in this study reported to have a sense of accomplishment after participating in educational programs.

Adolescents in this study reported that employment was a positive factor. A total of 22 (44%) of participants perceived being employed as enhancing their ability to reach personal goals and being successful. Approximately a quarter of adolescents participating in this study identified a need to live independently in order to have a supportive environment and successful life (Unruh et al., 2009).



## **Treatment Programs**

Youth in the juvenile justice system present a set of complex needs in our society related to academics, mental health, and behavior (Cagnon & Barber, 2010). Due to background characteristics, juveniles require research-based services as well as specific interventions to enhance their overall wellbeing (Cagnon & Barber, 2010). Punishment and probation have been seen in the United States as a form of treatment for controlling criminal behavior (Gultekin & Gultekin, 2012). Such punishment includes boot camps, intensive probation supervision, home confinement, and electronic monitoring (Gultekin & Gultekin, 2012). There are a variety of treatment programs offered for youth who are court referred. The goal of many of these programs is to prevent juveniles from reoffending and to improve their quality of life.

Treatment that targets specific needs may prevent juveniles from recidivism. A study done by Lancaster, Balkin, Garcia, and Valarezo (2010) evaluated the effectiveness of a life-skills-oriented psychoeducational program on the mitigation of recidivism as an antecedent to recidivism. Participants in this consisted of 120 predominantly Latino adolescents who had been court referred to the counseling program. The seven-week psychoeducational program model used didactic presentations, application opportunities, and group process. Other life skill interventions used within the group included role playing, feedback, reinforcement, and education. Content of group sessions included feelings, triggers to anger, healthy coping skills, stress management, substance use, healthy communications, familial patterns, and building self-esteem (Lancaster et al., 2011). The program was developed according to the needs of the adolescents.

Data in this study were gathered ex post facto, and a posttest control group design was used to evaluate the differences between treatment and recidivism rates (Lancaster et al., 2011). A chi-square test of association was conducted to assess the relationship between court-referred

youth who received a community-based intervention and youth who did not (Lancaster et al., 2011). Results indicated a statistically significant effect in recidivism rates across the control and treatment groups (Lancaster et al., 2011). For adolescents who received counseling services, 60% did not reoffend during the two-year period of data collection, and only 20% of adolescents who reoffended and received counseling services did so within three months (Lancaster et al., 2011). For the control group, 46% of adolescents did not reoffend (Lancaster et al., 2011). Approximately 42% of the control group who reoffended did so within one year.

This study demonstrated that court-referred youth who were provided with counseling services were less likely to reoffend than those who did not. Counseling programs show a promise of decreasing reoffending behaviors amongst juveniles. Juveniles who are court referred and are sentenced to serve a certain amount of time are placed in boot camps. Treatment in boot camps differs from the treatment provided in community agencies.

### **Cognitive Behavior Therapy**

A primary treatment used by community agencies and mental health providers is cognitive behavioral therapy (Clark et al., 2002; Sanborn, 2011; Ikonopoulou, 2014). Along with cognitive behavior therapy (CBT), Cagnon and Barber (2010) found an effective evidence-based intervention used in youth secured facilities to be school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports (SWPBIS).

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), one of the fastest developing psychotherapies, postulates that cognitive change is important for treating psychological disorders (Cristea, 2013). CBT uses a skill-building approach to teach adaptive reasoning and response patterns in order to help clients alter their negative thinking and replace it with positive thoughts (Gangnon &

Barber, 2010). CBT therapists believe that clients' thoughts affect behavior as well as how they feel. Changing one's thoughts is believed to change one's behavior and effect.

Adolescents who receive CBT may experience an awareness of their thinking patterns, change, hope, and at times, emotional discomfort. A client who begins CBT will experience the clinician using an agenda during therapy. The therapist will often write the agenda on a board setting the goals for the session. The client is often assigned homework during therapy. The client may practice techniques such as thought stopping, shaping, and reinforcement (Corsini & Wedding, 2014). The therapist takes a teaching role at times, but needs to be able to demonstrate core counseling conditions in order to establish a relationship with the client. CBT can be used across cultures. Multicultural issues during therapy might include the counselor's insensitivity or lack of knowledgeable of the client's culture. According to Chao (2012), counselors who have a cultural awareness but lack knowledge could be culturally biased.

Several studies including meta-analyses support the effectiveness of CBT-based programs for improving the behavioral and mental health of adolescents (as cited by Cagnon & Barber, 2010).

### **School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SW-PBIS)**

The goal of school-wide positive behavior interventions is to decrease problem behavior in order to have an effective learning environment (Johnson, Wang, Gilinsky, He, Carpenter, Nelson & Scheuemann, 2013). Gangnon and Barber (2010) noted that SW-PBIS is a promising approach that addresses the needs of juveniles in the juvenile justice system and is currently being implemented in more than 286 alternative and juvenile correctional schools nationwide.

The SW-PBIS system includes proactive strategies for defining, teaching, and supporting appropriate behaviors to create a positive school environment ("SW-PBIS," n.d.). Positive

behavior support is a behaviorally based system used to enhance schools, families, and communities. The goal of SW-PBIS is to create a positive environment in the school, classroom, and with individual students.

SW-PBIS uses an interactive approach with four key elements that focus on a) outcomes, b) data, c) practices, and d) systems. Outcomes are evaluated with the use of academic and behavior goals set by students, families, and educators. Practices are the interventions and strategies used to achieve desired goals. Data includes the information used to identify the effect of interventions, status, and the need for change. Finally, systems are what supports the continuation of the practice and implementation of SW-PBIS (“SW-PBIS,” n.d.).

### **Boot Camp**

Juvenile boot camps also known as shock or intensive incarceration programs are designed to reduce recidivism by interrupting problem behaviors and to providing cost-effective sentencing alternatives (Gultekin & Gultekin, 2012). Boot camp programs were introduced in the 1980s and became popular as correctional sanctions (Meade & Stiener, 2010). Juveniles tend to be sentenced between 90 to 180 days although behavior and other factors may affect the length of their stay (Meade & Stiener, 2010; Gultekin & Gultekin, 2012). Juveniles who successfully complete the program are recognized at a graduation ceremony where family and friends attend (Meade & Stiener, 2010; Gultekin & Gultekin, 2012).

Boot camps have a military atmosphere in which juveniles participate in physical training, drills, ceremonies, courtesy training, and are exposed to strict discipline which is believed to change their behavior (Gultekin & Gultekin, 2012; Lutze, 2006). Behavior modification occurs through the use of immediate punishment of negative behavior and reinforcement of positive behavior. Juveniles who are detained in a boot camp are assigned to squads or platoons, housed in dormitories similar to those of military barracks, and wear

military-like uniforms (Meade & Stiener, 2010; Gultekin & Gultekin, 2012). Juveniles who do not comply with the program's rules are given punishment such as running, push-ups, or chores (Meade & Stiener, 2010). Some boot camps incorporate psycho-educational rehabilitative programs as substance abuse, anger management, along with group counseling (Meade & Stiener, 2010; Gultekin & Gultekin, 2012).

Boot camps function as a disposition for adjudicated juveniles. Adolescents who are sentenced to a boot camp are exposed to higher risk factors such as neighborhood crime, gang involvement, peer dysfunctional behaviors, parental abuse, domestic violence, trauma exposure, parental addiction problems, poverty, unstable home living, lack of school and community support, and racial and social discrimination that can cause them to experience cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dysregulation than their peers in the general population (Ameen & Lee, 2012; Ford & Hawke, 2012; Koyama, 2012; Lyons et al., 2001).

Although juvenile boot camps have long been established to discipline young offenders and facilitate their transition to the community, research indicates that boot camps were not effective in reducing the recidivism due to the emphasis on youth's weaknesses, the reinforcement of forced relationships between staff and juvenile, the disciplinary nature of facilities, and the lack of professional supervision. (Lutze, 2006; Ryon et al., 2013). Ameen and Lee (2012) reported that the recidivism rate of youth ranged between 30 percent and 80 percent, indicating the failure of the punitive system of juvenile boot camps. The military model of boot camps neither improved juveniles' situations nor made the community a safer place (Lutze, 2006). In response to the high rate of recidivism and the ineffective outcomes of boot camps to victims and society (Lutze, 2006; Ryon et al., 2013), asserted that juvenile boot camps had to change their policies and the structure of facilities from traditional military to a less restrictive

therapeutic setting by reducing the punitive environment, improving the interaction between staff and adolescents, engaging in needs assessment of adolescents, and balancing needs for control and support in facilities.

Although boot camps offer external control such as behavior, discipline, and physical activity, they lack emotional feedback that provides internal control. Without internal control, rehabilitating a juvenile is almost impossible (Gultekin & Gultekin, 2012). One of the recommended structural changes to juvenile boot camps was involving structured activities and treatment programs from community agencies and outside resources (Lutze, 2006). These programs focus primarily on the academic, career, and personal/social development of youth at detention centers (Ameen & Lee, 2012; Kohler & Reese, 2008; Lyons et al., 2001). While adolescents enjoy participating in treatment programs, the nature of boot camps seem to hinder their participation (Lutze, 2006). Some adolescents do not want to actively engage in group discussion due to their fear of acting inappropriately and being punished by guards or correction professionals at boot camps (Lutze, 2006). Even though selective participation in programs is not supported in boot camps, (Lutze, 2006; Ryon et al., 2013) recommended that adolescents should be encouraged to attend programs that they considered to be beneficial to their growth and were able to fully participate without the threatened feeling.

### **Empirical Assessment for Juveniles**

Assessing and evaluating juveniles in the justice system can help in implementing and developing new programs in order to enhance their lives. Rates of the number of psychiatric disorders within the juvenile justice system are significantly high. Intakes administered to juveniles can help determine whether or not they may require specific treatment. The Reynolds Adolescent Adjustment Inventory (RAASI) is an example of an assessment that may help counselors and individuals working with the adolescents identify some of the adolescents needs.

## **Reynolds Adolescent Adjustment Inventory (RAASI)**

The primary goal of the Reynolds Adolescent Adjustment Inventory is to measure four broad constructs of adolescent behavior: antisocial behavior (AB), anger control (AC), emotional distress (ED), and positive self (PS) (Reynolds, 2001). The RAASI provides a fast and simple way to screen for early signs of distress in adolescents by measuring internal and external symptoms (Reynolds, 2001). The RAASI provides indications of the clinical severity of important psychological adjustment problems. The RAASI may be useful in comparing and describing adjudicated juveniles to non-adjudicated juveniles (Lancaster et al., 2011).

The Anger Control (AC) scale includes eight items which assess short temper, arguing with adults, ignoring rules at home or school, and oppositional behavior. Adolescents who obtain a score of 70T or above demonstrate extensive anger management problems, contrariness, and argumentativeness with others, parents, and teachers (Reynolds, 2001).

The AB section of the RAASI includes eight items that evaluate a broad area of antisocial behaviors such as using drugs or alcohol, engaging in illegal behavior, breaking rules, having trouble at home and/or school, staying away from home, and other problematic behaviors. The AC scale includes eight items which assess short temper, arguing with adults, ignoring rules at home or school, and oppositional behavior.

The ED section includes ten items which assess feelings of excessive anxiety, worry, general distress, crying, somatic symptoms, and dysphoric mood. Adolescents who score at or above 70T on ED are likely to have serious problems with depression and anxiety (Reynolds, 2001). After analyzing the ED scale, only one of the cadets demonstrated a high level ED.

Finally, the PS scale includes six items which assess basic aspects of self-esteem and sociability such as low self-esteem, negative or minimum social interactions, a feeling that life is

not going well, and the lack of social support. The RAASI Positive Self (PS) characterization consists of six items that assesses aspects of self-concept, social inhibition, feelings of things not going well in one's life, experiencing limited social interaction and reinforcement (Reynolds, 2001). The PS scale items are worded positively but are reverse-scored, a low score PS<47T may be interpreted as showing a healthy self.

The RAASI is a 32-item self-report measure taken by paper and pencil (Reynolds, 2001). The test takes approximately five minutes to administer and is at a third-grade reading level (Reynolds, 2001). The RAASI uses a 3-point response format with items scored from never, almost never, or nearly all the time. The participants respond to the question that best describes how they have been feeling within the last six months (Reynolds, 2011). Sample questions included are "I felt that everything was ok in my life," "I had fun with friends," and "I felt lonely" (Reynolds, 2011).

### **Summary**

This chapter examined the nature of adolescents in the juvenile justice system, history of the juvenile justice system, theoretical models explaining juvenile delinquents' behavior, risk factors related to juvenile delinquency, and protective factors. The literature review provided a background and identified variables for ongoing research. The following chapter describes the methodology used in this study and an understanding of the lived experiences of adolescents at a juvenile justice boot camp facility. Results from the analysis are reported in Chapter IV, and implications and conclusions are presented in Chapter V.



## **Chapter III**

### **Research Design and Methodology**

This chapter focuses on the field research that was designed and implemented to address the primary purpose of the study. The following areas are emphasized: the research design, sample, role of the researcher, descriptions of participants, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures.

#### **Research Questions**

The overarching research question directing this inquiry was “What are the experiences of juvenile offenders who were detained in the juvenile justice system?”

The secondary research questions are as follows:

1. What is the juvenile’s history and background prior to detainment?
2. What are the experiences of juvenile offenders during detainment?
3. What are the future plans of juvenile offenders upon release from detainment?

#### **Research Design**

A qualitative phenomenology approach was used in this study in order to illuminate the lived experiences of the adolescents and to obtain an in-depth understanding of juveniles’ experiences and perceptions. Phenomenological research design provides an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of one’s experiences (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2014; Hunt, 2011). The phenomenon or the focus may be an emotion, relationship, a program, or a culture in which people describe things and experience them through their senses (Patton, 2002; Hunt, 2011). Qualitative methods tend to be used for less researched topics and to gather stories of the individuals being studied (Alldred, 1998, p. 148).

The research questions guiding the current study were designed to further understand the experiences of juvenile offenders and build upon existent literature. There has not been scant

qualitative research that focuses on lived experiences of adolescents in boot camp facilities. The voices of juvenile offenders need to be heard in order for providers to understand and gain valuable insight into the culture, struggles, goals, and barriers of this population.

### **Participants**

The primary investigator studied a sample of youth cadets ( $n = 10$ ) that were enrolled in a juvenile boot camp facility. All participants for the study were selected with the use of purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is suggested when subjects are intentionally chosen based on a variety of criteria resulting in information-rich cases where one can learn about the issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (Patton, 2002). The selection of participants was voluntary with the approval of the facility director. The cadets' estimated age ranges were from 15 to 17.

An informed consent statement and a letter of permission from the director of the juvenile boot camp facility authorized the researcher to use the facility for the study. The researcher provided the boot camp staff with information that explained the study. The letter of permission from the director of the juvenile boot camp allowed the researcher to contact legal guardians of potential participating cadets for consent as well as to request assent of the participating cadets. The legal guardians of the cadets who consented to the study filled out a consent form and permitted their adolescent to participate in study. Cadets were provided with written information, and those who gave assent participated in the study. There were no monetary incentives, and participants had the option to opt out from the study at any given time.

Participants were three female adolescents and seven male adolescents with a mean age of 16, all serving their own respective sentencing time at a juvenile boot camp facility. Participants' names were not used; rather, participants were assigned numbers to protect their identity.

## **Setting**

This study was conducted in the southwest region of the United States. All interviews were completed in the boot camp facility where cadets were detained. The interviews were conducted in an enclosed visiting area with a guard on site.

I met with cadets on Saturdays and Sundays from 2:00 pm until 5:00 pm. Cadets' visiting hours varied according to their level of progress in boot camp. Some cadets had visitation on Saturday, while others had visitation on Sunday. I met with cadets on the day they were allowed to have visitation. The duration of interviews was between 30-45 minutes. The meeting room for the interviews was equipped with a table and chairs.

## **Data Collection**

Data were collected through a variety of sources. Data sources included the Reynolds Adolescent Adjustment Inventory, a demographic sheet, an individual interview, and a focus group. Throughout the process, the researcher maintained a journal with personal observations and reactions.

### **Reynolds Adolescent Adjustment Inventory and Demographic Survey**

A time for face-to-face meetings was set with consent from the director of the Juvenile Justice Facility. During the face-to-face meeting, the primary investigator reviewed the assent form, including participant rights, and addressed any questions. Following the juveniles' assent, the primary investigator administered the RAASI and demographic survey. The demographic survey was used to provide detailed information for the results and included age, gender, and ethnicity.

The RAASI was scored by the primary investigator after leaving the facility. The RAASI scores were used as a data source to enhance the credibility of the interview findings. The

primary goal of the RAASI is to measure four broad constructs of adolescent behavior: antisocial behavior (AB), anger control (AC), emotional distress (ED), and positive self (PS) (Reynolds, 2001). The RAASI provides a fast and simple way to screen for early signs of distress in adolescents by measuring internal and external symptoms (Reynolds, 2001). The RAASI does not provide a diagnosis based on the DSM (Reynolds, 2001). Rather, it provides indications of the clinical severity of important psychological adjustment problems.

### **Individual Interviews**

A semi-structured interview was conducted (refer to Appendix D) a week after the RAASI and demographic survey were completed. The interviews lasted approximately between 30 to 45 minutes and were held in an enclosed visiting areas that looked similar to a classroom setting. A guard was present outside of the visiting area to ensure the safety of the primary investigator and juvenile. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by the primary investigator. Pseudonyms were used to identify each participant.

Once data collection was complete, I transcribed all audiotaped interviews. I transcribed all interviews by listening to the recording, replaying the recording, and rereading the transcript as the audio played. The recordings were played at a slower speed in order to capture accurate statements.

### **Focus Group**

A focus group was conducted after all participants' interviews were completed and the data was examined for emerging themes. The purpose of a focus group is to collect data in a social context where people can consider their own perspective amongst other people (Patton, 2002). During the focus group, I asked questions that had emerged from the initial individual interviews. I held two separate focus groups, one for females and one for males, segregated due

to the boot camp's regulations. The same questions were asked in both groups. The focus groups lasted approximately 45 minutes.

### **Data Analysis**

A variety of steps were taken to analyze and organize the data to understand participants' experiences. The data analysis included initial and axial coding. Detailed data organization was utilized to maintain an accurate audit trail. After member checking, I provided the transcripts to two outside analysts via email. Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality of participants.

The primary investigator and two outside analysts separately read and re-read the transcripts and used initial coding to develop preliminary ideas about themes. Initial coding is the basic unit of analysis (Patton, 2002). Once each analyst had completed his/her coding, a face to face meeting was scheduled. The primary investigator and two outside analysts met in a private room at the university. The outside analysts and primary investigator discussed coding among themselves and discussed emerging themes. Upon completion of initial review of coding, findings from the data guided the development of questions for the focus group discussion.

Once the focus group session was complete and transcribed, the primary investigator provided the transcription to the outside analysts. The outside analysts and primary investigator followed the same procedure of reading and re-reading all of the material, using initial coding to identify preliminary units of meaning.

### **Initial Coding**

Initial coding, also known as open coding, is designed to deconstruct qualitative data into discreet parts so that each part can be examined and compared for similarities or differences with other parts. Initial coding allows the researcher to remain open and reflect about the content of the data (Saldana, 2013). Once the transcription process was complete, I conducted initial

coding. In vivo and line-line coding were used to separate and label the data. In vivo coding is used to facilitate interpretations of terms from the participants and utilizes participants own language (Saldana, 2013). Line-by-line coding is a microanalysis of the corpus (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 57).

Line-by-line coding was used to break down data to the smallest units. Words and short phrases were chosen due to their significance in the contexts of the transcripts. These words were then transferred to my laptop and organized into similar units. This extensive process began by taking the word units and gathering similar units, grouping like word units into progressively larger units. Once units were constructed, they were given names that began to form themes. The themes and key words were compared and reevaluated. All of the data were carefully compared, examined, and reexamined throughout the initial coding process.

### **Axial Coding**

The second phase of analysis, axial coding, began by reviewing prior codes from the data and expounding the codes. The purpose of axial coding is to reassemble the data that were split during the initial coding in order to identify the dominant codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). During this phase of coding I reorganized and reduced the number of initial codes, removed redundant codes, and selected the best representative codes. I also related the categories to subcategories.

### **Data Organization**

Data organization was imperative. As the researcher, I used an audit trail to maintain the connection of original data to identified codes and themes. The RAASI, demographic sheet, and transcripts were all labeled with the number assigned to each participant. All of the documents were kept in a file cabinet in my home office. Each participant had a folder that included the

pertinent documents along with the parental consent and assent forms. Electronic versions of transcripts were stored on my personal computer as well as in the participant's folders. Printed versions of each transcript were used for analysis.

The units of data that were organized during initial coding were used to construct a larger meaning of the data. As a result of initial coding, the two outside analysts and I formatted and came up with labeled codes. The analysts also removed any codes that were redundant. First, we attempted to determine the adequacy of the codes by examining word units and their origins in the data. In this process we were able to accept, reject, or reevaluate initial codes. After reevaluating the codes, we compared and discussed final codes in which further agreement was required. During axial coding, we were forced to revisit and reevaluate coding units. Once axial codes were evaluated and checked for accuracy, descriptive units of data were selected to best illustrate a theme.

After initial coding, all codes and sub codes were typed out and organized. After the focus group interviews were transcribed and codes were organized, a new sheet of data was typed with codes. Both sheets with codes were revised and analyzed by the outside analysts and me. From these, evolving themes emerged. A final document with themes was written. Highlighting and bold letters were used to identify themes and codes. Data was organized into new documents to prevent errors and to organize the data more effectively.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness refers to the scientific worth and credibility of a qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to ensure trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide the following criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Details and an explanation of each criterion is discussed below.

**Credibility.** Credibility refers to demonstrating that the research utilized rigorous methods and the data is interpreted and represented truthfully by the researcher (Polit & Beck, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A number of methods were used during this study to assure rigor. For the purposes of this study, prolonged engagement, data triangulation, peer analysis, and member checking were carried out to establish credibility.

A number of measures were used to ensure credibility. During the RAASI intake, I made sure to provide the participants enough time and space to answer questions. I sat across from the participants and provided them with instructions. I was available for any questions that they may have had. I also kept a journal to reflect on the process and events and to write any notes that I needed. During the interviews, I used the same format for all of the participants. I used attentive and reflective listening skills as well as core counseling skills. Prolonged engagement with data may be seen through transcription of the individual interviews and focus groups by repetitive reading, coding, and reflection. Prolonged engagement is referred to spending an adequate amount of time in the field to learn and understand the phenomenon of interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged engagement was demonstrated by providing my background information and time frame in the setting in which the study was conducted.

A detailed researcher journal that included personal observations and reactions allowed for bracketing of the researcher's own experiences and biases. The journal also included notes about decisions made throughout the research and data analysis process which provided an audit trail.

Triangulation of data sources was used to compare and cross-check the information derived at different times and by different means (Patton, 2002). Triangulation is based on the premise that no single method can adequately solve the problem, and each method reveals



different aspects of empirical data (Patton, 2002). Data triangulation included the use of one-to-one interviews, focus groups, and the RAASI instrument.

Triangulation analysis is having two or more persons independently analyze the same qualitative data and compare their findings (Patton, 2002). The process of having additional analysts review and code the data helps ensure that the primary researcher's beliefs or biases do not remain implicit in the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Two outside data analysts independently coded transcripts of individual interviews. Once they arrived at initial themes, we met to discuss the results of independent analysis and arrived at consensus about initial themes. This process was followed during axial coding, as well, with the two outside data analysts independently reviewing initial themes and arriving at categories. Analyst triangulation was also used during the analyses of both the individual and focus group interviews.

Member checking was utilized to ensure the accuracy of reporting the participants' voices. Member checking is the process of participants validating and clarifying their responses (Hays & Wood, 2011). According to Creswell (2014), the verification process insures credibility of the study findings. After the individual interviews were transcribed, the primary investigator met with each participant individually. Each participant received a copy of the transcription in order to validate or clarify the transcripts for the purpose of member checking. During the focus group meeting, I provided the participants with the initial themes for them to consider.

**Transferability.** Transferability refers to demonstrating that the findings are applicable in other settings (Polit & Beck, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To assist with transferability, a thick description of the participants' experiences is provided. My intention was to allow the reader to make associations about usefulness and transferability of findings.

**Dependability and Conformability.** Dependability refers to the consistency and reliability of the data over time and similar conditions (Polit & Beck, 2012). Conformability refers to whether the data represent the participants' experiences and not the investigator's bias or viewpoints (Polit & Beck, 2012). Dependability was demonstrated by meeting and collaborating with the two outside coding analysts. Upon completion of transcribing and member checking I met with the two outside analysts on several occasions. If any changes to the name of codes or themes were needed, the two outside analysts' and I would discuss potential changes, arrived at consensus, and provided a rationale for the decision being made. A paper trail of decisions were kept in a file. Conformability was demonstrated by describing how conclusions and interpretations were established by providing direct examples from the data.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher in a qualitative study is to be the research instrument through which data are collected (De Vos, 2002). Quantitative and qualitative research is influenced by the researcher. However, in qualitative studies, this is more evident with the researcher being a more an integral part of the research process (Hunt, 2011). For the study, I was an observer and interpreter of data. During the study process I observed how participants responded to questions attending to the participants' eye contact, facial expressions, and body language, and by listening to their statements.

### **Lens of Researcher**

Credibility is dependent on the skill and competence of the person conducting the study (Saldana, 2013). Because researcher is the instrument through which the data are collected and analyzed, the researcher is required to reflect on, deal with, and report any potential sources of bias (Saldana, 2013). The researcher tried to make any biases explicit. Life experiences such as being considered an at-risk youth as well as learning at an early age what statistics had to say

about outcomes for me may have created some bias due to my personal feelings about those experiences. It was important that I bracket those experiences and beliefs throughout the research process.

I came to understand the meaning of personal choices through the journey. As I began my career as a counselor, my passion for working with individuals who need guidance and a positive influence, such as at-risk youth, developed. I remembered how I felt and needing certain resources that could have been beneficial to me when I was youth. When I began a leadership program in the summer of 2013 at the boot camp facility, I realized that I knew very little about other at-risk adolescent experiences. My passion for understanding others through their lenses grew. Through my personal and professional experiences, I confronted and examined biases that could potentially impose themselves on this study.

I have experience working in a mental health facility, primarily with adolescents. I also gained experience with juveniles at the juvenile detention boot camp by providing psychoeducational lessons, co-developing, and implementing a wellness program. Throughout my career as a counselor, I have attended and presented in conferences regarding at-risk youth and strategies for working with adolescents. My doctoral studies and counseling profession have equipped me with the knowledge and skills necessary to conduct this study. Prior to beginning this study, I gained access to the study setting during a leadership project that involved developing and implementing a wellness program for adolescents in the facility. I provided brief psychoeducational lessons for the cadets. My co-facilitator and I decided to conduct a formal research study, which ended in April, 2014. Throughout my experiences at the juvenile justice facility, my interest in and passion to understand adolescents' lived experiences continued to grow.

After being involved in a wellness research project, I decided to conduct my dissertation study in the same facility. I had built rapport with some of the volunteers who participated in the study as well as with the staff. My role throughout the study was to be present with the participants during the process of the interviews and data collection, remain open, and be sensitive.

As in any qualitative study, awareness of my own personal and professional experiences was critical. I worked on being open, objective, and remain neutral to my potential biases and responses to the data. My goal for the results of the study to be a true representation of participant reflections and to capture the essence of participant experiences, not my own. During the study I maintained a reflective journal wherein I bracketed my biases, reflected on my thoughts during the research procedures and about participants, and detailed my feelings and responses during the data collection and analysis processes. In addition, I frequently discussed my own thoughts and reactions with the two outside analysts and my dissertation chair.

### **Summary**

The research design of the current study was presented including the purpose, research questions, participants, qualitative phenomenological design, instrumentation, data collection, and data analyses procedures. Results from the analysis are reported in Chapter IV, and implications and conclusions are presented Chapter V.

## **Chapter IV: Results**

### **Introduction**

The primary research question of this study, “What are the experiences of juvenile offenders who were detained in the juvenile justice system,” considers the perceptions conveyed by juveniles. A secondary purpose of this study was to contribute to the current scholarly literature and to provide a deeper understanding of individuals in juvenile boot camps.

After analyzing data sources for themes and using the RAASI results to supplement these themes, five core themes and nine sub-themes were identified that characterized the lived experiences of the juveniles, including: (a) Compounding Offenses, (b) Relationships (c) Debilitating Factors (d) Lessons Learned, (e) and The Future. The sub-themes for relationships include: (a) family and peer influence, (b) the sub-themes for debilitating factors include: drugs, not living at home, teen pregnancy, and sexual abuse, (c) the sub-themes for lessons learned include: positive and negative experiences, (d) and the future has one sub-theme which is needs. Themes were arrived via analyses of the interviews and focus groups. Direct quotes were taken directly from the words of the juveniles without corrections made to the language used. First, the chapter begins with an introduction of the participants followed by a discussion of the five identified core themes and sub-themes. The chapter ends with the RAASI scores and examples of how it relates to each identified theme.

The demographic and RAASI information were gathered from the participants during the first meeting. I had built rapport with the majority of the participants prior to the study through conducting psycho-educational lessons on a weekly basis. I strove to make the meetings and interviews as comfortable as possible for the participants. Throughout my interactions with participants, I felt it was incumbent on me to share the stories of these adolescents in hopes of enabling readers to connect with them. The stories of the adolescents may help dispel stereotypes

associated with adolescents in the juvenile justice system and provide understanding of their lived experiences.

As a result of in-depth interviews, focus group interviews, and the use of a reflective journal, the following juvenile profiles emerged. The profiles represent a synopsis of their lives and reveal how their experiences have impacted them. Participants were assigned pseudonyms for protection and confidentiality.

Table 1

*Demographic Data*

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Offenses</b>
<b>Olga</b>	Female	16	Hispanic	Violation of probation & assault
<b>Tom</b>	Male	16	Hispanic	Graffiti, theft, domestic violence & run away
<b>Becky</b>	Female	17	Hispanic	Run away & domestic violence
<b>Ann</b>	Female	16	Hispanic	Running away, possession of drugs, & burglary of a habitation
<b>Joe</b>	Male	16	Hispanic	Violation of probation, invasion of a habitation, & other
				Violation of probation & drug use

<b>Bill</b>	Male	15	African American	Violation of probation, invasion of a habitation, & possession of a control substance
<b>Joel</b>	Male	15	Hispanic	Aggravated assault & theft
<b>Bob</b>	Male	17	Caucasian	Burglary of a building & destruction of a habitation
<b>Mario</b>	Male	17	Hispanic	Possession of drugs & assault
<b>Jerry</b>	Male	17	Hispanic	

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**Olga**

Olga was a 16-year-old Hispanic female. Olga continually smiled; whether it was from joy or nervousness was difficult to perceive. Later during the interview, I understood that she felt joy and passion in sharing her story. Olga had an interesting story that revealed many hardships and opportunities for reflection. Olga was in boot camp for violation of probation and assault. Her time at the juvenile justice system really appeared to have impacted her in a positive manner; she appreciated life, began a relationship with God, and had many goals after boot camp. She came from a family of divorced parents and had three siblings: one younger sister and two older brothers. Olga had a personal background with the juvenile system, gang affiliation, drug use, teen pregnancy, and family problems. She perceived boot camp as a learning experience to grow

as an individual. Even with all of the hardships Olga had endured, she appeared to have a strong sense of self-responsibility and determination.

### **Tom**

Tom was a 16-year-old Hispanic male who appeared to be very reserved and quiet. He continually looked down and would nod to answers during the interview. Tom had one brother, did not know his biological father, and was being raised by his grandparents. Tom came from a background of different offenses such as drugs, graffiti, theft, running away, and family violence. Tom valued support from his family and believed that the support provided would help him complete school, get a job, and get off probation. Tom had improved his relationship with his mom, had learned to manage his anger, and learned about discipline.

### **Becky**

Becky was a 17-year-old Hispanic female who had been in foster care and was adopted by her grandmother. Becky kept a blank facial expression throughout the interview except when she occasionally smiled. Her story was one with many challenges and obstacles which really made me aware of the barriers some of these adolescents encounter and the need for preventive care. Becky had history of mental health disorder diagnosis such as ADHD, bipolar disorder, and border line personality disorder, and had a history of being admitted to behavioral hospitals. Her background included a history of running away, domestic violence, drug use, negative family influence, and sexual abuse. Another factor that appeared to have an impact in her life was not having her parents around. Her experience in the boot camp had been a positive one. She had learned to appreciate her grandma and had strengthened the relationship between her father and herself. When Becky spoke of her father, her eyes would illuminate with joy. She had made friends at the boot camp, which is something she had never had. The boot camp had also made her feel more mature and confident.



**Ann**

Ann was a 16-year-old Hispanic female who was very motivated and had great self-reflection skills. Ann came from an abusive family, divorced parents, abusive relationship, teen pregnancy, and had been raped. Her background included running away a lot and the use of drugs, possession of drugs, and burglary of habitation while underneath the influence. She had experienced a great deal of grief in her life, had gained confidence during her time at boot camp, and had built her self-esteem. Part of her suffering was having had two miscarriages and being raped. Even with her offenses and difficult challenges, she had grown in the boot camp and had found God, great mentors, and personal growth. Ann had strong reflection skills and knew what she needed to do to be successful, and understood what her struggles were.

**Joe**

Joe was a 16-year-old Hispanic male who also took full responsibility for his life and realized that he was trying to grow up too fast. Joe appeared to be mature, was very kind, and treated me with great respect. He also seemed to regret some of his previous behavior. He was in boot camp for violation of probation for invading a habitation, and something he did not like to talk about. Joe did not place blame on anyone but himself. Being in boot camp really helped him plan his future upon being released. He realized that he is the only one who can prevent himself from achieving his goals.

**Bill**

Bill was a 15-year-old African American male who appeared happy and was placed in boot camp for truancy, violation of probation, and burglary. Bill responded to questions with very brief statements; or yes or no nods, and continually looked away. Bill appeared to look up to his brother and cousin and did not attend school because he wanted to spend time with them. Bill did not have much to share when asked about his experiences in the boot camp or barriers

that may prevent him from achieving his goals. He did mention he wanted to be in the NBA, and if he joined a sport in school, he would be more likely to attend. He felt neutral about his experience at the boot camp. Bill did not mention any helpful experiences.

### **Joel**

Joel was a 15-year-old Hispanic male who was polite and kept good eye contact throughout the interview. Joel had family struggles and had committed offenses due to trying to fit in with friends. Offenses that have brought him to boot camp include invasion of property, criminal mischief, possession of a controlled substance, and running from “cops.” When I asked him what he felt had an impact on his decisions, he mentioned friends, and as the interview proceeded, it appeared that lack of family support also had a role in influencing his behavior. He had been raised primarily by his father and stepmother and did not have a relationship with his mom. After completing the boot camp, Joel hoped to work and help around the house.

### **Bob**

Bob was a 17-year-old Caucasian male who was very respectful and openly shared his experiences with me. Bob did not live at home at the time of his arrest, and felt he had support from his mother. Bob did not have a father and looks up to his cousin. Boot camp had helped him refrain from using drugs. Some of his goals included getting a job in the oil field and completing school.

### **Mario**

Mario was a 16-year-old Hispanic male who continually smiled and enjoyed sharing his experience with me. Mario had gone into boot camp for burglary of a building and destruction of a habitation. Some of his behavior had come from trying to fit in with his friends. He had been

raised by his mom and had a girlfriend who is expecting his baby. His support and relationship with his girlfriend seems to be what really encourages him during his time at the boot camp. Mario's goals are to be an electrician. He feels that having support from his girlfriend and mom will help him achieve his goals.

### **Jerry**

Jerry was a 17-year-old Hispanic male who continually looked down during the interview and answered questions with nods and brief statements. Jerry was in boot camp for violation of probation, drug possession, and assault. Jerry appeared to have little family support; he stated his mom supports him, but his brother and sister do not. When I asked Jerry if maybe lack of family support was a factor, he simply nodded yes. His experience in boot camp had been neither beneficial nor positive. Jerry did not have any specific goals after boot camp.

### **Themes**

The following section is organized around the five core themes and sub-themes derived from the interview data with the RAASI instrument responses supplementing each theme. The five themes include compounding offenses, relationships, debilitating factors, lessons learned, and the future. Relationships has two sub-themes which include family and peer influence. Debilitating factors has four sub-themes which include drugs, not living at home, teen pregnancy, and sexual abuse. Lessons learned has two sub-themes which include positive and negative experiences. The future has one sub-theme which includes needs. In order to provide a brief history about the participants I begin with the theme, compounding offenses. The RAASI was used to supplement the core themes, and responses were integrated into each theme.

### **Compounding Offenses**

All participants discussed their offenses. Most had compounding offenses, and many of the offenses were similar across participants, however none had identical charges. The manner in

which participants stated their offenses was striking. While some shared details and others stated the offense only, all appeared to be accustomed to stating their charges. It was important for me to share their offenses and provide how the participants' stated their charges; it was if they were used to stating their charges. Every cadet began with brief short statements. A few of the cadets shared details of their offenses, but the majority of them simply stated what their offense was. Olga shared her story and how it led to her offense:

My case is because well, my mom and me got into a fight; I tried to stab her, and I was on probation, and I violated my probation. The first time I ran away; the second time I just leave home with my boyfriend. This last time I didn't know I was still in probation, and it was last my week on probation, then I had a warrant, and then they sent me to court.

A similar response about being on probation was made by Joe who stated, "Violation of probation for invading a habitation, and something I really don't like to recall." Mario also was charged with invading a habitat and stated that the reason he was in boot camp was for "burglary of a building and destruction of a habitat." Joel also had an offense for destruction of a habitat along with other charges:

I got locked up the first time 'cause a kid was breaking windows and I was with him. I ended up getting locked up for it, and they gave me a couple more chances, like ten chances. I ended up messing up on my last one because I didn't go to court. I did a lot of stuff; I invaded, criminal mischief, possession of a control substance, and running from cops.

Bill shared the offense substance use stating, "Cause I wasn't going to school, and I was smoking weed."

One of the common offenses indicated by several of the cadets was running away from home. Tom shared his offenses stating, “For graffiti, theft, and running away from home, and stealing a car, and family violence.” Similarly, Becky shared charges of “Mostly runaways and domestic violence.” Ann also had a history of running away along with other charges such as possession of drugs: “I am here for many reasons, but the main reason is running away a lot and the use of drugs, and possession of drugs, and burglary of a habitation while underneath the influence.” Violence and assault were also common offenses; Jerry responded to being in boot camp due to “possession and assault,” and Bob who had similar charges shared further details of his offense stating:

Assault with a deadly weapon. After we broke in, we went into his apartment complex and we broke into all the cars that we could; his homeboy was like “I am keeping all the stuff that we found,” and then we got into an argument saying we are going to split it three ways, and then I ended up trying to leave him, and then we ended up having conflict; he ended jumping on my car while I was driving, and I ended up shooting him in the shoulder.

The comments about offenses were important, especially with the operational definition of adjudicated juveniles in this study. Cadets were detained at the juvenile justice facility due to assault, drug possession, graffiti, running away, violation of probation, and burglary. It is difficult to separate offenses due to the compounding nature of them.

### **Relationships**

Relationships was a major theme identified in the data, including relationships with family, peers, and other non-family relationships. Virtually every participant identified at least one other person who was identified as a support or negative influence in his/her past, present, or future.

**Family.** Family played a major role in the lived experiences of participants. Some cadets reported good relationships with their parents, while others reported many challenges, including family violence. Whether viewed as positive, negative, or mixed, the family relationships were discussed by all of the participants. Broken families such as divorced parents, foster care, and not knowing or having a relationship with one of biological parent was a common topic. Along with broken families, cadets seem to be affected by the lack of money and lack of attention their parents gave to them. Ann shared, “My mom never had money. My dad was too lazy to give me money. He had a job but was too focused on his girlfriend, car, making his car look nice. He was never home.” Olga also had divorced parents and shared about her family stating:

My mom was always there for me through thick and thin. One thing my dad showed me you have to be open. The first time my mom and dad would come together, I thought ok I’m going to get out and we are going to be a family again ‘cause my parents are divorced. They started separating you know, they wouldn’t come with each other, like when they would come with each other they wouldn’t even see each other. It’s like I would have a conversation with one and another conversation with another person. It made me realize, and I started crying the other day because my family is shifting. It made feel like I didn’t know what to do; it made feel like my parents are growing apart; they are drifting, and I’m here thinking I have a perfect life. I have a little sister, she’s 7; I have an older brother, and my older brother, he’s gay and he went to college. My second older brother, he’s in a gang, well no, he is a dealer, a big dealer, and he had a lot of money, but one day he’s going to die, and everybody knows it.

Becky also shared her family history which included being in foster care, not having a relationship with her mom, and some violence that had occurred. Becky stated:

I was put in foster care when I was three, 'cause my sister lied to the police saying that my dad molested her, and after everything, she said she was just kidding, but nobody believed her because it was too late; everything was done. And I was in foster care when I was three, and I was in it for three months, and I would bang my head. I had a ball this huge; my eyes were purple and green. I have a picture of it but, and I'd bang my head everyday crying that I want my mom and dad, and well my grandma adopted me. She said I'd hide food, I guess because I didn't have enough food when I lived with my parents 'cause they were never home either. My mom was a stripper pole dancer, and my dad was, I don't know where he was. They were always out, and they would leave my nine year old sister to take care of me. Now she's like 20 something, but I don't talk to her. The last time I talked to her, she called CPS, saying that my dad was molesting me, and it never happened.

Several of the cadets also revealed not having a biological parent in their lives. Tom stated, "My mom, we're cool already; we didn't have a good communication. I don't even know my dad, so I didn't have a dad to talk to, but I talk to my grandpa. My grandpa is more like a dad figure," Bill also shared, "it is only mom; I'd put my school clothes on, and then I would go to my cousin's and stayed there and then go with my brother. I don't hang out with my friends; I just hang out with my brother and my cousin."

Although some of the cadets did not have a biological parent, they did mention their parent who was involved as one who was supportive. Joe appeared to blame himself and not his family stating, "My dad had always tried to take care of me and keep me out of trouble; he did all he could." Jerry also mentioned "My mom, she supports me; my brother and sister not really."

Bob had his mom's support, and it appeared that not having his father present had negatively affected him:

My mom is my support; I don't have a father. Like my cousin, he's like a role model to me because I haven't had a father figure, and he's "chillin," then like I just started living with him when I was on probation. Me and my cousin and his home boys were out jacking cars, breaking into cars. My cousin, the one I got in trouble with, he is doing "3." So I just use their mistakes they made, and I'll just learn from them, 'cause I'm not going to be able to make all of the mistakes in the world, and I am not going to live long enough for that; might as well learn from others.

Some of the cadets' biological parents were deceased, and others were in prison. Joel shared a history of his family stating, "My real mom, she's in prison; they told me she had me in prison, and stayed there until I was nine, and she got out and went back in. She's been there my whole life." Mario shared that he never met his father because he had died when he was little: "My dad, he died when I was small when I was 2. I've just been hanging around my mom."

Family violence was another experience mentioned by half of the cadets. Family violence was discussed as direct violent behavior from a cadet to a family member or a family member to the cadet. "Family violence," was also an offense that caused some cadets like Tom to be in boot camp. Some of the cadets' violent experiences included the use of a deadly weapon. Olga stated, "My mom and me got into a fight; I tried to stab her, and I was on probation." A similar act of violence made by the cadet to a parent/guardian was by Becky; she shared, "I used to abuse my grandma physically. It makes me sad, then I don't know, right before you came in here, I was just thinking about how I picked up a chair, hit her with it, and how I kicked her into the wall,



how I don't know, I wanted to cry. I feel so bad." Other cadets' spoke about their parents being violent to them. Ann stated:

My mom used to be real abusive when I was little. She was stressed cause of my dad. When she was stressed, she would spank us. She would take it out of hand and beat me real bad one day, and they took me away from her, and I moved with my dad. My dad had to get custody of me, and they had to do classes and stuff before she could see me. I remember I went home, and my dad didn't even know. He never paid attention to me. He worked all day; he would go from 8 am until 4 in the afternoon to midnight. At the time, we had finished the classes, and my mom was able to get custody of me, but I was so used to my dad letting me do whatever that I didn't want to go back home. I love my mom to death because my dad hit my mom and I hated my dad; I never wanted to move with him, but I had to. I never opened up to him. We argued constantly. They weren't there for me; I didn't have the support I wanted. My mom was there, but not like I wanted her to be.

Family violence included violence with siblings. Mario shared:

I am a figure to my brother, but I won't hit my mom. Like I'll push him back and be like "what the heck are you doing?" He wants to come swinging at me; I am not going to hit him back; I am just going to bear hug him down until he calms down and tell him that.

My brother gets crazy when he fights. I fought my brother so many times, it's not even funny.

The cadets not only shared their family experiences, but I was also able to see the impact they had on them through their body language. The females were able to express their emotions more freely and share the pain that they felt not having both parents living together or the impact of not having a biological parent present. When the males spoke about their parents or families, it

was different. For a few of them, their body language spoke louder than their words. For example, when some of the males spoke about not knowing their biological father or mother, they would look down and never make eye contact. The males would also squirm in their seats, almost as if they felt uncomfortable sharing their feeling about their situation.

**Peer Influence.** Along with family influence and relationships, all except Jerry spoke about their experiences with friends or lack of friends. Some experiences included being with their friends at the time they committed an offense, or how they felt pressured by friends into things. A common statement made by the participants was that they had friends which who considered to be the “wrong crowd.” For instance, Joel stated, “Friends, yeah just friends, hanging out with the wrong crowd.” Joe also shared his friends’ support but added that he wanted to be independent stating, “Well at the time all I thought I wanted to do was what I wanted to. I wanted to be a grown up. I had the mind set of I can live on my own and I had friends that would help me out.” Bob shared how he hung out with the wrong crowd: “I hang out with gang members, and my mom never liked any of my friends, and I can understand now why.”

Peer pressure was evident; Mario shared how his friends influenced his behavior when he stated:

I thought I was cool, I was with my friends, hanging around with my friends. They’d say break into this, break into that. I was like “nah, I don’t feel like it,” and when they leave, I’m like I am bored. I might as well go do it then, and I broke into that building.

A similar statement was made by Olga:

I used to go around asking for advice to my friends usually smoking and stuff. When I get out its kind of hard knowing that you came in because of this, and you know it’s wrong,

and you have to avoid those people; you know what I mean? Like when you get in trouble, you can just chill with friends. I admit some people I shouldn't have hung out with.

Some participants indicated they sought out friends because of lack of relationships at home. For instance, Ann indicated that:

I remember I went home, and my dad didn't even know. He never paid attention to me. He worked all day he would go from 8 am until 4 in the afternoon, to midnight. I had nothing to do but hang around with the wrong crowd. I wanted attention, and they paid attention to me. It felt good to have friends, and it felt good to hang out with the cool crowd. They're (friends) parents loved me. They used to call me their daughter 'cause I was always the shortest and youngest one. They'd used to call me "little X." I think I started hanging around with the same crowd, and I started learning that, yeah I am girly, but I can be hard at the same time. I started fighting, and my parents were like "what are you doing like where have been you been," and I'd be like "I am do this or doing that." They never really got after me.

Two of the cadets mentioned not having friends; Becky stated, "I don't have friends. I was bullied a lot, but now I am the bully; I've been bullied all of my life. That's why I said I have no friends." Similarly Bill made a comment during the interview stating, "I don't hang out with friends."

Something that all of the cadets had in common was socializing with the "wrong crowd." Some of the cadets had friends who were in gangs, while others simply were trying to impress their friends and be a part of something else. Becky and Ann had a similar experience of being bullied. Statements related to their friends were very brief and short for the majority of the cadets.

## **Debilitating Factors**

Debilitating factors was also a theme that emerged from the data. Debilitating can be defined as something that takes the energy out of you or makes you weak (“Debilitating,” 2013). Participants in the study experienced debilitating factors during and before entering the boot camp such as drugs, emotional factors, not living at home, sexual abuse and teen pregnancy.

**Drugs.** Drugs were mentioned by all participants with the exception of one, Mario, who indicated he did not use drugs or drink. As previously shown, several of the cadets had drug charges, while four other cadets’ being under the influence of drugs had negatively affected them. Bob was a participant who “was bad on drugs,” during the time he committed a crime. Becky stated she would hit her grandmother while under the influence of drugs: “I was on drugs, and if she did something, I didn’t like, I would just hit her.”

Having a family history of drug use, selling drugs, or being around peers who abused drugs was discussed by several participants. Becky stated, “My dad wasn’t really around because he was on drugs too, but he stopped doing drugs while I’ve been in here, and he had a job and kept the job so far. He is actually home; he wasn’t home before. He was always with his friends drinking or smoking stuff.” Tom shared how peers may have influenced him into abusing drugs:

You start seeing the way people are like the way people do drugs. I can tell like who is bad and good; I don’t know like I would just do it myself, like do whatever I want; after a while, I kept doing it, and after a while I didn’t feel like I was doing anything bad.

Olga shared her experience with drugs and her family history about drugs:

I used to sell drugs; I wouldn’t do drugs, I would sell them. Well, I used to smoke weed, but I wouldn’t do bars, crack, or cocaine. I used to smoke weed which I regret because I learned from it. I had another brother; he died. He was almost 19. I am 17; I am almost

18. He passed away because he used to sell drugs, and then they shot him, and they couldn't save him. They shot him because they set him up. He was a dealer, a big dealer.

Ann was explicit about her experience with how and when she began using drugs:

I smoked weed until 7th grade. My second year of 7th grade, I finally got caught with possession of marijuana and possession of yellow 'jadar's' aka bars. I had the distribution amount. Of course I was selling and distributing. It all started in 6th grade; it was little. Once I got into 7th grade, it started getting bigger and bigger, and it finally caught up to me 'cause...I remember I smelled, and my eyes were red, and one of the girls was like 'spray this on you' and gave me some gum. I was like 'what is this feeling,' and she was like 'you are high,' and she was like 'have you ever had weed?' And I was like 'no, but that's what my brother did,' but that's what big people do; the drugs pushed my family away; the drugs got my self-esteem down...I am here for many reasons, but the main reason is running away a lot and the use of drugs, and possession of drugs, and burglary of a habitation while underneath the influence. I think I would've never gotten into drugs if it wasn't because of the school that I transferred to...I got put on probation for getting caught with drugs while I was at school. He (boyfriend) sold drugs of course, and I thought I was in love at the time but I wasn't.

**Not Living at Home.** Although running away is considered a crime, not living at home appeared to be a debilitating factor for the cadets. Many of the decisions they made were during the time they were not living at home. The majority of the cadets did not feel they were running away and simply wanted to be with friends or somewhere else. Joel stated, "Well I wouldn't really stay at home; I'd go home and leave, and they would get mad, and sometimes they

wouldn't let me go back and sometimes they will." It became evident that the cadets wanted to be and feel independent. Tom shared:

I guess I just hit that stage early where you just want to leave home and just be alone all the time, but I was just too young at the time. To me it wasn't running away, but my mom, like I'd leave, and like I wouldn't come home, and she would get mad; I would come and get clothes every day, but I wouldn't stay, and I wouldn't stay home for no longer than 4 hours, and she would get mad and report me as a runaway.

Becky shared her experience with running away when she stated:

I would run away usually for dumb reasons like boys, and one time she tried putting me in Bay-View, and I didn't want to go there, and I ripped off my ankle monitor and just went on the run, but bad things happened to me when I was on the run; I learned my lesson though.

Some cadets believed they could not go back home after running away because of the consequences they would face. Olga stated, "I wasn't supposed to come to boot camp, but my parents didn't want to take me home, and they sent me to boot camp. So I ended up in boot camp." Ann thought she could not go back home because she was pregnant: "Once I ran away, they found out. I told them 'I'm pregnant and I can't go home,' and my mom told my dad and my dad flipped out. I was like 'I definitely can't go home now 'cause he is mad.'" Bob shared how not living at home had negatively impacted him. He stated:

I got off probation; I started living with him, and then I don't know; his wife had gotten 11 years, and he started doing bars bad, and then he just, I guess I got peer pressured into doing bars one day, and then I just wanted more. I lived with her when they put me on an ankle monitor, so I lived with her for the whole nine months, and then I stayed with her

before I moved in with my cousin; the whole nine months I wasn't on drugs, it was ok; I don't know why I didn't want to live with her; she's cool.

Not living at home often led to a negative impact in the participants' lives. For some of the cadets, not living at home led them to use drugs, and staying out late, or had other damaging consequences.

**Teen Pregnancy.** Another debilitating factor mentioned by two of the three female participants was being pregnant and losing their babies. Not only was teen pregnancy hard for them, but going through the loss of a miscarriage was even more devastating. Olga shared:

When I was pregnant, I found out he was having sex with some girl; I felt like everything fell apart, and I didn't have the kid or anything. I lost my kid when I was 6 months pregnant. I got pushed down the stairs by that girl, and I lost my baby.

A similar story was shared by Ann. She stated:

I got pregnant at the age of 13, and I actually lost the baby. I had lost the baby after a while, and I got real depressed because he (boyfriend) came home drunk one time. I was stressed out, and we were fighting; he didn't touch me or hit me or anything. I was 5 months about to be 6, and I lost it. I had gotten pregnant again. This time, I was determined to make sure I kept the baby, but of course, because when I was pregnant, I didn't find out until I was 3 months pregnant. I didn't want a baby; I lost it once, and I didn't want it again, so I went to the clinic.

Mario shared he would be a father soon, "I am having a kid, it's a boy," and he appeared to be very happy. He realized he had to work in order to support his girlfriend. Teen pregnancy was something difficult that the female cadets had experienced. However, the male cadet appeared to full of joy when he spoke about his son.

**Sexual Abuse.** The third debilitating factor that emerged came from data from the females. Two of the three females in the boot camp experienced sexual abuse, which impacted them deeply. Becky shared “I’ve been raped 3 times. The third time was the worst.” A different story shared by Ann was also related to sexual abuse. Ann stated:

I went to my first party, and they put something in my drink, and I got raped by boys and girls. They took advantage of me; they videotaped it and put it online and everything. I turned myself in because I was embarrassed, and who wants a girl that was raped? I got real depressed about it; it happened a month before I came to boot camp; I was in detention, and they were like “we are sending you to boot camp.” When they sent me, I was real sad; I’m still sad.

### **Lessons Learned**

The final theme is lessons learned. Participants discussed lessons they learned during boot camp, including those that were positive and those that were negative.

**Positive Experiences.** The majority of the cadets, with the exception of Bill, spoke about their experience in the boot camp as a good one. When I asked the cadets about beneficial experiences, many of the cadets have learned to manage their emotions and have self-discipline through the programs offered in boot camp. Cadets shared their beneficial experiences, while others made short brief statements when responding to the question “Tell me about any experiences that you believe have been beneficial to you during your stay.”

Having a schedule appeared to be helpful for Olga: “From here I learned you have to have a schedule; like I’m not saying that’s how your life had to be, but you have to take it one step at time.” Along with having a schedule, several of the cadets mentioned they have learned to control their anger or emotions through the programs offered in the boot camp. Joel simply stated



that “anger management class,” was the only positive experience. Tom appeared to agree with the statement stating,

My anger management, Mr. so and so had helped me out a lot; he always helps me get calm. Like I can be mad; I can just chill there and talk to him, and then I can just forget about everything, drugs and alcohol; they’re helping me you know, like focus on my cues, and focus on how not use; like how to avoid people that are using.

A similar response of being able to control emotions was made by Ann: “I learned to control myself. I learned to not cry in front of people to give them the satisfaction. I learned to control my anger. I went through regressions in this program due to anger.”

Jerry had a similar experience, except he did not learn to control his anger through the anger management classes; rather he shared that being restrained is what had made him change: “my temper, because whenever they’d tell me to do something, and I wouldn’t do it, they would restrain me.”

Two of the cadets felt their entire experience at the boot camp was positive. Bob shared that anger management, along with the DNA class, was beneficial:

The DNA, drug and alcohol class, they help us find ways to, like, alternatives to not to use, how to keep busy, how to deal with our anger, so those help. Everything is helpful to me; like I don’t know how other people take it, but I take it like they are just helping me become a better person, so when I go back in the society, I am not out robbing, out doing drugs; I am not out shooting people. I don’t know; everything is good here. They help us find ways like alternatives to not use, how to keep busy, how to deal with our anger. I am not out robbing, or out doing drugs.

Mario shared how being in boot camp had helped him become a better person stating his experience as follows:

Just pretty positive, because out there, I wasn't getting any help at all; I was doing what I wanted to do. Up in here, they teach you how to become a man; if it's a girl, they teach you how to become a woman, like how to stay straight in life, like what to do. Many of the programs offered and staff have helped these cadets in a positive manner. When I get mad, I tell him "man I'm mad sir, I am heated up!" And he tells me to just think about your girl, and I asked "what do you mean?" And he said "yeah, just think about your girl; you know she's out there waiting for you with your son, your kid." And I was like "yeah." And he said "think about the little Caesar's pizza," and I'm like "man, come on; you gotta be kidding me!"

Another element important to mention was the mentoring relationships cadets received from counseling and staff working in the boot camp. Some cadets appeared to be positively influenced by their mentors. Becky stated, "I see a counselor, um she helps me. I am very scatter brained, and she's very on point because she's like 'we are not talking about this, we're talking about this.'" Ann provided her experience with one of the staff members she views as a mentor:

I have this one mentor that had been my mentor since day one, since I got on probation and detention. She's been my mentor. This is a great program because you come in, and they don't call you by your name; they call you Cadet X, because you are going to start off as a new person, and I've learned manners here: "Sir, yes sir! No ma'am." Before I wouldn't respect people like my parents. There's some staff that treat us bad here, but there is some staff that are actually here to help us. Even though they treat us bad, they treat us bad for a reason cause if we can handle it in here, we can handle it out there. I've

seen the way I am. I notice that I used to be a liar, conniving, used to be manipulative. I used to get away with a lot of things. I used to play the system a lot, and now I don't care to do that.

A similar statement of having good mentors was also made by Mario. He shared:

Yeah, most DIs are like good mentors. If you start going off on them, you get restraint by another DI that didn't care about you; he comes in and is like "alright hold on, hold on, take a break" and takes us out with the handcuff's and stuff; he takes us out and takes them off, and is like "what did I tell you?" We explain it to him. Then he tells us "go back up in there, do what you gotta do, and I'll call you up for 'choa.'" Chao is detail set up choa, or I call you to "go do police call;" he'll do all that.

Finally, Olga appeared to feel empowered by the advice provided by one of the staff members. Olga shared:

Lately it's been only my support; Lieutenant X told me even if they are drifting, you can't depend on that person or any situation 'cause life is life, and life doesn't stop, and you have to hit hard to go to soft. It made me feel like if I go out there and your mom is a bad influence for you, well my parents aren't. If you have a mom, and she's doing bad, you are going to do bad in her house, if she's like always talking mess to you. Don't let her stop you. Yeah she's your mom, but you can't let nobody stop you from your future.

God was mentioned as a positive experience by some of the cadets. Becky stated, "its' brought me closer to God," They mention that they met God during boot camp when a group of volunteers provided a church retreat for them, or that their faith was what had kept them going and made them stronger. Olga shared how she began to believe in God stating:

I didn't believe in God. I used to worship the devil. I came in here, and like I was at first maybe he does exist, and then every time they would talk about him, I don't know. There was this girl in here that her family is bad, the same thing as me. The same thing I was into, she was too. She was always reading the bible; she was so into it. I learned that it would give me so much peace inside. One time I asked God, "dude I'm losing faith I need help."

Ann also shared how believing in God made her stronger and how He had positively influenced her life; she stated:

Now if you have God on your mind, you can do a lot of things with God when you ask for forgiveness and pray. I got sick recently, and I was in the hospital. I got an infection on my bones, and I went to the hospital; as they were admitting me, the kids were there, the brother and the sister, and like I was freaking out; I never thought I would see them. I looked at them, and I smiled, and they looked at me, and I was like I forgive you all.

They had me on monitors 'cause I was real sick. I told them "God told me to forgive you all, and I forgive you all."

Having reported on cadets' positive experiences about lessons learned; I want to report their negative experiences during their time at the boot camp.

**Negative Experiences.** A few of the cadets spoke about negative experiences and/or shared that the entire experience had been unhelpful. Food and staff were mentioned by several cadets. One common statement made about staff was when staff yelled at them, Joel shared "Whenever they are projecting their voice at you," and similarly, Tom stated, "Getting screamed at; they are doing it from behind your ears and they try to restrain you just stand 'POA' or whatever, and you just do what you gotta do. Basically they try to bring stuff up like, your family

don't care they say negative things." Becky shared how her experiences with staff had been negative along with the common topic of food. Becky stated "Eat more food. This place had actually made me angrier. I'm not a violent person, but these couple of days I have become very hostile attacking staff, and I already have a felony here. My first felony was because I attacked a staff member. I don't know, a couple of days ago, I grabbed a staff member's hair, and I don't know; I've been so violent."

Olga was one of the cadets who provided greater details of what she found unhelpful in boot camp stating:

Professionally, our food is disgusting; there is plastic in it at times, hair in at times, and staff. I feel like the system expects a lot from us, but when we stand up for our rights, they don't even care. I wrote a grievance, and the staff told me that I can role it up, and that they weren't going to do anything about it, and it was a joke. The counselor, now I trust her, but like DNA and the other people that come, we can't trust them; we can't trust everyone in the world. You have to learn how to trust. How do you expect for me to tell you my intimate stuff when in 8 days, 8 months, I don't know when it's going to happen; you are going to leave.

Several of the cadets mentioned other peers in the boot camp have had a negative influence on them. Ann stated, "I've been up and down in this program. I was bullied in this program for a long time; I still am, but I learned not to let it bother me." Other cadets shared that observing their peers get into trouble also had a negative effect. Joe stated, "A lot of the times, cadets. I can't say I'm the perfect one here, but I mean in here, there are some cadets wanting to actually be locked up. Sometimes for the ones they want to get out, they'll end up taking them down with them," and Bob simply stated, "Seeing people mess up."

There were very similar reactions by the cadets and their negative experiences in boot camp. Bill mentioned that nothing had been helpful and only going home would help him. Peers, staff, and food were recurring topics of negative experiences.

### **The Future**

Participants shared their thoughts about the future and plans upon and during completion of the program. They discussed their future needs and potential barriers they believed would influence their success. When I asked cadets what their goals were, the common topics included finishing school, staying off of probation, and getting a job. Tom stated, “Stay in school, get a job, try to get off probation. That’s basically what I am trying to do right now.” A similar response was made by Joe, “Getting off probation, finishing high school, and going to college.”

Ann mentioned she also wanted to finish school but included that she would like to stay home most of the time: “I’m just going to try and stay home most of the time and keep myself busy, and I’m going to start my first job. I’m nervous ‘cause I’ve never had a job before.” Joel responded similarly stating he wanted to, “Get a job when I turn 16, stay in school, and just help out around the house.” Olga was one who had many dreams and really hoped to make a difference stating:

When I get out, I’m not going to find a job like this; I am already making a list of places I’m going to volunteer, like Oakland. I want to keep myself busy in what I’m working on like help handicapped people, veterinarians, and hospitals. I want to know all types of people. I used to laugh at hobos, but now I want to know how they feel. I have to be attending church because I can’t do it without it. I learned you have to have a schedule, like I’m not saying that’s how your life had to be, but you have to take it one step at time. When I get out, I am already planning I’m dedicating myself to a dog; you know how

hard that is for me. The first thing is to grow a plant; the second thing is to get a new puppy. A fresh start, and I want to grow it and train it. I want to come home and that's my puppy, my buddy. That's who I'm going to dedicate myself to and walk in the morning. I want to keep myself busy in what I'm working on.

Getting a job with a family member was also discussed by some of the cadets. Bob shared his plans stating, "After I finish school, I am going to get a job with my mom's boyfriend in the oil field," while Jerry shared, "I want to go to school and go to work with my dad." Bill was one who was hesitant on his goals and towards the end of the interview he stated, "I want to go to college, and I want to be signed by Nike, and get drafted by the NBA." Mario who was having a baby hopes to get married but realizes he needed a job stating, "First I have to get a job; that's what I gotta get, and then marry her (girlfriend)."

The connection between the cadets and their goals was important to note. The passages demonstrate their brief statements of their future goals. It was evident that the majority of them did not really know what type of job they wanted but did mention working.

**Needs.** It was evident that the cadets had a clear idea of what they needed during and after being in boot camp in order to be successful and remain on the right path. Many of the cadets spoke about their struggles with family and friends indicated earlier, but cadets spoke about having support from their families and/or friends as being a factor that would help them succeed as well as prevent them from succeeding. Relational support or returning to old influences such as family, friends, counselors, and/or mentors were mentioned by the majority of the cadets. For instance, Tom stated, "Just getting support from my brother and my family" after being asked about barriers he perceived as important. A similar response was made by Joel:

“My parent’s support, and them helping me stay on the right track,” and Becky stated, “I just wish I could see my family more.”

While some cadets mentioned their parents, some cadets mentioned other individuals who they believed would help them achieve their goals. Ann shared, “Family support, counseling, and sticking to my mentors,” and Bob also shared direct family but included her sister’s boyfriend stating, “Well my sister’s boyfriend is always like ‘why are you hanging out with them; you should hang out with me; go to the gym or something,’ so that will help.”

Counseling, but more specifically, individual counseling, was a response given by cadets after being asked, “Tell me about anything that could have been different that would have helped you in completing the program.” Joel responded, “If counseling was one-on-one, it would be helpful,” and Olga responded:

I don’t know how we get counseling. The counselor is trying to change stuff for the good. They say DNA is counseling; you talk about drugs and alcohol, but you don’t talk about your life, but that may not be what you have a problem with. They tried to do a group of people that have been raped, and I don’t feel that was appropriate; you should’ve pulled out one person at a time because how do you expect people to tell their story in front of everybody? What if they tell? You never know what can come. After a certain amount of time, you can put them in a group.

**Barriers.** Self-responsibility, staying away from old peers, and being busy were other factors that cadets mentioned as being important and potential barriers for their success. Bob shared that old friends would be barriers stating, “Gangs, and if I hang out with the same people,” while other cadets made statements of their personal behavior such as Tom stated, “If I wouldn’t act up.” Joe had a similar response stating, “It would be me. I have to tell myself that I



want to change. I have to stick to my guts. If I have to tell him we can't be friends, then that's what I'll have to do." Olga shared a deeper reflection of self-responsibility and self-reflection:

At first I was telling my mom I wanted to move and start new. It made me realize I can go out and say no I can do it. I learned you have to have a schedule; like I'm not saying that's how your life had to be, but you have to take it one step at time. When I get out, I am already planning I'm dedicating myself to a dog, you know how hard that is for me. The first thing is to grow a plant, the second thing is to get a new puppy. A fresh start, and I want to grow it and train it. I want to come home and that's my puppy my buddy. That's who I'm going to dedicate myself to and walk in the morning.

Further statements made by the cadets made it evident that not only was their own personal choices important, but fear of not knowing what to expect after completing the boot camp also played an important part.

Ann shared her feelings:

I guess the fear of not knowing what to expect as I walk out these doors, not knowing if I can do it but telling myself I can't. I think I need to get, which I am still working on is my determination to get dedicated, motivated, and educated, which is our motto here. As long as I have motivation, I am fine; as long I am dedicated, I am fine, and as long as I get my education, I can do anything.

One way cadets felt they would be successful was by staying busy. Becky shared "my grandma says she's going to keep me busy like swimming and bowling, like I used to be. When I was in all the sports, I never got in trouble. That is when I stopped doing them; then when I do my own thing is when I get into trouble."

The connection between barriers and needs was an important component of the theme The Future. The passages reflect what the adolescents' hope for as well as factors they perceive important to their success and personal growth.

### **RAASI and Themes**

The following section describes the characterizations of the RAASI and how they support the emerging themes. The RAASI had specific questions from the four constructs which directly relate to the themes found. After reviewing the questions under each construct, I selected specific questions pertaining to each theme. Some constructs supported an entire theme, while sometimes only the questions under the construct supported the themes. I use specific questions from the RAASI to demonstrate the relationship of the themes and the responses of the cadets.

Table 2 provides an overview of cadets' adjusted total scores and overall scores in each characterization: Antisocial Behavior (AC), Anger Control (AC), Emotional Distress (ED), and Positive Self (PS). Respondents answered the statements with "never" or "almost never," "sometimes," and "nearly all of the time." The time frame which RAASI utilizes is within the past six months. Following the table, a discussion of the four characterizations are described as they relate to the emerging themes. For several of the themes, specific questions supported the emerging theme, and for other themes, the scores of a characterization were used to illustrate the connections. I begin with the first characterization scale of the RAASI, Antisocial Behavior (AB). The AC scale includes eight items that evaluate a broad area of antisocial behaviors such as using drugs or alcohol, engaging in illegal behavior, breaking rules, having trouble at home and/or school, staying away from home, and other problematic behaviors.

Table 2

*Adjusted T-Scores for Categories*

	Antisocial behavior (AC)	Anger control (AC)	Emotional distress (ED)	Positive self (PS)	Adjustment total
Olga	88	59	56	59	69
Tom	88	53	52	38	61
Becky	68	74	56	59	68
Ann	72	74	77	63	79
Joe	88	68	65	47	73
Bill	62	53	36	51	48
Joel	88	71	54	63	72
Bob	78	65	61	55	69
Mario	82	65	59	67	72
Jerry	72	71	63	63	68

There are specific questions under the AB scale that reflected the theme of compounding offenses, lessons learned, and debilitating factors. The first question reflecting the participants' background was, "I did things that were against the law." All of the 10 cadets responded to having done something against the law. Of the 10 who responded to having done something

against the law, half of the participants responded with “sometimes,” while the other half responded to having done something against the law nearly all of the time. This question supported their history of being in the juvenile justice system but also demonstrated that cadets’ had read the question and answered truthfully.

The second question on the RAASI relating to similarities of offenses was “I broke the rules at school or at home.” All of the 10 participants responded to having broken the rules at school or at home. Of the 10 participants, 7 responded that they had broken rules at school or at home nearly all of the time, and 3 responded to sometimes. Breaking rules at school or at home was an obvious indicator which led to being arrested. A law that could have been broken was running away. Some of the cadets mentioned their parents reporting them after they had run away.

A question relating to similarity of offenses was “I got into trouble at school and at work.” All of the 10 participants responded that they had gotten into trouble at school and work. Of the 10 participants, 6 responded sometimes, and the remaining 4 responded to getting into trouble nearly all of the time. I found it interesting that 7 of the cadets responded to breaking the rules nearly all of the time, and only 4 cadets responded to getting into trouble nearly all of the time, and 6 responded to getting to trouble sometimes. This was important to note because the cadets spoke about learning discipline during boot camp as a positive experience, and the numbers illustrated that prior to being in boot camp, discipline may have not been enforced.

A question highlighting debilitating factors and compounding offenses under the AC scale was “I used drugs or alcohol.” Drugs was a topic mentioned by the majority of the cadets. For some of the cadets, drugs had been the offense, and for others, drug abuse was a factor in their lives. Of the 10 participants, 8 responded that they had used drugs or alcohol. Of the 8 who

responded to having used drugs or alcohol, 5 responded “nearly all of the time,” and 3 responded “sometimes.” One of the respondents answered “never” to having used drugs.

The second characterization scale was the Anger Control (AC) scale which included eight items. The AC assessed for short temper, arguing with adults, ignoring rules at home or school, and oppositional behavior. Adolescents who obtained a score of 70T or above demonstrated extensive anger management problems, contrariness, and argumentativeness with others, parents, and teachers (Reynolds, 2001). The AC scale supported the theme debilitating factors and lessons learned, where cadets discussed their emotions and anger. Throughout the cadets’ statements under the themes lessons learned and debilitating factors, cadets’ discuss their anger and positive changes that have helped through their anger management class. Of the 10 cadets who participated, 4 scored 70T or greater on the AC, demonstrating severe anger management.

The AC category had two questions directly asking adolescents about feeling angry and losing their temper. For the question that asked, “I lost my temper,” all of the 10 cadets responded to having lost their temper. Of the 10 participants, 8 responded that they had lost their temper nearly all of the time. The remaining 2 responded that they had lost their temper sometimes. For the question, “I felt very angry,” 9 out of the 10 participants responded to feeling angry. From the 9 who responded to feeling angry, 6 responded that they felt angry sometimes, and 3 responded all of the time. Cadets’ spoke about their emotions on lessons learned. One of the lessons learned mentioned by the cadets was that they had learned how to control their anger during boot camp. Cadets also shared their feelings of anger as they spoke about their past experiences.

The characterization of Emotional Distress (ED) scale included ten items which assessed for feelings of excessive anxiety, worry, general distress, crying, somatic symptoms, and

dysphoric mood. Adolescents who scored at or above 70T on ED were likely to have serious problems with depression and anxiety (Reynolds, 2001). After analyzing the ED scale, only one of the cadets demonstrated high levels of ED.

Certain questions from the ED scale supported the theme The Future. One question related to Future was, “I worried about a lot of things.” Of the 10 cadets, 9 of them worried, 4 of those 9 cadets responded that they worried nearly all of the time, and 5 of the 9 cadets responded that they worried sometimes. Cadets shared their goals but also shared the barriers that would prevent them from achieving their future goals. One cadet mentioned that the fear of being released and her ability to be successful was what prevented her from reaching her future goals.

The second question related to the theme The Future was, “I worried about the future.” Of the 10 cadets, 8 of them responded that they worried about their future. Of the 8 cadets, half of them responded that they worried sometimes, while the other half responded to worrying about their future nearly all of the time. More cadets endorsed worry about the future than worry in general.

Finally, the Positive Self (PS) scale included six items which assessed basic aspects of self-esteem and sociability such as low self-esteem, negative or minimum social interactions, a feeling that life is not going well, and the lack of social support. The RAASI Positive Self (PS) characterization consisted of six items that assessed aspects of self-concept, social inhibition, feelings of things not going well in one’s life, experiencing limited social interaction, and reinforcement (Reynolds, 2001). The PS scale items were worded positively but were reversely-scored. A low score  $PS < 47T$  may be interpreted as showing a healthy self.

The PS scale supported the following themes: Relationships and Lessons Learned. After analyzing the RAASI PS scale (see Table 2), 8 of the 10 cadets had a *t*-score higher than 47. *T*-

scores from the 10 cadets averaged at 57.5, indicating that most of the cadets did not have a positive sense of self.

Examples of questions under the PS scale are, “I felt that everything was OK in my life,” and “I felt comfortable meeting new people.” There was one specific question supporting the themes Lessons Learned and Future. The first question, “I felt that everything was OK in my life,” supported their future and both positive and negative experiences of the cadets’ lived experiences. During their time at the boot camp and prior to the boot camp, cadets shared their difficulties and emotions. The question “I felt that everything was OK in my life,” highlighted their overall feelings about their personal life. Of the 10 cadets, 7 responded that they sometimes felt everything was OK; one cadet responded that he/she never or almost never felt that everything was OK, and 2 cadets responded that they felt OK nearly all of the time. A question under the PS characterization that related to the theme Relationships was, “I felt comfortable meeting new people.” Of the 10 cadets participating, 5 of the cadets responded that they sometimes felt comfortable meeting new people, 2 responded to never or almost never feeling comfortable when meeting new people, and 2 responded that they felt comfortable meeting new people nearly all of the time.

The RAASI had two questions which asked about parents or family. The first question was “I argued with my teachers or parents.” Out of the 10 cadets 9 answered to have argued with a teacher or parent, and only one answered never or almost never. Out of the 9, 5 responded to sometimes arguing with a teacher or parent, and 4 responded to nearly all of the time. The RAASI had one question related to friends: “I had fun with friends.” Out of the 10 participants, 8 responded to having fun with friends. Out the 8 who responded to having had fun with friends, half of them responded to sometimes, while the other half responded to nearly all of the time.

## Summary

The intent of this study was to examine the lived experiences of juveniles in a boot camp facility. This study was based on three overarching questions: (a) “What is the juvenile’s history and background prior to detainment?” (b) “What are the experiences of juvenile offenders during detainment?” and (c) “What the future plans of juvenile offenders are upon release from detainment?”

Themes developed in five areas of the participants’ lives: (a) Compounding Offenses, (b) Relationships, (c) Debilitating Factors, (d) Lessons Learned, and (e) The Future. The theme Debilitating Factors were discussed according to the participants’ experiences and the negative impact they had on them. Debilitating Factors included drugs, emotional factors, not living at home, sexual abuse, and teen pregnancy. The theme Lessons Learned were discussed by the experiences of the participants’ during their stay at the boot camp as positive and negative. The theme The Future was discussed according to the support and factors that participants’ felt were necessary in order to be successful.



## **CHAPTER V: Discussion, Implications, and Future Research**

### **Introduction**

This chapter recapitulates and discusses the themes explored in Chapter IV: compounding offenses, relationships, debilitating factors, and the future. I will also provide an overview of the findings in light of previous research, discussion of the qualitative findings, limitations of this study, and recommendations for future research.

### **Overview of the Study**

Adolescents in juvenile detention centers are considered one of the most challenging populations in a multicultural society (Ameen & Lee, 2012). Due to the growing population of juvenile arrestees, with more than 100,000 juvenile arrests in the state of Texas (TTJD, 2012), the current study sought to examine the lived experiences of participants in a boot camp facility. Researchers have identified a number of factors predicting the risk of juvenile delinquency (Feldmann, 2014; Lambie & Randell, 2013). Although previous research had focused on the perceptions of adjudicated youth regarding the risk and protective factors, there had been a dearth of qualitative investigations related to juvenile adolescents' lived experiences prior to being arrested, struggles they may have had during detainment, and goals after being released from the juvenile facility.

In this study, I examined the lived experiences of participants in a juvenile justice facility. Individual interviews, a focus group, and the RAASI were used to collect data. Details of these methods were presented in Chapter III, and a thick description of findings was provided in Chapter IV. Juveniles described their lived experiences during the interview.

The primary investigator conducted this study with a sample of youth cadets ( $n = 10$ ) currently enrolled in a juvenile boot camp facility. Participants for the study were selected using purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is used when subjects are intentionally selected based on a variety of criteria such as information-rich cases where one can learn about the issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (Patton, 2002).

The selection of participants was on a voluntary basis with the approval of the facility director. An informed consent statement and a letter of permission from the director of the juvenile boot camp facility authorized the researcher to use the facility for the research study. Participants were three female adolescents and seven male adolescents with an age range from 14-16, all serving their own respective sentences at a juvenile boot camp facility. Of the ten participants, three females were Hispanic, five males were Hispanic, one male was Caucasian, and one male was African American. Participants' were assigned numbers to protect their identity.

A time for face-to-face meetings was set with consent of the director of the juvenile justice facility. During the face-to-face meeting, the primary investigator reviewed the assent form, including participant rights, and addressed any questions. Following the juveniles' assent, the primary investigator administered the RAASI and demographic survey. The demographic survey was used to provide participants ethnicity, age, and gender.

A semi-structured interview was conducted (refer to Appendix D) a week after the RAASI and demographic survey. The interviews lasted approximately between 15 to 45 minutes and were held in a classroom setting. A guard was present outside of the classroom to ensure the safety of the primary investigator and participant.

A focus group was conducted after all participants' interviews were completed. The purpose of a focus group was to get data in a social context where people could consider their own perspectives among other people (Patton, 2002). During the focus group, I asked questions that had emerged from the initial individual interviews. The primary investigator held two separate focus groups: one for females and one for males, due to the boot camp's regulations. The same questions were asked in both groups. The focus groups lasted approximately 45 minutes.

Qualitative data was obtained by analyzing responses to the interview questions. Data analysis utilized included initial coding and axial coding. Detailed data organization was utilized to maintain an accurate audit trail. Data sources were used to create emerging themes. Five core themes were identified by the researcher and two outside data analysts. The emergent themes were centered on the lived experiences of the participants including: (a) Compounding Offenses, (b) Relationships, (c) Debilitating Factors, (d) Lessons Learned, and (e) The Future. The five themes are discussed in the following sections.

## **Discussion of Core Themes Related to the Literature**

### **Compounding Offenses**

As I began the interview with "tell me about how you came to be here," all of the cadets stated their offenses. Some participants responded with short statements that identified their offenses, while very few of them gave details describing what they did and how they got arrested. All of the cadets had more than one charge and had a history with the juvenile justice

system. It seemed very clear that they were used to stating their offense both during the interview and focus group. There were a combination of offenses that had been committed by the participants; some included possession of drugs and while being under the influence, while other offenses included aggravated assault with a deadly weapon or burglary.

According to Feldmann (2014), Hispanic participants are 83% more likely to reoffend as compared to non-Hispanics. Of the ten participants in the study, eight were Hispanic, and the majority of them had a history with the Juvenile Justice System. Feldmann (2014) noted juveniles in high school are 69% more likely to reoffend than those in different grade levels. The average age of the ten cadets in this study was 16. Adolescents who were 16 years of age tended to be in high-school.

### **Relationships**

Relationships with people was a theme that all of the cadets spoke about. Relationships included struggles with their family, the influence friends have had on them, or the relationships that they have built during the boot camp. According to the literature, certain risk factors, including characteristics of the individual and the social environment, including family increase the chances of offending behavior. Risk factors included characteristics of the individual and social environment, including the family, peers, and community (Put et al., 2014; Feldmann, 2014). Adolescents are susceptible to peer influence, impulsivity, provocation, and stressful situations due to the influence of other peers, social rewards, and approval (Lambie & Randell, 2013).

There were similar findings in this study as related to family being a negative influence or predictor of risky behavior. Family was discussed by all of the cadets who participated in the study. Participants shared their relationships with their parents and also shared if they had

experienced struggles such as violence or having family with a crimeogenic history. Some cadets spoke about their family with joy and excitement, while others had sadness in their eyes or did not demonstrate any emotion. Feldmann (2014) noted juveniles who live with a guardian other than a parent have a 127% chance of reoffending. All of the cadets in this study had a history of reoffending.

Adolescents who come from a family with negative relationships and influence often have poor adult health outcomes, risk of drug abuse, and risk of suicide (Bramlett & Radel, 2014). Arrigona et al. (2002) noted that 33% of juveniles with an indicator of low stability were associated with a gang, and/or had a household member with a history of gang activity, and/or had a family member with a history of criminal activity or incarceration. Bramlett and Radel (2014) found that 2.25 million (3.1%) of children lived in non-parental care, and amongst those children living in non-parental care, 15% were in foster care. Approximately 25.2% lived with their parents(s), 37.9% lived with grandparent(s) and others, and one-quarter were being raised by other relatives or nonrelatives. Children living with only one biological parent were 3 to 8 times more likely to have experienced neighborhood violence, caregiver abuse, caregiver incarceration, or have lived with a caregiver with a drug or mental health problem compared to those living with two biological parents (Bramlett & Radel, 2014).

The cadets who spoke about both biological parents, indicated that their parents were divorced. Cadets shared the impact that the divorces had on them. The majority of the cadets in this study did not know of one of their biological parents. It was interesting that four of the males who did not have a father spoke about having another male as their role model. The first male cadet looked up to his cousin, the second cadet admired his brother and cousin, the third cadet

saw his grandfather as his father, and the last cadet looked up to the male staff member in the boot camp.

Adolescents are susceptible to peer influence, impulsivity, provocation, and stressful situations due to the influence of other peers, social rewards, and approval (Lambie & Randell, 2013). The findings in this study show that peer influence was a factor of their behavior. Cadets in this study shared how “hanging around the wrong crowd” had been a reason to committing their offenses. Cadets spoke about either smoking weed with their friends, being pressured into doing something, or “trying to be cool” around their friends. A few male cadets who did not have a father present spoke about who they looked up to as a father figure or role model. Cadets also shared their feelings of the staff and explained that they see some of the staff as mentors.

### **Debilitating Factors**

Cadets described different factors that impacted their life in a negative manner. A study by Ikonopoulou (2014) found that juveniles at a boot camp facility experienced common risk factors before entering treatment. Juveniles shared similar histories of mental health issues, poor academic achievement, sexual risk behaviors, teen pregnancy, and substance abuse. Juveniles had negative expectations about themselves, limited understanding of their strengths, and low self-esteem related to self-identity (Ikonopoulou, 2014). Adjustment difficulties have a greater risk in mental health problems that may have serious outcomes among adolescents.

General Strain Theory (GST) was proposed by Andrew Agnew (1992) as a social psychological explanation of criminal behavior and represents one of the most important theoretical developments in criminology (Watts & McNutly, 2013). Strain is considered the impact that stressors have on an individual. The focus of GST is on the individual’s inability to achieve economic goals which results in stress. According to Agnew, there are three types of

strain that will lead to deviant coping: the loss of someone or something important, the presentation of a harmful experience such as childhood abuse, and the failure to achieve positively valued stimulus (Grothoff, Kempf-Leonard, & Mullins, 2014). The following section will describe the cadets' experiences related to GST.

Many of the cadets in this study have experienced great strain and suffering. For some of the cadets, abuse was a common topic mentioned. Abuse did not solely come from physical pain, but emotional pain as well. The females were able to express their pain through their stories. Some of the strain that the females have encountered is the loss of their babies, abusive relationships, and sexual abuse. The males have also had much strain in their life. Abuse was a common topic spoken about by the males. Abuse included assault and family violence. Although the males did not share details, their body language and appearance made it clear that they had pain in their lives.

Substance abuse is a factor related to offending behavior. Substance abuse offenses have doubled over during the past 15 years (Caldwell, Silver, & Strada, 2010). A report by Arrigona, Prescott, and Trusty (2002), analyzed social factors that may affect juvenile offenders in nine different counties in Texas. Approximately 1,595 juveniles were sampled based on their disposition (Arrigona et al., 2002). Juveniles in this study were categorized as a) high need (major substance abuse and sex offender), b) high risk (school problems and criminogenic associations), and c) low stability (family/ home stability and parental supervision) Arrigona et al. (2002) found that 31% of juveniles categorized as high need engaged in alcohol and drug use. Approximately 49% of juveniles had criminogenic associations with gang membership which was a factor that elicited substance abuse and had a negative impact on adolescents' behavior (Arrigona et al., 2002).

Drugs was a topic mentioned by the majority of the cadets in this study. Drugs may have been a reason that caused some of the cadets to offend, or drugs may have been the way the cadets coped with their situations. Some of the cadets were under the influence of a drug at the time they committed a crime, and other cadets were caught with possession of drugs.

There was not a specific question on pregnancy, but two of the three females shared their experiences of being pregnant and losing their babies. They spoke about the experience and the negative impact it had on them. Another debilitating factor which two of the three females had experienced was being sexually abused. Neither of them spoke about details but did mention that they had been raped in the past.

Child maltreatment, including emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, is a variable associated with negative development outcomes along with future violent behavior (Atlucker et al., 2006). The U.S. National Library of Medicine (USNLM) defines child abuse as “doing something or failing to do something that results in harm to a child or puts a child at risk of harm.” Most children who have been abused suffer greater emotional rather than physical damage (USNLM, 2013).

### **Lessons Learned**

Boot camps have a military atmosphere in which juveniles participate in physical training, drills, ceremonies, courtesy training, and are exposed to strict discipline which is believed to change juvenile behaviors (Gultekin & Gultekin, 2012; Lutze, 2006). The process of behavior modification occurs through immediate punishment of negative behavior and reinforcement of positive behavior.

Throughout the interview, cadets spoke about how they had changed, and how they have learned from their mistakes. The interview included questions related to their experience at the



boot camp such as positive and negative experiences. Some of the lessons they have learned came from the boot camp, while other lessons learned have been from self-reflection. A study by Unruh et al. (2009) found that juveniles identified their personal choices as an important factor as 43 (86%) of the participants identified themselves as having personal strength for a successful transition into adulthood with decreased criminal activity, and 38 (76%) identified their “bad choices” as a barrier to succeeding in life.

Cadets experienced positive changes during their stay at the boot camp. Some cadets talk about the impact and influence that the staff had had on them, while others share how they have learned coping skills to control their anger. When I asked them to “tell me about any experiences you believe have been unhelpful to you during your stay,” cadets shared their experience of being yelled at and the food they ate. They also shared the experience of other cadets bullying them or influencing their behavior during their time at the boot camp.

### **The Future**

Cadets in the study appeared to have goals for the future but did not have an exact plan. Cadets spoke about their future just like they did about their offenses, with brief statements and even some hesitation. A few of the cadets did not have goals and had to take a moment to think of what they wanted by asking me “what do you mean” after I asked about their goals.

The majority of the cadets stated that they needed the support of family and friends in order to accomplish their goals. In order to achieve their goals, cadets felt they needed to refrain from interacting with old friends and stay away from drugs. Cadets shared their experience as a difficult one because they were going back to the same environment. Unruh et al. (2009) found similar needs as family was found to be an important factor with 36 (72%) of the participants describing having the need for strong emotional support in order to be successful. Adolescents

viewed a positive family relationship as a crucial factor in reducing negative behaviors. Contrary to having positive family support, 19 (37%) of adolescents reported that the lack of emotional support had a negative impact on their success in the developmental process (Unruh et al., 2009). Adolescents in this study identified their families as barriers to their success due to family members' involvement in gangs, drugs, alcohol, and other crimes.

## **RAASI**

The RAASI was used to supplement the themes by highlighting specific questions and demonstrating the responses of the cadets to those questions. The RAASI supported the emerging themes either by complete characterization scales such as the AC or PS or by specific questions that directly related to the themes. The PS scale on the RAASI supported the following themes: Debilitating Factors, Relationships and Lessons Learned. Not having a strong self-concept can lead to the use of drugs or risky behavior. Having good mentors or a good influence can guide individuals in the right path.

## **Implications and Recommendations**

Researchers have conducted many studies on protective, risk, and resiliency factors related to juvenile delinquency (Feldmann, 2014; Unruh et al., 2009; Simoes et al., 2008). The results of this study indicated that indeed, juveniles in the juvenile justice system struggle with family issues, drug use, running away, and peer influence. Most studies examine delinquent behavior through quantitative methods at a macro level, exploring causes and correlations according to hypotheses that are typically grounded in a theory (Wester et al., 2008). Information missing from these studies might include important aspects of the juveniles' experiences that could assist counselors who are attempting to facilitate behavioral change (Wester et al., 2008).

It was evident that many of these adolescents felt happy and excited when sharing their stories. Some juveniles spoke longer than other juveniles and even made statements such as “I’ve never shared my story like this before.” The findings of this study gave voice to the juveniles in a juvenile justice boot camp facility. As a counselor, I look at individuals holistically, and I am ethically required to honor diversity and embrace a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of individuals within their social and cultural contexts as well as promote social justice (ACA, 2014). Although the findings of this study support current research as it relates to risk factors, barriers, and protective factors, this study provides a different perspective on juveniles’ personal feelings and lived experiences.

The presence of suffering, pain, and overcoming obstacles in the lives of the adolescents who are in the juvenile justice system poses a challenge to their developmental growth and overall psychological well-being. It became evident in this study that one type of treatment was not enough, and that juveniles need individualized treatment. Graves, Shelton, and Kaslow (2009) found in their study that children in the foster care system were not matched to the services appropriate for their level of functioning. Each participant came from a different background and had a different story to share. Knowing and understanding the differences among these individuals is crucial for program implementation, meeting the needs of the juveniles, and for counselors or those working with the juveniles.

As participants shared their experiences in the boot camp, it was apparent that discipline was a factor learned along with becoming independent. Participants spoke about the two programs offered, and how they helped them control their anger or other emotions. Participants discussed the punitive nature of the boot camp, and although participants learned discipline concepts during their stay, once they are released, they will return to their environment without

someone to continually monitor their behavior. Participants discussed their goals and needs when being released, and although they have an idea of what they want to do, they did not have a clear plan to accomplish their goals.

It is evident through research that counselors know factors that lead juveniles to offend; the concern is that after knowing these factors, what is being done to improve their lives? My purpose for this research was not to confirm the predictors and risks which led juveniles into the juvenile justice system, although this study did that in many aspects, but to give the juveniles an opportunity to share their stories and for readers to look beyond the surface and try to connect with these adolescents. As counselors and human beings, we need to remember not to look at numbers and generalize. Statistics serve a great purpose, but when working with individuals, we have to remember that we have all been created differently, and not one of us copes with a similar situation the same way (Graves et al., 2009).

Are we really listening to what they say? There are many factors that are needed to enhance the program and policy of the juvenile justice system along with preventative programs. Budget is a major concern in providing juveniles with adequate care, but I do wonder if investing in the lives of adolescents may prevent them from reoffending. How might we invest in their lives and prevent reoffending? Statements made by the participants such as “I felt lonely,” and “As long as I have support from my parents,” lead me to believe that love, compassion, and empathy is what these adolescents need. The juveniles who spoke about seeing a specific staff member as mentor in the juvenile justice system appeared to be happier than those who did not. Furthermore, other cadets spoke about looking up to siblings or other members in their family as a role models. Having an assigned mentor to the adolescents in the juvenile justice system could potentially have a great impact on their lives. Research literature provides a vast number of

studies demonstrating the effectiveness of youth mentoring (as cited by Cawood & Wood, 2014). Mentoring promotes positive outcomes in areas such as emotional and psychological well-being, academic achievement, and behavior problems (Cawood & Wood, 2014). The cadets came from broken families, and a major need that was spoken about was support.

The findings of this study have implications for the programs offered in the boot camp. One implication that I believe to be of utmost importance includes the parents of juveniles who enter these programs. According to Walker, Bishop, Traylor, Jaeger, Gustaveson, and Guthrie (2015), the juvenile court system had a limited amount of programs that provide peer support for parents, and little is known about the impact of parent support on the family's court processes. Adolescents spend approximately six months in a detained facility with structure, rules, education, and discipline. When the juveniles are released, some have changed but return to an environment with families and friends who have not changed. Due to the fact that the adolescents are minors, parents/guardians should be obligated to attend parenting classes along with family counseling. The current public school system mandates parents to attend court after a certain amount of unexcused absences, but I find it interesting that the juvenile justice system did not mandate for parents to attend programs that will enhance their families.

Another implication is related to the staff who work with the cadets. Cadets came from a background with broken families, drugs, and abuse; is the constant yelling and punitive nature healing their emotional damage? The cadets commented there was a constant turn over in staff, and that yelling from the staff to the cadets was something regularly experienced. These adolescents' mentioned not being able to trust the staff or counselors because "soon they would be gone." Not having consistent staff may be a barrier to helping these adolescents as well as not having an even amount of emotional support with punitive punishments.

Some of these adolescents are almost considered adults by state law, but have they learned skills and tools to be successful in the future? The programs offered appeared to have benefited the majority of the cadets, but when cadets spoke about their future, there was not any concreteness or motivation. Their statements were brief and doubtful. Perhaps if cadets learned how to find a job, write a resume, and fill out a college application, they would feel more empowered and leave the boot camp with greater knowledge on being successful. Another concern is that they do not really socialize in boot camp due to the military style and punishments given after speaking without permission. Interpersonal skills is crucial as they grow older. The fact that the cadets are not allowed to speak or share their thoughts is only causing them to feel unheard, which perhaps is something they are used to. Some cadets mentioned how their parents never paid attention to them; is the boot camp demonstrating similar characteristics?

Several considerations and future recommendations involve counselors, counselor educators, or those working with adolescents in the juvenile justice system. One recommendation is to focus on teaching life skills such as career counseling, interpersonal skills, communication skills, and work ethics. Providing these skills can help adolescents set goals and learn how to achieve them. Another recommendation is to include family programs where parents learn parenting skills, family counseling, and how to cope with a child involved in the justice system. Change is important not only for the adolescents, but for the environment to which they will return. It was apparent that family relationships were broken, and mending those relationships during their stay can have a positive influence upon being released from the boot camp. Having individual counseling along with group sessions and educational classes may have a greater impact as well. Finally, it is recommended that assessments be used to measure the progress of individual goals and impact of treatment plans.

### **Limitations**

There are limitations to the current study. The first limitation is the sample of participants. Adolescents from only one boot camp participated in the study. This limited the range of participants' experiences. Second, the presence of the researcher and/or guard could have affected participants' responses as the data gathered were dependent on the participants' willingness to disclose accurate and honest information.

### **Future Research**

Future research is recommended to support and expand the findings of this study. The lived experiences and personal stories of adolescents in a boot camp is largely unknown. Further research concerning gender differences in a juvenile boot camp could be valuable in adding to the literature on this topic. In addition, future research concerning the parents/guardians of the adolescents would enhance the understanding of their families and cultural background. A qualitative study on parents would give a better understanding of not only what the adolescents' need, but what the parents need to adequately help their children. Other research recommended is related to the impact and relationship that the staff have on adolescents in the boot camp. I believe the staff can have a greater positive impact in the lives of adolescents. Understanding what the staff training requirements are and what they personally feel will help these adolescents can influence the way the staff is trained. Due to a fast turnover of staff, researching the causes that prevent the staff from staying can be beneficial in changing those factors. Future researchers could investigate the effectiveness of the programs offered in each different boot camp or in the juvenile justice system.

Finally, future research on counselors' advocacy is important. As mentioned previously, advocating is part of the American Counseling Association's code of ethics. Counselor educators are constantly researching different topics and programs for therapy, having current research on any changes or implications made from previous findings could enhance our profession and add more credibility to our work.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to gain greater understanding of the lived experiences of adolescents at a juvenile justice boot camp facility and to provide counselor educators, counselors, and other professionals working with adolescents a deeper awareness of juvenile offenders. This research study addressed (a) perceptions of the adolescents' struggles before entering the juvenile detention system, (b) the experiences of juveniles within a juvenile justice boot camp facility, and (c) the adolescents' future plans.

The findings were consistent with current literature in relation to juvenile risk factors, protective factors, and resiliency. Adolescents have experienced family violence, abused drugs, and have more than one offense. Participants shared their positive and negative experiences during their sentenced time at the boot camp. Participants in this study also shared needs and goals they wished to accomplish in their lives.

My hope is that this research inspires further studies that will contribute to the understanding of individuals in boot camps along with adolescents in the justice system. Furthermore, I hope that being aware of the needs of individuals in boot camps and community centers will impact the programs offered in these settings.



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**Appendix A**  
**Letter of Facility Authorization**


Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi  
Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology  
6300 Ocean Drive, Unit 5834, Corpus Christi, TX 78412-5834

**Institutional Review Board Support Letter**

This document is confirmation that I, Leonardo Garcia, the director of the Juvenile Justice Boot Camp, am aware that Lorena A. Rosenbaum is conducting her dissertation research at Nueces County Juvenile Justice Detention Center. I am aware she will meet with 10 cadets during the months of July until no later than November 2014.

Signature of Director:  Date: 5/22/14

Printed Name: Leonardo Garcia

Signature of Person Obtaining Permission:  Date: 5/22/14

Printed Name: Lorena A. Rosenbaum

## **Appendix B**

### **Assent Form**

#### **Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi**

Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology

6300 Ocean Drive, Unit 5834, Corpus Christi, TX 78412-5834

#### **A Qualitative Investigation of Juvenile Offenders**

##### **Introduction**

Lorena Rosenbaum is a graduate student at Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi. I am conducting a research study on the lived experiences of juvenile offenders. A research study is a way to learn more about people and test new ideas.

I would like you to help with my study. The research study can increase your self-awareness, help you explore future plans, and reflect on your life.

##### **What will I be asked to do?**

If you want to help my study, I will ask you to participate in filling our instrument, demographic sheet, an interview meeting, and a group meeting with those who participate. The instrument consists of 32 questions, and take about 10 minutes to fill out. The interview will be a face to face meeting and will consist six main questions. The meeting will last about 30 to 45 minutes. I will then ask for a second meeting were you will gather with the other participants to confirm the topics that have been found. The questions are as followed: (1) What had been your experience during the your time at the Juvenile Justice Boot Camp? (2) What had brought you to the Juvenile Justice Boot Camp? (3) What are your plans after being released from the Juvenile Justice Boot Camp? All interviews will be audiotaped recorded. Your identity will not be known, as numbers will be assigned to each one.

##### **What are the risks to me?**

The risks to you are no bigger than the risks you would experience in a physical or psychological exam. You may experience discomfort and anxiety arising from self-disclosure, self-reflection, and personal awareness regarding various aspects of their life experiences

##### **What good can happen?**

You could increase self-awareness and share your experiences. You could explore your future plans after being released. You will have the opportunity to share their experiences and voice your thoughts and concerns regarding your lived experience.

##### **Do I have to be part of the study?**

No, you do not have to be part of the study although your parent/guardian said you can be in the stud. You can also stop participating in the study whenever you want to.

**Who will know I am part of the study?**

No one will know you are part of the study. Privacy, also called confidentiality, is an important and necessary part of the study. *As a general rule, we will keep the information you share in the study confidential.* Your name will be kept secret from everyone except your parent/guardian.

**Signature**

Now that I have asked my questions and know about the research study and what it means, here is what I decided:

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I'll be in the study. \_\_\_\_\_ No, I do not want to be in the study.

I were told about the research study. I had a chance to ask questions. I know I can ask questions at any time.

By signing this assent form, I am acknowledging that I have read this form and understand its contents stated above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Your Name (Printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Your Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Assent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Obtaining Assent

## **Appendix C**

### **Parental Consent Form**

#### **Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi**

Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology

6300 Ocean Drive, Unit 5834, Corpus Christi, TX 78412-5834

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this form is to provide you (as the guardian of a prospective research study participant) information that may affect your decision as to allow/not allow the cadet to participate in the research study. This form will also be used to record your consent if you decide to let the cadet be involved in this study.

If you agree, your child will be asked to participate in a research study. During the summer semester I will be interviewing the cadet. The purpose of the interview is to gain understanding and awareness about the cadet's lived experience before being detained, during detainment, and future goals when released. The interview will last no longer than one hour. An estimated number of 10 cadets from the juvenile justice boot camp facility will be selected to participate in the qualitative study. The cadet will be selected based on a voluntary basis and upon approval from the director of the Juvenile Justice Facility.

#### **What will the cadet be asked to do?**

If you allow the cadet to participate in this study, he/she will be asked to engage in an interview process with the researcher where he/she will be able to share personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings about their life. The cadet will meet with the researcher on three occasions in a classroom setting. The first meeting is to inform the cadet of the study. The second meeting is for the interview process. The final meeting is where the cadet will meet with all of the cadets who have participated to review common information and gather any final thoughts.

#### **What are the risks involved in this study?**

There may be minimal risks and do not exceed what you child would experience in physical or psychological interview. Risks involved in participants may include fearing to expose personal experiences. The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks your child ordinarily encounters in daily life.

#### **What are the possible benefits of this study?**

The possible benefits of participation in the study are increasing awareness in the cadet's self-awareness and the opportunity to share their experiences and voice their perceptions and concerns regarding their lived experience.

**Does the cadet have to participate in the study?**

No, the cadet does not have to be in the study. You can agree to allow the cadet to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty.

**What if the cadet does not want to participate?**

In addition to your permission, the cadet must agree to participate in the study. There are no positive or negative repercussions for agreeing or refusing to participate in the study. If the cadet initially agrees to be in the study, he/she can withdraw at any point during the study.

**Who will know about the cadet’s participation in this study?**

This study is confidential. No one will know the cadet participates in the study. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you or the cadet to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely in locked filing cabinets in Dr. Smith’s office, and only the researchers, Dr. Robert Smith and Lorena Rosenbaum will have access to the records. Any recordings will be kept for three years following the study and then erased.

**Whom do I contact about the cadet’s rights as a research participant?**

This research study had been reviewed by the Research Compliance Office and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi. For research-related problems or questions regarding the cadet's rights as a research participant, you can contact Erin Sherman, Research Compliance Officer, at (361)825-2497 or [erin.sherman@tamucc.edu](mailto:erin.sherman@tamucc.edu).

For further questions regarding the study, you can contact Dr. Robert Smith at 361-825-2307 or [robert.smith@tamucc.edu](mailto:robert.smith@tamucc.edu) and Lorena Rosenbaum at (956)459-9838 or [lrosenbaum@islander.tamucc.edu](mailto:lrosenbaum@islander.tamucc.edu).

**Signature**

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions, and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to allow the cadet to participate in this study.

**Signature of Parent/Guardian:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Printed Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Printed Name of the Cadet:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Person Obtaining Permission:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Printed Name:** \_\_\_\_\_



**Appendix D**  
**Interview Guide**

1. Tell me about how you came to be here.

Possible follow-up: if you are willing, tell me a little about the offense.

2. Tell me about factors you believe played a part in you being here.

Possible follow-up questions: What about the people in your life who may have played a part? Or Are there any other factors you believe are important?

3. Tell me about any experiences that you believe were beneficial to you during your stay.

4. Tell me about any experiences you believe were unhelpful to you during your stay.

5. Tell me about anything that could have been different that would have helped you in completing the program.

6. Tell me about any barriers you see in reaching your goals.

7. Tell me about things in your life you believe help you achieve your goals.

**Appendix E**  
**Focus Group Guide**

1. Tell me what brought you here?

Follow up: Tell me about your experiences related to you coming here

2. Tell me about positive experiences here?

3. Tell me about challenges that you've had while being here.

4. Tell me about any changes you would suggest concerning this program.

5. Tell me what makes it difficult for you to reach your goals?

6. What would help you to reach your goals?

## Appendix F: Demographic Sheet

Please do not write your name on this form. It were stored separately from other information during the study and not be linked with your identity in any way. The information allow us to provide an accurate description of the sample.

For the following items, please select the one response that is most descriptive of you or fill in the blank.

Gender: Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity:

Asian or Pacific Islander \_\_\_\_\_

Native American \_\_\_\_\_

Asian Indian \_\_\_\_\_

Latino/Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_

Black/African American (Non-Hispanic) \_\_\_\_\_

Puerto Rican \_\_\_\_\_

Caucasian/White \_\_\_\_\_

More than one race (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G:

### Reynolds Adolescents Adjustment Screening Inventory

“IN THE PAST 6 MONTHS...”		Never or almost never	Sometimes	Nearly all the time
1	I felt that everything was OK in my life	1	2	3
2	I argued with my teachers or parents	1	2	3
3	I used drugs or alcohol	1	2	3
4	I enjoyed getting together with my friends or family	1	2	3
5	I lost my temper	1	2	3
6	I felt good about myself	1	2	3
7	I argued with adults	1	2	3
8	I did what adults asked me to do	1	2	3
9	I did things to bother people	1	2	3
10	If someone told me to do something, I did the opposite	1	2	3
11	I felt very angry	1	2	3
12	I felt like getting back at others	1	2	3
13	I broke the rules at school or at home	1	2	3
14	At night, I stayed out later than I was allowed	1	2	3
15	I got so mad that I threw things at home or at school	1	2	3
16	I felt comfortable meeting new people	1	2	3
17	I did things that were against the law	1	2	3
18	I was very lonely	1	2	3
19	I had fun with friends	1	2	3
20	I felt very tense	1	2	3
21	I got into trouble at school or at work	1	2	3
22	I felt nervous	1	2	3
23	I felt depressed or sad	1	2	3
24	I stayed away from home without telling my parents where I was	1	2	3
25	I did not study or turn in my homework	1	2	3
26	I worried about a lot of things	1	2	3
27	I worried a lot about the future	1	2	3
28	I had trouble falling asleep	1	2	3
29	I felt upset	1	2	3
30	I had trouble concentrating	1	2	3
31	I felt like crying for no reason	1	2	3
32	I did something I knew was bad	1	2	3