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Youth Perspectives on Their Relationships With Staff in Juvenile Correction Settings and Perceived Likelihood of Success on Release

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This study explored youth perspectives on their relationships with staff in juvenile correction settings and perceived likelihood of success on release. Surveys were administered to 543 youth committed to select facilities in Alaska, Idaho, Nevada, and Oregon. Youth were asked to nominate a staff they turn to most for help and advice, then report on the qualities of their relationship with that staff. Results indicate that youth have different types of key helping relationships with staff, and that youth forecasts about their future vary across these relationship types.

Keywords: *delinquency; juvenile corrections; relationships; future forecasts*

The qualities of relationships between staff and delinquent youth in secure settings are hypothesized to serve an important rehabilitative function (Norman, 1990; Roush, 1993). Specifically, it is believed youth correction staff—often known as juvenile care workers—are important and powerful models who most effectively encourage change when they have positive connections with youth in an environment of respect and safety (Roush, 1996). Social psychological theory and evidence from fields such as education and psychology tend to support this view (Bandura, 1986; Hubble, Duncan, & Miller, 1999; Lewin, 1951; Noam & Fiore, 2004). Furthermore, evidence from studies that have explored social climate within juvenile correction settings suggest that interactions with staff can profoundly influence how youth experience this type of intervention (Abrams, 2006; Abrams, Kim, & Anderson-Nathe, 2005; Inderbitzin, 2005; Langdon, Cosgrave, & Tranah, 2004).

To the best of our knowledge, however, only one study has specifically considered the qualities and function of helping relationships between staff and youth in juvenile correction settings. In that study, Biggam and Power (1997) examined the association between social support networks of incarcerated youth and their adjustment to institutionalization. Results indicated that psychologically distressed, incarcerated youth reported that they would like more emotional and practical support from staff. Additionally, poor relationships with staff were most predictive of youth anxiety, depression, and hopelessness.

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Although these results provide evidence of the importance of relationships between staff and youth in correction settings, further research involving helping relationships and outcomes in this context is clearly needed, particularly considering the costs associated with failed rehabilitation of delinquent youth and the reality that staff are the one universal intervention medium across all correction programs.

The purpose of the present study was to address a notable gap in the juvenile justice literature by exploring relationships between staff and youth in correction settings, and how those relationships might be associated with potential for success on release. Examining these relationships, however, presents unique challenges, given the role of staff in juvenile justice facilities is rarely limited to being a guard like those in adult correction facilities. For example, the duties of juvenile care workers often include spending a substantial amount of time working with youth, individually and in groups, to encourage change. Most of these staff, however, are paraprofessionals and not trained therapists, counselors, or teachers—and some evidence suggests that these roles in the traditional sense are inappropriate for juvenile care workers (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003; National Mental Health Association, 2005). Rather, the nature of the relationship between staff and youth at its ideal has been formulated with staff as a "role model," the youth as an "observer," and every interaction between the two as a "teaching moment" (Roush, 1996). This emphasis on modeling processes for a worker position that includes both security and rehabilitation duties suggests that the traditional professional helping relationship literature (e.g., those involving client–therapist) is insufficient to guide exploration of youth–staff relationships in correction settings (Noam & Fiore, 2004).

Fortunately, the emerging field of positive youth development does provide direction for exploring these unique relationships, and also has been cited as a promising framework to guide efforts to improve responses to delinquency in general (Butts, Mayer, & Ruth, 2005; Schwartz, 2001). Positive youth development is an alternative to viewing adolescent development within a structure of problems or deficits, and emphasizes asset development through prosocial bonds with helping adults. One type of relationship-based intervention within positive youth development is mentoring, which focuses on the ability of nonparental adults to help young people avoid or cope with risks and develop assets. It is believed that the benefits of mentoring stem from a modeling process within the relationship that provides emotional support, instrumental support, and opportunities for skill development (Blechman & Bopp, 2005; DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002). In general, the body of research on mentoring relationships suggests that positive connections with nonparental adults are beneficial for youth across a broad range of social, psychological, academic, and employment outcomes (Beier, Rosenfeld, Spitalny, Zansky, & Bontempo, 2000; DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002; Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Langhout, Rhodes, & Osborne, 2004).

Evaluations of youth mentoring program impact, however, suggest that the process by which they work is complex and the benefits are not universal (e.g., see Rhodes, Haight, & Briggs, 1999). Additionally, when benefits are present, they are not necessarily maintained over time or consistent across ecological domains (Jackson, 2002; Westhues, Clarke, Watton, & St. Claire-Smith, 2001). Although prior research does indicate youth in relatively strong relationships experience more improvement on various outcome measures (de Anda, 2001; DuBois, Holloway et al., 2002; Rhodes, 2002), many studies in this area share a

major methodological limitation: Ratings of relationship quality are retrospective and made with the knowledge of youth adjustment (Beam, Chen, & Greenberger, 2002; DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002; DuBois, Neville, Parra, & Pugh-Lilly, 2002). Furthermore, few studies have tried to account for youth perceptions of their relationships with mentors. These methodological and conceptual issues, coupled with research from allied fields, suggest that there is value in directly considering youth experiences of mentoring relationships (DuBois, Neville, et al., 2002). The counseling and psychotherapy literatures, for example, consistently cite client perceptions of their relationships with their therapists as one of the strongest predictors of treatment outcomes (Lambert, 1992).

In one of the few mentoring studies to focus on youth perceptions of relationships and outcomes, Grossman and Johnson (1999) found better relationship quality to be related to improved academic achievement and reduced substance abuse. Similarly, Langhout et al. (2004) developed a typology of relationships from the youth perspective, and found that youth who viewed relationships as providing moderate levels of conditional support and structure gained the largest number of benefits across social, psychological, and academic outcomes. Thus, overall relationship quality and the characteristics and contexts of relationships—especially as perceived by youth—appear to play an important role in mentoring interventions and associated outcomes (de Anda, 2001; Rhodes, 2002; Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995). Instruments developed to tap youth perspectives of mentoring relationships illustrate the importance of considering this point of view and experience (e.g., see Jucovy, 2002; Rhodes, Reddy, Roffman, & Grossman, 2005).

Although research suggests that disadvantaged youth benefit most from mentoring interventions, research also indicates that youth demographics, such as gender, age, and ethnicity are largely unrelated to outcomes in mentoring relationships (DuBois, Holloway, et al., 2002; Grossman & Tierney, 1998). These findings are based on limited research, however, and evidence from the more developed corporate mentoring and developmental psychology literatures suggests that youth benefit from programming and relationships that are sensitive to not only gender, age, and ethnicity—but socioeconomic status and family structure as well (Bogat & Liang, 2005; Cavell & Smith, 2005; Darling, 2005; Pianta, Stublman, & Hamre, 2002; Sanchez & Colon, 2005; Weinberger, 2005). For example, there is evidence that males and females likely experience relationship-based interventions differently, with dimensions of a relationship related to intimacy and authenticity being especially important for girls, whereas support for autonomy being especially important for boys (Bogat & Liang, 2005; Holsinger & Ayers, 2004). One difference that has consistently emerged in mentoring research is that in contrast to individualistic cultures, youth from collectivist cultures prefer familial mentoring relationships versus formal assigned mentoring relationships (Darling, Bogat, Cavell, Murphy, & Sanchez, 2006; Sanchez & Colon, 2005). Nonetheless, more research on youth characteristics in a mentoring context is needed (e.g., see Darling et al., 2006; Granger, 2002).

Mentor characteristics likely influence the bond between youth and mentor (Pianta et al., 2002). For example, youth-centered mentors who display positive regard might develop a stronger bond with mentees that in turn encourages healthy outcomes (DuBois, Neville, et al., 2002). Although evidence from the corporate mentoring literature suggests that female and male mentors might provide different types of relationships (i.e., psychosocial vs.

instrumental), gender of the mentor has not been shown to be associated with relationship quality (Bogat & Liang, 2005). Similarly, gender matching of youth and staff has not been found to be a robust predictor of outcomes—although there is some evidence that at-risk males experience better outcomes when matched with male mentors (Novotney, Mertinko, Lange, & Baker, 2000). There also is no clear pattern of difference in outcomes between cross-race versus same-race mentoring relationships. However, this lack of difference might be due to the reality that same-race matching with minority mentors is difficult to accomplish at the same rate as same-race or cross-race matching with White mentors (Sanchez & Colon, 2005). On the other hand, evidence suggests that mentors who receive cultural competence training have longer and higher quality relationships (Sanchez & Colon, 2005).

The fields of mentoring and juvenile justice are similar in their focus on the importance of modeling processes in paraprofessional helping relationships. Of the two disciplines, however, the field of mentoring is more developed in terms of research on the nature and function of helping relationships involving youth and adults. For example, mentoring researchers have developed instruments to evaluate relationship characteristics and outcomes from multiple sources, including how youth view the quality of their relationships with mentors (Jucovy, 2002). Furthermore, mentoring researchers have developed basic typologies of relationships that exist within mentoring pairs, and have explored the conditions under which relationship types are linked with improved youth outcomes (Langhout et al., 2004). The parallels between mentoring and juvenile justice in terms of how helping relationships are conceptualized, coupled with the more developed line of mentoring research, suggests that the literature on mentoring is appropriate to guide an initial exploration of youth–staff relationships in a juvenile correction context.

The present study employs a mentoring relationship framework to explore the relationships between juvenile care workers and incarcerated youth. As part of this effort, a youth perspective on these relationships was used because it is perhaps most critical to understand the experiences of the consumers of helping relationships (Ben-David & Silfen, 1994; Biggam & Power, 1997). We considered youth experiences of these unique relationships through the lens of positive psychology to avoid a deficit orientation, maintain consistency with a positive youth development framework, and embrace the underlying differences between the juvenile justice and criminal justice systems. Furthermore, we explored these relationships separately by gender, given evidence of variance in problematic behavior for males and females (e.g., externalized vs. internalized symptoms; Leadbeater, Kuperminc, Blatt, & Hertzog, 1999), relationships serve different purposes for males and females (e.g., emotional closeness; Johnson, 2004), and the reality that males and females can differ substantially in terms of developmental trajectories (Leadbeater et al., 1999) and their experience in the justice system (Livers & Hiers, 2007).

Specifically, there are two research questions that guide the study. The first question asks: What perceptions do youth have of the types of relationships that exist between themselves and the juvenile care worker they turn to most for help and advice? Answering this question is important as it provides a way to categorize helpful relationships for comparison on important variables. Although the answer to this question is emergent, based on findings from the mentoring literature (e.g., Langhout et al., 2004), we hypothesized that there would be different types of "most helpful" relationships youth experience in these settings. The second question asks: How is relationship type associated with perceived

likelihood of success on release in key psychosocial domains? Answering this question is important as it suggests how key relationships might function to assist youth in developing traits important for future success. Guided by social cognitive theory that emphasizes the role of modeling in human development (Bandura, 1997), we hypothesized that youth reporting stronger relationships with key staff would also report more self-efficacy for success on release. The next section further outlines the conceptual nature of the measures employed in the study.

Method

Procedure

Data for this study were collected in June and July of 2006 via surveys of youth in selected juvenile correction facilities in Alaska, Idaho, Nevada, and Oregon. Data collection occurred as part of a larger research project involving both juvenile care workers and incarcerated youth in several Western states. For the purpose of this study, juvenile care workers were defined as frontline direct care staff responsible for the day-to-day supervision and rehabilitation efforts of youth detained in long-term secure facilities. Identification of data collection sites began by proposing involvement in the study to state or county juvenile justice administrators in each of the 11 western states as identified by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Screening criteria for involvement in the study included the availability of a facility with at least one correction unit for adolescent offenders with an average length of stay approximately 90 days or greater. Human subjects protection protocols also required that each participating facility have access to a mental health professional for debriefing youth if necessary. A total of five facilities in the four states noted previously met the screening criteria, agreed to participate, and completed necessary documentation in time for inclusion in the study. One state-operated facility participated in each of the four states, and one county-operated facility also participated in Nevada. All facilities involved in the study housed both male and female juvenile offenders.

Two researchers, one male and one female, administered the survey to youth. The researchers emphasized that participation in the study was voluntary, and that there would be neither a reward for completing a survey nor any consequence for not completing a survey. Surveys were usually given to gender-homogenous groups of 12-20 youth in a location, such as a classroom, that provided adequate individual private work space. The presence of facility staff during survey administration was minimized to the extent allowed by security protocols. Youth responded to a 144-item instrument designed to assess youth experiences in the facility, social networks, key personality traits, perceived likelihood of success, and fears and goals for the future. The researchers were present throughout the survey administration to answer questions, check for understanding, and assist youth in reading and completing the instrument as necessary. Most youth completed the survey within 30 to 40 minute.

Participants

A total of 543 youth ($n = 569$ available with $n = 26$ refusals) in Alaska ($n = 86$), Idaho ($n = 125$), Nevada ($n = 186$), and Oregon ($n = 146$) agreed to take part in the study. Forty-two

youth were unavailable during data collection for various reasons, including medical appointments, court hearings, work detail, and passes. The sample consisted of 384 males (71%) and 159 females (29%). Males ranged in age from 12 to 22 years ($M = 16.52$, $SD = 1.48$). Females ranged in age from 13 to 21 years ($M = 16.41$, $SD = 1.49$). On average, ninth grade was the last grade completed by both males and females. Most males were White (39%), followed by Hispanic (19%), multiethnic (17%), Black (8%), Native American (8%), other (6%), and Asian (3%). Most females were White (37%), followed by multiethnic (23%), Native American (11%), Hispanic (10%), Black (9%), other (8%), and Asian (2%).

Stay for males in their current program ranged from 0 to 66 months ($M = 9.64$, $SD = 11.04$), with an average expected total stay of 16.46 months ($SD = 19.64$). Stay for females in their current program ranged from 0 to 48 months ($M = 5.62$, $SD = 7.43$), with an average expected total stay of 12.14 months ($SD = 17.83$). Males reported an average of 7.72 prior incarcerations ($SD = 14.54$), whereas females reported an average of 11.12 prior incarcerations ($SD = 18.10$). Most males (35%) identified violent crimes as the offense leading to their current incarceration, followed by sexual offenses (21%), property offenses (16%), status offenses (15%), probation violations (8%), and multiple offenses (5%). Most females (33%) also identified violent crimes as the offense leading to their current incarceration, followed by status offenses (31%), probation violations (14%), property offenses (10%), multiple offenses (7%), sexual offenses (3%), and prostitution (3%).[1]

Although we do not focus on staff reports in the present study, a brief description of that population helps provide important context. Juvenile care workers from each of the participating facilities took surveys as part of the larger data collection effort to gain individual level data on demographics, background, and attitudes toward working with youth. A total of 250 of the 296 available juvenile care workers agreed to participate in the research, resulting in an 85% response rate. Seventy percent of staff were male and 30% were female, and they ranged in age from 20 to 71 years ($M = 41.42$, $SD = 11.46$). The majority (82%) of staff were White, followed by multiethnic (6%), Black (4%), Asian (3%), Hispanic (2%), Native American (2%), and other (1%). Forty-one percent of staff reported having a 4-year college degree, followed by high school diploma (28%), 2-year degree (21%), and graduate degree (10%). On average, staff worked in their respective facilities for 7.85 years ($SD = 7.47$), and worked with youth in some capacity for 13.57 years ($SD = 9.37$).

Forty-nine percent of staff reported that their approach to working with youth was equally juvenile corrections and positive youth development oriented, followed closely by 47% of staff who reported that their approach was mostly (or only) positive youth development oriented. The rest of staff (4%) reported their approach to be mostly (or only) juvenile corrections oriented. A total of 98% of staff agreed that their goals for dealing with juvenile offenders focused on rehabilitation, 83% agreed that their goals focused on deterrence, 14% agreed that their goals focused on incapacitation, and 8% agreed that their goals focused on punishment. A similar pattern of responses emerged when staff reported on their perception of facility goals in the areas of rehabilitation, deterrence, incapacitation, and punishment. Overall, staff characteristics and pattern of attitudes were relatively stable across both gender and facilities.

Administrative staff who reported on facility-level data are also not the focus of the present study. A brief summary provides key facility data, however, to illustrate institutional

philosophy and resources. All administrators agreed that their facility's goals for dealing with juvenile offenders were focused on rehabilitation. Fifty percent of administrators also agreed that their facility's goals focused on deterrence, 33% also agreed that goals focused on incapacitation, and none agreed that goals focused on punishment. A high school diploma or equivalent was the minimum education needed at all facilities for employment as a juvenile care worker. One half of the facilities required at least 160 hours of initial training during the first year of employment, and one half offered incentives to juvenile care workers to continue their education. Administrators at each facility reported that all their staff completed training in the following areas related to working with delinquent youth: thinking errors, independent living, prerelease counseling, substance abuse, anger management, and basic medical and mental health.

Measures

Relationship quality. A youth mentoring relationship quality inventory developed by Rhodes et al. (2005) was used to explore how incarcerated youth perceive their relationship with a juvenile care worker they turn to most for help and advice. The inventory was developed to tap youth perceptions of mentoring relationships, and uses items drawn from the mentoring literature that deal with assessing relationship characteristics and quality (Grossman & Johnson, 1999; Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Jucovy, 2002; Langhout et al., 2004). The inventory consists of 15 Likert-type items that assess relationship qualities related to satisfaction, coping, happiness, and trust. The wording of the inventory was modified slightly for the purpose of the study, and sample items include "This staff has lots of good ideas about how to solve a problem" and "When I am with this staff, I feel mad". Respondents rated each statement on a 5-point scale with 1 = *not at all*, 2 = *very little*, 3 = *somewhat*, 4 = *quite a bit*, and 5 = *very much*. The average of item responses created a score of relationship quality that could range from 1 to 5, with higher scores representing more positive relationships ($\alpha = .88$ for males and $\alpha = .85$ for females).

Instructions for completing this inventory were emphasized before and during the survey. For this measure, it was important for each youth to think of a particular juvenile care worker and rate his or her relationship with that worker. Based on a prompt used by Beier et al. (2000), we told youth verbally and in writing to:

> Think of the staff (i.e., counselor, officer, etc.) on this unit you turn to most for help and advice. Keeping only this person in mind, read each statement carefully and circle the number on the scale that is most true for you.

It was stressed verbally that youth should think of a staff whom they respected, and that "respect" did not necessarily mean "like". Furthermore, we emphasized that youth should nominate only juvenile care workers (versus other types of staff such as nurses), and instructed youth to keep only that one staff in mind when answering these questions. This less-directed nomination procedure has been used previously in mentoring research (Beier et al., 2000) and is believed to produce more meaningful and valid ties between relationships and positive outcomes for youth (DuBois, Neville et al., 2002). To explore basic characteristics

of the staff nominated by youth, the survey included several follow-up questions about that staff, including gender, shift normally worked, and if they were formally assigned to work with the youth (e.g., as a case manager or primary counselor) versus another juvenile care worker on that unit. As a result of concerns surrounding anonymity, we were unable to collect other potentially interesting staff characteristics from youth, such as race or ethnicity.

Perceived likelihood of success. The dependent variable of interest for our second research question was the Post-Detention Likelihood to Succeed (PDLS) scale (Evans, Brown, & Killian, 2002). Instead of tracking postrelease outcomes or forecasting risk of recidivism based on static variables such as offense history, this measure assesses the likelihood of youth to succeed on release from incarceration based on their beliefs about the future. Conceptually, the measure draws on the robust association between self-efficacy beliefs and future behavior (Bandura, 1997; Koestner et al., 2006; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). For example, boosting self-efficacy in young adults while they plan a course of action to achieve a challenging goal can increase progress toward achieving that goal (Koestner et al., 2006). Furthermore, positive expectations about the future have been linked to adjustment in disadvantaged youth (see Dubow, Arnett, Smith, & Ippolito, 2001 for review). This forecasting approach to assessing potential for success on release from incarceration also is similar to that explored by other recidivism researchers (e.g., Benda, Toombs, & Peacock, 2003; Mills, Kroner, & Hemmati, 2004).

Four suppositions well-established in the delinquency literature underlie the construct of the PDLS scale. These suppositions are (a) youth who reoffend or use substances are *more* likely to be delinquent, (b) youth who reenter an antisocial network are *more* likely to be delinquent, (c) youth who reduce conflict are *less* likely to be delinquent, and (d) youth who are involved in prosocial activities are *less* likely to be delinquent (Brown, Killian, & Evans, 2003; Carr & Vandiver, 2001; Evans et al., 2002; Lattimore, Visher, & Linster, 1995). The PDLS scale was modified for use in this study and included 12 of the original 13 Likert-type items that measure self-efficacy beliefs about future behavior in the domains suggested by these four suppositions. Two items assess involvement in prosocial activities (e.g., "After leaving here, I will complete high school"; $r = .52$, $p \leq .01$ for males and $r = .45$, $p \leq .01$ for females). Four items assess social networks (e.g., "After leaving here, I will hang out with old friends"; $\alpha = .70$ for males and $\alpha = .72$ for females). Four items assess substance abuse and reoffending (e.g., "After leaving here, I will return to detention"; $\alpha = .69$ for males and $\alpha = .63$ for females). Two items assess conflict reduction (e.g., "After leaving here, I will work at not getting into fights with other youth"; $r = .60$, $p \leq .01$ for males and $r = .56$, $p \leq .01$ for females). Respondents rated each statement on a 5-point scale with 1 = *disagree strongly* and 5 = *agree strongly*. The average of item responses created a score of perceived likelihood of success on release that could range from 1 to 5, with higher scores representing more positive forecasts ($\alpha = .86$ for males and $\alpha = .84$ for females on the overall scale).

Covariates. Covariates for the study included age, ethnicity, and time in relationship (i.e., time in current program or unit). We used this approach to assessing relationship duration, given the wording of the nomination procedure described earlier and our desire to focus on relationships that at the time of the survey were characterized by high levels of

contact. Age was measured continuously in years only, and time in relationship was measured continuously in months only. Ethnicity was measured categorically. Because more than half the sample was White and some of the other categories were small, ethnicity was dichotomized as 0 = *White* and 1 = *non-White*.

Results

Analyses were conducted separately by gender using SPSS version 12.0. A slight majority (51%) of the 330 males who resided in a program that assigned juvenile care workers to be some version of a case manager did *not* identify that staff member as the one they turn to most for help and advice. Similarly, a slight majority (53%) of the 137 females who resided in a program that assigned some version of a case manager did *not* identify that staff member as the one they turn to most for help and advice. Most males and females identified a same-sex staff as the one they turn to most for help and advice (i.e., 81% of males selected male staff and 64% of females selected female staff; $\chi^2(1, n = 501) = 94.19$, $p \leq .001$). Most staff (≈40%) nominated by males and females worked various shifts, followed by ≈35% working mainly swing shifts and ≈25% working mainly dayshifts.

Dimensions of Relationship Quality Measure

The measure of relationship quality developed by Rhodes et al. (2005) on a community-based sample of youth identified four dimensions to mentor–youth relationships. To assess how well this model fit the present data, we examined reliability coefficients and conducted both a traditional confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) as well as a CFA using structural equation modeling. Results of these analyses suggested potential problems with model fit. To assess if a different formulation of the relationship quality measure would better fit the present data from incarcerated delinquent youth, we conducted a principal components analysis (PCA) of the 15 items in the scale. A preliminary visual examination of the correlation matrix of items in the youth mentoring relationship quality inventory revealed conceptually appropriate associations in direction and strength. An initial PCA without rotation extracted three components with eigenvalues more than 1 for both males and females. Although the solutions for both males and females were robust, interpretation of the component matrix was difficult because of no clear pattern of item loading. The analysis performed again with varimax rotation substantially improved interpretability. Component loading patterns were highly similar for males and females, and typically in the .60 to .80 range with limited/weak multiple loadings. Variance accounted for by the components with the rotated solution emerged as 32%, 18%, and 14%, respectively, for males; and 29%, 16%, and 16%, respectively, for females. These solutions were consistent with the results of another PCA conducted with gender combined, suggesting a parsimonious and generalizable component structure.

Table 1 presents the loading matrix, reliability coefficients, and descriptive statistics for the subscales for the youth mentoring relationship quality inventory by gender. Interpretation of and labeling of the components emerged through examination of the item loadings and

Table 1
Principal Components Analysis Solution With Varimax Rotation for Youth Mentoring Relationship Quality Inventory by Gender

Item	Satisfaction	Coping	Closeness
1. This staff person promises we will do something and then we won't do it	.61/.61		
2. This staff person makes fun of me in ways I don't like	.70/.62		
3. I wish this staff person was different	.64/.70		
4. When this staff person gives me advice, she or he makes me feel kind of stupid	.74/.75		
5. When I am with this staff person, I feel ignored	.77/.81		
6. When I am with this staff person, I feel bored	.75/.83		
7. When I am with this staff person I feel mad	.79/.76		
8. I can't trust this staff person with secrets because she or he would tell my parents/guardian	.55/.40		
9. When I am with this staff person, I feel disappointed	.77/.53		
10. When something is bugging me, this staff person listens while I get it off my chest		.80/.83	
11. This staff person has lots of good ideas about how to solve a problem		.77/.86	
12. This staff person helps me take my mind off things by doing something with me		.82/.78	
13. I wish this staff person knew me better			.81/.89
14. I wish this staff person spent more time with me			.88/.88
15. I wish this staff person asked me more what I think			.78/.85
Cronbach's alpha	.91/.86	.82/.83	.77/.85
Mean	4.05/4.18	3.64/3.90*	3.48/3.17**
Standard deviation	.90/.74	1.07/1.03	1.15/1.23

NOTES: First number in each column represents males. Second number in each column represents females. No multiple component loadings exceed .43 for males (Item 3) and .40 for females (Item 3).
*$p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$.

comparison with the work by Rhodes et al. (2005). In that study, the authors labeled the four components they extracted "not dissatisfied," "not unhappy," "helped to cope," and "trust not broken." In the present data with the three component solution, the "not dissatisfied" and "not unhappy" items all load onto component one, the "helped to cope" items all load onto component two, and the "trust not broken" items all load on component three. This consistency suggests that the interpretation by Rhodes et al. (2005) is generally applicable to the present data. To simplify and align labels with a more positive orientation, however, the components for this study were relabeled "satisfaction" (component one), "coping" (component two), and "closeness" (component three). These relabeled dimensions of the youth mentoring relationship quality inventory also are congruent with the interpretations of other mentoring researchers (e.g., Jucovy, 2002). Based on the item response options described previously, the mean scores across subscales for males and females suggest that youth are largely positive in their assessment of relationships with key staff (e.g., a mean of 4.00 = "quite a bit").

Relationship Types

To identify possible relationship types for comparison in later analyses, a *k*-means cluster analysis was performed using the *satisfaction*, *coping*, and *closeness* subscales of the youth mentoring relationship quality inventory identified through the PCA. A *k*-means cluster analysis was employed because it uses an algorithm to suggest groupings in such a way to maximize between group contrasts (Langhout et al., 2004; Lattin, Carroll, & Green, 2003). To assess the ideal number of clusters to keep that best fit the present data and goals of the study, analyses were run separately by gender; first with two clusters specified, then three clusters, then four clusters (Lattin et al., 2003). Based on prior research (e.g., Langhout et al., 2004) it was anticipated that no more than four clusters would emerge with three variables (subscales). The two cluster specification failed to converge after 10 iterations, thus was discarded as a potential solution. Both the three-cluster and four-cluster specifications converged for males and females within the specified 10 iterations. In contrast to the four cluster solution, the three cluster solution revealed a distinct loading pattern and the number of youth in each cluster was more balanced and robust for both males and females. Thus, the three cluster solution was retained for interpretation and the remaining analyses.

Figures 1 and 2 present graphical representations of the clusters for males and females, respectively. Cluster 1 is marked by relatively high scores across the three relationship-quality subscales. In comparison, Cluster 2 is marked by slightly lower scores on the *satisfaction* and *coping* subscales but substantially lower scores on the *closeness* subscale. Finally, Cluster 3 is marked by moderate scores on the *satisfaction* and *closeness* subscales but a relatively low score on the *coping* subscale.

As noted by Lattin et al. (2003), a heuristic is useful to guide interpretation of the results of cluster analyses. For interpretation of mentoring-type relationship types, prior research has revealed a broad but inconsistent range of characterizations, including satisfied and dissatisfied (Styles & Morrow, 1992); developmental and prescriptive (Morrow & Styles, 1995); social and instrumental (Hamilton & Hamilton, 1990); and moderate, unconditionally supportive, active, and low-key (Langhout et al., 2004). Guided by these previous efforts at categorization, the relationship groups identified through the present analyses were characterized as follows:

- Cluster 1: "balanced" (↑ satisfaction / ↑ coping / ↑ closeness). From the perspective of the youth, his or her relationship with the nominated staff is marked by high levels of trust and positive affect, effective problem solving, and engagement. Overall, youth report having a very good relationship with the key staff.
- Cluster 2: "practical" (↑ satisfaction / ↑ coping / ↓ closeness). From the perspective of the youth, his or her relationship with the nominated staff is marked by trust and positive affect, effective problem solving, and low levels of engagement. Overall, youth report having a good relationship with the key staff but note less personal engagement with the staff.
- Cluster 3: "engaged" (↑ satisfaction / ↓ coping / ↑ closeness). From the perspective of the youth, his or her relationship with the nominated staff is marked by trust and positive affect, less effective problem solving, and good engagement. Overall, youth report having an adequate relationship with the key staff, but do express dissatisfaction with the problem solving strategies employed by the staff.

Figure 1
Representation of Relationship Clusters for Males

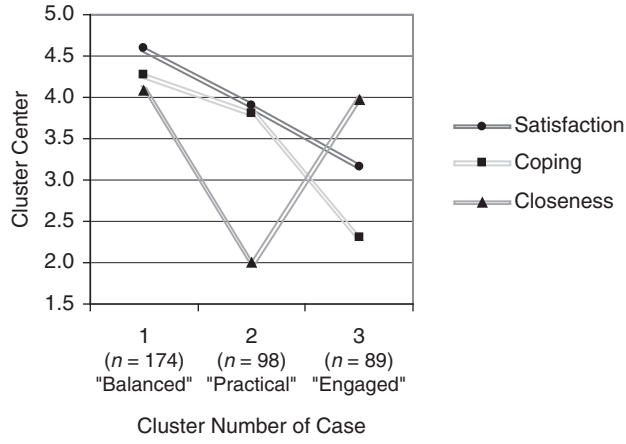
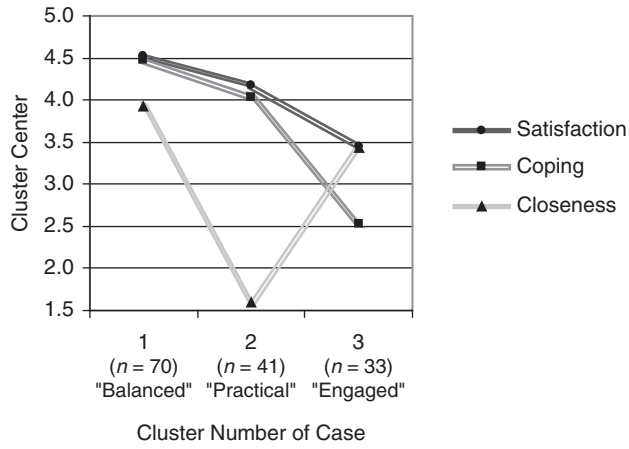


Figure 2
Representation of Relationship Clusters for Females



Differences in Perceived Likelihood of Success

With an initial typology of most helpful relationships identified, the next step in the analyses was to examine the domains of perceived likelihood of success across relationship types. To accomplish this, we conducted a multivariate analysis of covariance

Table 2
Results of Multivariate Analysis of Covariance of PDLS Subscales Across Relationship Cluster by Gender

	Males					Females				
Statistic	Value	*F*	N/D *df*	*p*	η^2	Value	*F*	N/D *df*	*p*	η^2
Wilk's Λ	0.85	7.32	8/672	<.001	.08	0.87	2.72	8/244	<.05	.07

NOTES: Box's test of equality of covariance for both males and females not significant at $p > .10$. Levene's test of equality of error variances for both males and females not significant for all subscales at $p > .10$. Power ≥ .87 for both males and females. Effect size statistics indicate a "medium" effect for both males and females (Cohen, 1977). PDLS = Post-Detention Likelihood to Succeed scale; N/D = numerator/denominator.

(MANCOVA) with the three relationship types as groups, the scores on each of the four domains of the PDLS as dependent variables, and age, ethnicity, and time in relationship as covariates.[2] An assessment of key assumptions for a reliable MANCOVA revealed that two scales were negatively skewed. Transformations subsequently normalized both subscales, and assumptions for the analysis were then met (e.g., Levene statistic >.05 for all subscales and Box's Test >.05).

Table 2 presents the results of the MANCOVA. Results indicated that there is a significant difference in the PDLS subscale scores across relationship types for both males and females. Because the overall MANCOVAs were significant, univariate ANCOVAs were appropriate and revealed significant difference across clusters for each subscale for males ($p \leq .001$) as well as significant differences across clusters for the *social networks* and *conflict reduction* subscales for females ($p \leq .05$ and $p \leq .001$, respectively). Therefore, pairwise comparisons were performed on these subscales employing a Bonferroni correction to address the possibility of Type I errors associated with the number of multiple comparisons conducted. Results of the pairwise analyses indicate that males have significant differences on all subscale scores between Clusters 1 and 3 (*balanced* and *engaged*) and Clusters 2 and 3 (*practical* and *engaged*). All pairwise comparisons were significant for males at $p \leq .05$. Females, on the other hand, had a significant difference only on the *social networks* and *conflict reduction* subscale scores between Clusters 1 and 3 (*balanced* and *engaged*). All pairwise comparisons were significant for females at $p \leq .01$. Age and ethnicity emerged as significant covariates for females only ($p \leq .05$). Figures 3 and 4 present means plots of subscale scores (nontransformed) for males and females, respectively. All PDLS subscale scores decline from Cluster 1 (*balanced*) to Cluster 2 (*practical*) to Cluster 3 (*engaged*) for both males and females.

Discussion

The objective of the present study was to develop an initial typology of youth–staff relationships from the perspective of youth using a mentoring framework and then explore for differences on the domains of perceived likelihood of success on release across the identified relationship types. Three relationship types based on satisfaction, coping, and closeness

Figure 3
Post-Detention Likelihood to Succeed (PDLS) Subscale Scores by Relationship Cluster for Males

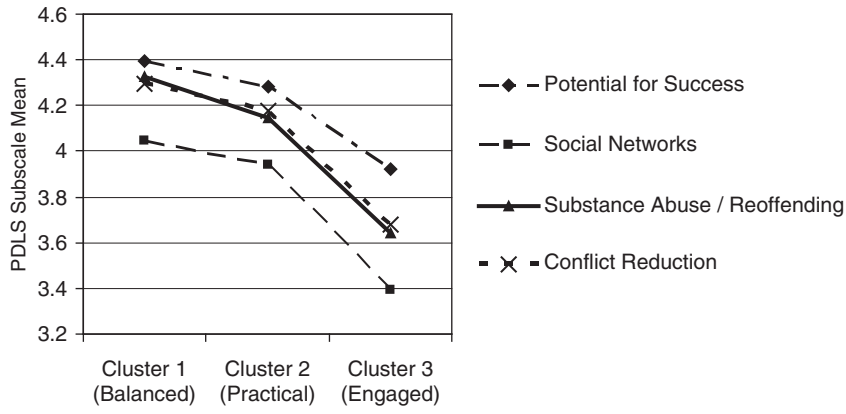
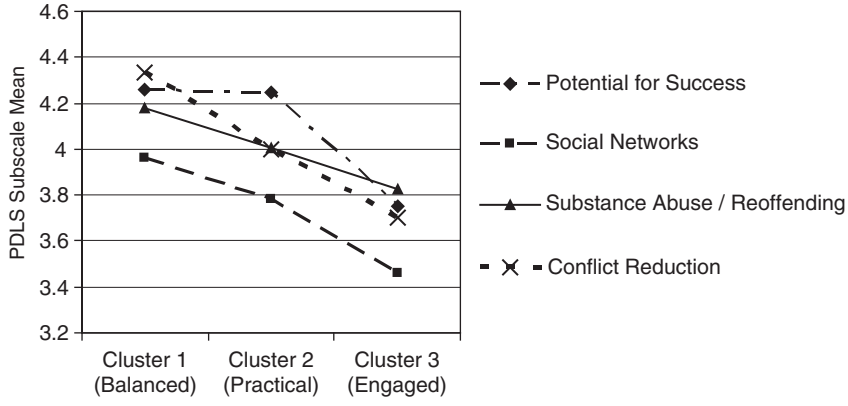


Figure 4
Post-Detention Likelihood to Succeed (PDLS) Subscale Scores by Relationship Cluster for Females



dimensions of relationship quality were identified for both males and females: *balanced* (high across dimensions), *practical* (low in closeness), and *engaged* (low in coping). On average, youth in the *balanced* group perceived the greatest likelihood of success on release on each of four domains: potential for success, social networks, substance abuse/reoffending, and conflict reduction; followed by the *practical* group and then the *engaged* group. Males

in the *engaged* group had significantly less positive forecasts about their future on all four domains than the *balanced* and the *practical* relationship types. Females in the *engaged* group had significantly less positive forecasts about their future on the social networks and conflict reduction domains than the *balanced* relationship type only.

Context is important when forming and assessing potential explanations for these research findings. In the present study, the youth–staff relationships examined exist within a total institution. The self-contained nature of total institutions and the inherent power differentials within their walls can have a profound influence on the attitudes and behavior of both staff and residents. For example, residents might report on their relationships with staff in a manner that is more role-congruent with the norms and expectations in the institution than their actual experience. Despite this cautionary note about validity, it is also important to recognize that from the perspective of youth, all the relationships discussed here are the most helpful they have with staff in the institution at the time of the data collection. Accordingly, the challenge is to identify, understand, and learn from the "best of the best" of these relationships reported on by youth without characterizing the less helpful relationships as "bad."

The primary feature distinguishing the three relationship types, lower scores on the coping dimension in the *engaged* group, suggests an association between problem-solving strategies employed by staff in the relationship and a less positive forecast by youth about their future. The use of less effective coping strategies by staff in this relationship group could interfere with the ability of youth to process stress. From a social cognitive perspective, higher levels of stress might interfere with the attention and retention processes necessary to watch, consider, and assimilate the behavior of role models, thus reducing self-efficacy development (e.g., regarding potential for success on release). Furthermore, certain states of arousal stemming from unchecked stress in youth, such as aggression, could lead staff to avoid positive social persuasions linked to gains in self-efficacy. Perhaps even more concerning, youth who externalize reactions to unregulated stress could incite staff to engage in negative social persuasions, which are particularly effective in undermining self-efficacy (resulting in a negative cycle).

From the perspective of youth in the *engaged* relationship group, staff who employ less effective coping strategies in their interactions with the youth might present as too directive in their problem-solving efforts. This interpretation is consistent with that of Rhodes et al. (2005), who suggest that youth dissatisfaction with coping strategies in a relationship might be signaling that staff are focusing on fixing what they believe to be wrong versus following the lead of the youth. Youth might interpret this directive approach as signaling that their concerns are invalid or that they are unable to form workable solutions, which in turn affects their self-worth. This hypothesized association between staff who are too directive and less successful outcomes for youth also is supported by the work of Morrow and Styles (1995), who suggest that more positive outcomes for youth emerge when mentors follow the lead of the youth. Indeed, a recent ethnographic study of incarcerated adolescent offenders revealed that the youth held particular disdain for overly authoritarian staff, but appreciation for staff who "took the time to listen to them and try to come up with creative solutions" (Inderbitzin, 2005, p. 18).

The present study is correlational, however, so it might be perceived likelihood of success on release influences the relationship type that youth develop with staff. This is consistent

with current thinking about the reciprocity between personality and characteristics of relationships (e.g., see Cooper, 2002). Youth with more negative forecasts about their future on release are perhaps the most likely to be hardened and skeptical in general, and seek out relationships that are congruent with this less positive orientation. Negative cognitions also are likely to lead to negative actions, which could result in *engaged* group staff adopting an authoritarian approach in the relationship as a means to address the more challenging attitudes and behaviors of these youth. Furthermore, individuals with lower self-efficacy often have a narrower vision of how best to solve a problem (Bandura, 1997). The least efficacious youth in the *engaged* group, who express dissatisfaction with the coping techniques of staff, might actually be signaling a limited ability to see the merit of problem-solving strategies that differ from their own.

Youth with the least positive forecasts about their potential for success on release also might be the most antisocial or "institutionalized". From this perspective, youth in the *engaged* group might be establishing a bond with staff as a means to make their time in the program less arduous. In doing so, however, these youth also avoid addressing substantive issues related to change by avoiding or dismissing the problem-solving efforts of staff. This approach has been called a "fake it" strategy (Abrams, 2006). Youth who adopt this strategy often are resistant to change or are unwilling to share information with staff, but understand the value of developing advantageous relationships and presenting as invested in the program. As part of this effort, they preserve their delinquent values or privacy by focusing on trivial issues in discussions with staff. Staff who sense this insincerity or avoidance likely respond by being more directive. The tension created by this dynamic then results in youth reporting less satisfaction in the relationship, especially on the dimension related to coping and problem solving (Abrams, 2006; Abrams et al., 2005).

As noted, males and females had different constellations of domains of perceived likelihood of success significantly associated with relationship type. Findings in this area suggests that the two perceived likelihood of success domains that center on relational issues are particularly salient for delinquent females who are often more focused on, and sensitive to, relationship dynamics than males (Weiler, 1999). Alternatively, this finding could suggest that key staff for females are most consistent across relationship groups at encouraging the same beliefs about education and reoffending/substance abuse. In either case, within the relationships identified in the present study, overall relationship quality and satisfaction with coping strategies used by staff appear most strongly associated with forecasts in social domains for females.

The previous observations about correlational data apply here as well. Females who feel that they are less likely to succeed in social domains on release might indeed lack necessary relationship skills, and this is reflected in less positive relationships with staff in the facility—especially on the dimension related to problem solving. Consistent with previous interpretations, this could signal an effort by youth to preserve congruence between their beliefs about relationships and what they experience in relationships. Females who are more negative in their forecasts about potential for success on release also might exude other negative attitudes and behaviors that lead staff to become more directive in their approach, which eventually emerges as dissatisfaction with coping strategies in the relationship. Finally, females with less positive forecasts might be more hardened and the most

resistant to change in general, and thus more likely to dismiss problem-solving efforts and strategies employed by staff.

Age emerged as a significant covariate for females when considered with perceived likelihood of success across relationship groups. It is not clear from our data why age was not significant for males; however, examination of mean ages across groups revealed that on average, both males and females in the *practical* relationship group were the oldest compared with the *balanced* and *engaged* groups. The *practical* group is marked by lower scores on the bonding dimension of the relationship, but the overall quality of the relationship is good. This could indicate that more mature youth have less inclination to seek out an emotional connection with staff, perhaps as a function of developmental tasks related to autonomy and individuation. Older youth also are more likely to have the most experience in the juvenile justice system. Youth who have multiple incarcerations or long terms to serve might adopt a "doing time" strategy, whereby they engage in isolation, polite distance, and routine as their primary coping mechanisms (Abrams et al., 2005). Similarly, older youth could be drawn to relationships with low expectations for emotional closeness to avoid "getting too comfortable" with institutional living in general (Abrams et al., 2005).

Ethnicity also was a significant covariate for females but not males. Our treatment of ethnicity makes it difficult to provide a satisfying explanation for this finding, but it is reflective of mixed findings in prior research around the role of ethnicity in mentoring relationships. Time in relationship also did not emerge as a significant covariate for males or females. It is not clear from the data why this is the case, because one might hypothesize that longer duration key relationships would be associated with more positive ratings of the helping relationship. Given these findings, future research on ethnicity and relationship duration in a juvenile corrections context is suggested.

Implications

From the perspective of incarcerated youth, there is variance in their most important relationships with staff. It is tempting, therefore, to decide that efforts should be made to develop protocols that match youth and staff to encourage an ideal relationship type. Until we better understand the range of youth and staff characteristics associated with relationship quality and outcomes in correctional settings, however, an effort at "matching" is premature. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to argue that it is desirable for youth to have the most positive relationships linked to positive forecasts for success on release possible. Considering the present results, this would suggest efforts to encourage relationships between youth and staff that resemble the *balanced* type.

Similar to the conclusions of Grossman and Bulle (2006) in regard to "connectedness" between youth and nonparental adults: recruiting appropriate staff, providing them with meaningful training (e.g., rapport development, cultural awareness, female-responsive treatment, etc.), and helping them to maintain relationships through programmatic structure and positive program atmosphere are likely to be important activities. As part of this, educating staff regarding the potential perils of overly directive relationships seems warranted. Given many staff reported support for rehabilitation and positive youth development principles suggests that they might be open to additional or different training in these areas.

Furthermore, helping youth modify antisocial behaviors might serve an important function in improving relationship quality with staff—and ultimately—forecasts about the future.

Awareness of potential gender differences in the association between relationships and outcomes is especially important at an applied level. The preliminary results presented here about the association between relationship quality and domains of self-efficacy are congruent with literature that notes the developmental trajectory, needs, and treatment of females in the juvenile justice system are substantially different from males (Bloom, Owen, Deschenes, & Rosenbaum, 2002). Consistent with these findings, present results reveal gender-based differences that future research will need to elucidate. As part of this research, further development of our understanding of the risks and rewards of gender-matching youth and staff is critical.

Together, results support the commonly held but underresearched belief that relationships between youth and staff in secure settings is a critical vehicle by which rehabilitation can be encouraged. The present findings contribute directly to the literature in that they serve as early evidence for an association between the quality of youth–staff relationships in correctional settings and self-efficacy for success on release, and provide an initial relationship typology to guide future research efforts. Furthermore, findings also suggest that the mentoring relationship scale and its conceptualization are useful for understanding other relationships that youth have with nonparental adult role models outside of a community mentoring context. In other words, this consistency suggests that the more positive youth–staff relationships in correctional settings are similar to those identified as relationships engaged in by effective mentors and role models. Therefore, we conclude a mentoring or role model relationship framework is a promising means to further explore and understand the dynamics of youth–staff relationships within juvenile correction settings.

Limitations

There are limitations to the present study. Data are cross-sectional and do not allow for exploration of changes in relationships that could occur over time because of factors such as developmental processes. Data are from self-reports that could lead to over- or underreporting. Although our sample size was adequate, additional data might reveal a different cluster model solution (e.g., a four cluster model reported in prior mentoring literature). Relationship quality data also were from only one member of the dyad, and a more holistic consideration of multiple perspectives and reciprocal processes could influence results. The precision of the staff nomination procedure and time in relationship measure was limited in that they do not provide information about whether the nominated staff had been the most important staff for the entire time the youth was in the program or for just some portion of that time. This could influence findings in that multiple changes in the most helpful relationship over time could suggest that this is a more fluid process and potentially invalidate the importance of relationship duration on outcomes. Finally, the present study also obtained limited characteristics of the nominated staff. It might be that factors such as age, ethnicity, marital status, and parental status could affect the present findings about youth–staff relationships and their association with outcomes for youth (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

These limitations, however, also suggest areas for future research. Because the present study was cross-sectional and focused on one perspective of the relationship, future research should incorporate other approaches, such as longitudinal and dyadic designs, to better understand nuances in relationships and outcome expectancies in juvenile correction settings. For example, data from youth–staff dyads over the course of incarceration would be helpful in understanding important bidirectional processes in these relationships and how they might be associated with future forecasts, and ultimately, successful outcomes. Researchers also should draw on recent qualitative work to develop more specific research questions about the form and function of helping relationships in secure settings for youth (e.g., Abrams, 2006; Inderbitzin, 2005). Further qualitative work in this area, in general, is desirable given the richness of information and perspective it provides on a largely unknown and misunderstood population and environment.

Conclusion

The present study sets the foundation for a broad range of future social psychological research on the relationship and rehabilitative experiences of youth in correctional facilities. More investigation is necessary to understand the complexities of youth–staff relationships and other process dynamics in institutions and their association with outcomes for youth. Results presented here, however, are tentative evidence for an association between youth–adult relationships and outcomes in a juvenile corrections context. These findings are consistent with much of the educational, clinical, and youth development literature, and support the long-held belief by many in the juvenile justice field that relationships are a critical ingredient of change (Butts et al., 2005; Hirschi, 2002; Norman, 1990; Roush, 1996; Schwartz, 2001). Developing a widespread culture in youth corrections that encourages development of these relationships will no doubt remain a challenging task. The cost associated with avoiding this challenge, however, is simply too great for society and its most troubled youth.

Notes

1. Violent crimes include weapon offenses and gang activity. Status offenses include drug and alcohol-related charges. Probation violations include any violation of a court order (e.g., escape). Examination of offense type by data collection site revealed no discernable patterns or differences in rates for males or females, suggesting that variations in waiver and transfer protocols at the state level are not resulting in substantively dissimilar youth populations across the participating facilities.

2. Analyses revealed marked similarity in the three groups for both males and females, with no significant difference across groups on the variables of age, ethnicity, or time in relationship.

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