Juvenile facility staff: research, policy, and practice

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Juvenile Facility Staff: Research, Policy, and Practice
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Abstract

This chapter explores the role of staff members in juvenile facilities, particularly as they manage the core tensions between care and control. The chapter examines the function of staff in young people's lives, and the importance of understanding their role in terms of the consequences for young people's safety and well-being. Drawing from a piece of qualitative research about staff working in residential juvenile facilities in New York State, it also examines the ways that staff manage the demands of care and control, and looks at the practices of emotional labor that staff members engage in.

Juvenile Facility Staff: Research, Policy, and Practice

Workers arguably lie at the heart of our understandings of youth imprisonment. When a young person is removed from their homes and their families and detained in custody, the state assumes responsibility for their care and safety. In most youth imprisonment contexts, the state assumes the role of *in loco parentis*, or the "place of a parent," while a young person is incarcerated. Thus, the adults working in facilities for youth in trouble with the law, which includes juvenile detention, corrections, and residential facilities, serve as both custodians of a population that has been incarcerated beyond their will, but also carers who must ensure the well-being of a population of young people who are considered to be legally and socially

vulnerable. The core tension between 'care' and 'control,' then, is one which arguably animates the relationship between young people and staff in juvenile facilities (see also Inderbitzin, 2006).

Juvenile facility work is also important to understand in the broader context of labor and labor rights, and the transformation of juvenile imprisonment around the globe, particularly in the context of the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and global reforms which have sought to keep the detention of children to the minimum and transform the treatment of young people. Workers lie not only at the heart of organizational change initiatives, as they are the key individuals who implement those reforms, but also at the center of discussions about the future of care work (Armstrong et al., 2013, Himmelweit, 2018). They are also the individuals who are most likely to lose their work in the face of substantial reforms.

This chapter provides an overview of the dynamics of work in juvenile facilities, focusing on the critical role that workers place in shaping juvenile facility life, as well as a focus on the microculture of juvenile facility work, drawing on data from a US-based study of juvenile facility staff.

The micro dynamics of work in facility life, and particularly the relationships between young people and the staff who manage them, have been studied by a number of scholars and researchers, and these dynamics have pointed to some key and core issues: the tensions between care and control, the experience of trauma, both that which is imported into facility life by staff and young people and that which occurs in facility life, and the dynamics of staff training. The macro studies of work in juvenile imprisonment have pointed to the history of juvenile incarceration and their impact on local communities and the nature of work, the effect of decarceration on staff resistance to reform, and broader theoretical discussions about the

abolition of juvenile imprisonment and whether treatment can ever really be effective in juvenile justice landscapes (Schlossman, 1977, Miller, 1991, Bernstein, 2014, Cox, 2015).

Staff in Juvenile Facilities

Not all staff members working in juvenile facilities across the globe are focused on custodial matters, nor are all staff members in juvenile facilities that are primarily focused on custody and control involved in the work of control. In general, juvenile facility frontline staff (sometimes referred to as 'juvenile care workers') involved in custodial matters are often not referred to as 'guards,' despite engaging in roles similar to those as prison guards or corrections officers. They often do what is termed 'direct care' work in the field of social work and social care, which involves direct interactions with young people as clients, as opposed to administrative or managerial work or supervisory social care. These frontline staff workers are generally tasked with order maintenance, surveillance and control, the management of movements within the facility, and the uses of restraints when an incident triggers them. They are also tasked with enforcing rules and behavioral expectations, as well as implementing behavioral change strategies, often either solely or in conjunction with treatment or counselling staff members, as well as mentoring and support of young people (Kupchik, 2007). Staff members can play a critical role in assisting young people to adjust to institutional life, particularly through the support they offer (Cesaroni and Peterson-Badali, 2010). Yet these staff members also often transcend their traditional 'control' role, building close relationships with young people on their units, sometimes even as surrogate parents or guardians, often because they are the staff members in the facilities with the most frequent forms of contact with young people (Inderbitzin, 2006). It is thus often noted that frontline staff in juvenile facilities struggle

with a role conflict as they manage the often-competing goals of punishment and rehabilitation
(Abrams and Anderson-Nathe, 2013).

In her study of the role of staff working in a small cottage setting in a rural juvenile
training school in the United States, Michelle Inderbitzin found that frontline staff members
engaged in more than simply the 'control' of the young people under their care; they serve
simultaneously as correctional officers, parents, counselors, coaches, friends, and guardians"
(Inderbitzin, 2006) in a living unit context which demanded close cooperation and interaction
between staff and young people. Inderbitzin's work helpfully contributes to our understanding
of the tensions at play in a facility environment where staff are charged with transforming the
lives of young people charged with crimes.

In addition to frontline staff, there are a number of other workers in juvenile facilities that
play a critical role in the life of the facilities. In North American and British contexts,
counselors, social workers and therapists are increasingly common in facilities, whereas in
Scandinavian facilities which are more child-welfare and 'pedagogically' oriented (van der Laan
and Eichelsheim, 2013), staff members play a blended role between security and treatment. In
the Netherlands, for example, 'group workers' are employed in juvenile correctional institutions,
and they are tasked with "stimulating behavioral change" through in-depth, intensive interactions
with young people (Geenen, 2017). Institutions in Sweden, for example, include a combination
of young people placed for reasons of child welfare ('problematic home conditions') or behavior,
and the placements can range from being voluntary or done through a court order (Franzén,
2014). Staff members in these institutions are generally considered to be parent-like, providing
physical and emotional affection to young people while also expected to deliver treatment
(Franzén, 2014).

Juvenile facilities are also overwhelmingly full-time educational institutions, and thus employ teachers and other full-time educational staff. Teaching staff in juvenile facilities often have to enforce the broader sets of norms and rules in the facilities themselves. Although there have been some informal accounts of the lives of teachers and other educational staff in juvenile facilities (Zeman, 2014), there are few empirical studies of the role that teachers play in the context of confinement (Benner et al., 2016, Flores, 2015, Flores, 2012, McCray et al., 2018). Despite the fact that juvenile facilities are intended to be largely therapeutic institutions, some researchers have found that the delivery of services and care, as well as education provision, is often limited (Domenici and O'Leary, 2015, Ashkar and Kenny, 2008), even in comparison to adult prisons (Kupchik, 2007), even though it is federally mandated in U.S. contexts which receive federal funding for education.

Developmental role of staff

Juvenile facility staff arguably play a critical role in enforcing norms and expectations of behavior amongst young people during their time in confinement. They are also often working with young people during a core moment in their development, and thus arguably play an important role in either facilitating or interrupting that development, particularly through their joint roles as mentors and enforcers, as well as their ability to engage young people successfully in treatment and promote readiness to change (Mulvey et al., 2010a, Kupchik and Snyder, 2009, Schubert et al., 2011). Positive relationships between young people and staff are said to be at the core of healthy institutional functioning (Mulvey et al., 2010b)

The extant research on juvenile facility staff, primarily from Western contexts, indicates that poor relationships between young people and staff are correlated with young people's sense

of safety and their well-being, and in particular their experiences of anxiety, depression and

hopelessness (Biggam and Power, 1997, van der Laan and Eichelsheim, 2013, Harvey, 2007).

Marsh and Evans (2009) argue that the traditional literature on helping or mentoring

relationships may not sufficiently address the unique relationships that are established in juvenile

correctional settings, because juvenile justice staff spend a significant amount of time with the

young people under their care. There has been a substantial amount of research which has

looked at mentoring relationships, however, which demonstrates that young people benefit from

strong and consistent relationships with adults in these mentoring contexts (Marsh and Evans,

2009, pp. 47-8). In a study conducted in juvenile facilities in four Western states, researchers

evaluated youth perspectives on the quality of relationships with staff, with an emphasis on how

those relationships would impact on young people's self-efficacy with respect to their release

plans. They found that the types of relationships that young people developed with staff

impacted on their levels of stress, sense of self-worth, their forecasts about their future, and their

general orientations, all of which may impact on their sense of self-efficacy about their release

(Marsh and Evans, 2009). In a study comparing young people's experiences with staff in prisons

as compared to juvenile facilities, young people in juvenile facilities rated staff members more

highly for their abilities in being supportive mentors (Fagan et al., 2007).

Young people have also identified key concerns with the procedural fairness and

legitimacy of institutions. Young people incarcerated in correctional institutions place a high

value on fairness; they point to authoritarian rule-making and cultures of institutions, the limited

privacy rights, and an obsessive focus on rule-making as key concerns related to the legitimacy

of the institutions (Ashkar and Kenny, 2008, Harvey, 2007, Miller and Ohlin, 1985, Geenen,

2017). Gover *et al,* in their study of 48 U.S. juvenile facilities, found that young people who

perceived their institution to have less 'justice' were more likely to report higher levels of anxiety (Gover et al., 2000). Dutch researchers similarly found a relationship between "experienced perceptions of justice of the rules and fairness of treatment in the institution" and feelings of safety by young people in juvenile institutions (van der Laan and Eichelsheim, 2013). A British study revealed that young people's experiences of unfairness at the hands of staff related to their levels of stress (Harvey, 2007).

Gender dynamics between staff and young people

Since juvenile facilities are often gender segregated, the gender dynamics at play in the facilities, both between staff members and young people, and between young people themselves, can be an important dimension of life inside of those facilities. Some researchers have examined the gendered dynamics of staff-youth relationships, and have found that staff members can play a vital role in young people's self-understandings, their gender identity, and in enforcing normative gender role expectations (Galardi and Settersten, 2018). Researchers have found that girls are often described by staff members as more emotionally labile, more manipulative and difficult to work with (Bond-Maupin et al., 2002, Baines and Alder, 1996, Lanctôt et al., 2012). This, some have argued, may play a role not only in how staff treat young people, but also how they communicate normative gender role expectations to them, and how and what they expect of young people after they leave facilities (Galardi and Settersten, 2018). Researchers have found that staff members tend to draw on gendered stereotypes and expectations of young people's behavior, and thus when a young person does not conform to those gender role expectations or stereotypes, they may often be perceived to be more difficult or are judged negatively (Galardi and Settersten, 2018, Cox, 2018). Although some facilities in the United States and the United

Kingdom, for example, have started developing what they call 'gender-responsive' programming, it is unclear to what extent this programming engages with the views of frontline staff (Galardi and Settersten, 2018). However, there is less research on the gendered performances of staff members in juvenile facilities, and how these performances may play a role in the dynamics of care and control (although see Abrams and Anderson-Nathe, 2013).

Staff abuse and violence

Allegations of abuse and violence by staff members in juvenile facilities against young people are common (see also the chapter by Liz Ryan in this volume). Young people have died at the hands of staff members involved in aggressive restraints, they have suffered serious physical and sexual abuse, and they have sustained life threatening injuries. Novelist Colson Whitehead released his book *The Nickel Boys* (2019), which was a fictional account of the horrific abuse and violence, and sometimes homicides, that were revealed to have occurred at a reform school in Florida called the Arthur Dozier School for Boys.

Sexual violence and victimization by staff members against young people remains a problem in juvenile facilities. In the United States, the most recently available data reveals that the number of allegations of sexual victimization has increased between 2005 and 2012, and 45% of the reported incidents involved staff-on-youth sexual victimization (Beck and Rantala, 2016).

Although news media headlines might suggest that juvenile facilities are places prone to violence, investigations of juvenile facility life beneath the headlines reveals a different reality. In a large scale study of the role of officers in violence in juvenile facility life which took place in Canada, researchers found that staff "allowed, and induced" young people to use force on

other young people in the facilities (Peterson-Badali and Koegl, 2002, Cesaroni and Peterson-Badali, 2010). Negative relationships between young people and staff have also been found to be related to violence between young people and in the facilities, as identified in a study of German juvenile facilities (Klatt et al., 2016), Young Offender Institutions in England and Wales (Bottoms, 1999), and in the United States (Poole and Regoli, 1983). On the flip side, positive relationships between staff and young people have been found to be correlated to lower levels of violence (Lai, 2018).

Occupational Stress

Researchers have found that occupational stress amongst individuals working in juvenile facilities is relatively high. Staff turnover rates in juvenile correctional facilities are relatively high (Mitchell et al., 2000, Armstrong et al., 2013). Occupational stress in correctional environments has not only been linked to negative health outcomes, including lowered life expectancy, but also to negative personal behaviors, such as alcoholism and family problems, but also to chronic absenteeism, problems at work, low morale, and problems with co-workers (Mitchell et al., 2000).

High sources of stress for individuals working in juvenile facilities include negative relationships between administrators and line staff and work in institutions with a strong treatment orientation, potentially because staff members experience higher levels of role ambiguity (Mitchell et al., 2000).

In recent years, practitioners and policymakers have recognized that staff members in juvenile facilities can experience two kinds of trauma related to their work in juvenile facilities; vicarious trauma, associated with their work with young people who have entered the facilities

having experienced high levels of neglect and abuse, as well as the trauma associated with exposure to abuse and violence within the facilities (McNamara, 2010).

A New York Case Study

There is a dearth of qualitative research on the experiences and lives of juvenile facility staff. The research below documents staff perspectives on care and control in the context of reforms that were taking place in a US state-level juvenile justice system. This state, New York, is used as a case study here to reveal staff perspectives in the context of a state which was under federal and state scrutiny for its staff practices –not only had sexual and physical violence and abuse been identified in custody, but the state's treatment and behavioral change practices were also being assessed.

In order to develop an account of staff perspectives on confinement, I undertook a period of qualitative research between 2011 and 2012 inside of New York's residential juvenile facilities. The research involved observations and interviews with over 75 frontline staff members, including teachers and recreational staff, and 40 site visits to facilities, where I conducted observations in various areas of the facility, from the units, to the security booths, to the recreational areas. The research took place during a period of substantial reform in New York's system aimed at addressing allegations of abuse and violence by staff against young people, the overuse of physical restraints, as well as the state's overreliance on incarceration. The state had been under federal oversight and monitoring for a period after allegations were made that staff were engaged in sexual violence against girls in some facilities, and that they engaged in an overuse of force (King, 2010, King, 2009). In order to address these issues, the state introduced a new model of care that was designed to be 'trauma informed,' implemented a

restraint monitoring system, and began to implement changes in the daily life of facilities in order to make the facilities more home like, like allowing young people to decorate the walls of their rooms, or receive more rewards, such as video games on their units. The research study itself was focused on understanding the staff dynamics of resistance to organizational change, staff-youth relationships, and the role of behavioral change programming in the lives of staff members.

This chapter is based on interviews with 50 frontline staff members across three facilities, union members, staff at the central administration, and court-based staff and observational research which took place in five juvenile residential facilities across New York State. Where available, the length of time that the staff member worked in the system is indicated. Staff members from several positions in the facilities were interviewed. YDAs, or Youth Development Aides, spent the most time during the day with young people, and were responsible for security, movement, and monitoring of progress. Youth Counselors, or YCs, met on a regular basis with young people to monitor their treatment and behavioral change program progress and to provide some support for their release. Mental health workers were relatively sparse in the facilities, but represented a range of professions, from social workers to psychiatrists, who worked closely with young people diagnosed with a serious and persistent mental health disorder. I also interviewed teachers, recreational staff, and facility management.

<INSERT TABLE 12.1>

Methods

The study involved semi-structured interviews and observational research with staff members serving in a range of roles in the facilities, and who represented a mix of ages, race and ethnicity, and genders. The research also included a group of young people incarcerated in the facility who were trained in interview research and who conducted several research interviews, as well as a university-based research assistant who had previously been incarcerated at one of the facilities, and who participated in interviews and observations. The young people were incarcerated in the same facility where the staff were interviewed, and they conducted several of the interviews themselves. A purposive sample was generated based on the goal of interviewing participants occupying a range of positions, who had worked in the system for varying lengths of time, and who were identified by other staff members as representing a perspective that was pertinent to the research focus. The interviews followed an Appreciative Inquiry approach (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2007), in which staff members were asked to describe what they saw working well in the organization and in their relationships with young people.

At the time of the research, New York State managed juvenile facilities across the state, which ranged in size from just a handful of young people to a facility with a capacity for 200 young people. The facilities range in security from being staff secure to being locked and heavily secure, with hurricane wire fencing around the perimeter. All facilities in New York are centrally managed and overseen by the state's Office of Children and Family Services, but have their own facility directors who make day-to-day decisions about young people's movements, care and treatment. Every facility has a school, which young people attend daily. They also generally participate in some recreational activities and had staff counselors assigned to them to monitor their progress in a behavioral change program. The behavioral change program was a token economy system, whereby young people would earn privileges based on their compliance

with particular behavioral norms and rules (Kazdin, 1982, Tompkins-Rosenblatt and VanderVen, 2005, Doll et al., 2013). This kind of system is also used in residential treatment facility contexts.

The disciplinary system in New York's facilities included tickets or write-ups for young people who violated rules, which would prevent them from advancing in the behavioral change system. But informally speaking, discipline also involved the use of 'room confinement,' which sometimes involved young people being locked in their rooms (which were locked from a central unit in the facility). Although physical restraints were only triggered if a young person was considered to be a threat to themselves or others, some young people experienced the use of physical restraints as a form of punishment for misbehavior.

Young people lived on small units in the facilities, and had their own rooms. They traveled throughout the facility by unit; in the larger facilities, they would rarely interact with other units, and the 'movements' between units were orchestrated carefully by senior security staff, ensuring that no two units met each other in hallways. At least two staff members would generally accompany units of young people at all times. Young people attended school daily, for most of the day.

At the time of the research, frontline staff members in New York's juvenile facilities wore uniforms and, by all accounts, looked like prison guards (although they did not carry weapons or have pepper spray). The youth counselors in the facility wore their own clothes. But it was the frontline staff—referred to as Youth Division Aides (YDAs)—who spent the most time with young people. They sat with them on the facility units, accompanied them around the facilities, ate with them, and even sat in classrooms with them. YDAs would often work eight-

hour shifts, but the regular use of overtime, involving 16-hour shifts, was not uncommon during the study period, as a number of staff had called out sick.

Emotion management and labor

Engaging in work with young people in custody involves a great deal of emotional labor. The sociologist Arlie Hochschild has defined emotional labor as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (1983, p. 7). Juvenile facility work arguably creates particular demands to manage feelings, as staff members are expected to manage a group of young people who are held in custody against their will, and thus uphold a performance of 'control,' but residential juvenile facilities also often demand strong attention and care to relationships, or 'care,' and thus staff members sometimes struggle to perform work within these competing demands. Elaine Crawley (2004) has studied the management of emotions required by corrections officers working in adult facilities, and argues that prison work demands a performative attitude in order to manage their life at work. Crawley describes prison as an 'emotional arena' in which, because people are held against their will, where the experience of prison can be painful for incarcerated, and where the "degree of intimacy" between staff and people who are incarcerated is great (Crawley, 2004, p. 414).

Performances of control

The physical presence and performances of the YDAs, or frontline staff, was a critical part of their emotion and identity management. The YDAs wore uniforms that resembled the uniforms of prison guards; they had military-style cargo trousers and a collared shirt with the insignia of the agency on it, and carried radios (see also Abrams and Anderson-Nathe, 2013).

Although the staff were relatively diverse by gender and age, the frontline staff were predominantly male, and a number of these male staff members were physically large, and participated in heavy weightlifting. Some would come to work carrying protein milkshakes for bulking up their muscles, and some would speak to the young people in the facility about their muscle-building and weight-lifting strategies. For some of those staff, their physical bulk was deemed essential for their performance as staff members who were capable of exercising physical control over the young people they had custody over. YDA French, a white man who was in his 20s and had just started working at a small facility for boys in a rural part of the state, was himself physically strong and large. When I asked him what made a good staff member, he said that he said that if a staff can "be aggressive without being aggressive," or looks like the kind of guy who "would rip your head off," that this would be important. Referring to another physically strong and large staff member, he said that he "probably has more respect than anyone else." French had recently joined the facility after being told by a friend, who was also a staff member, he said that his friend had told him that he could come to the facility to work "and you can beat the shit out of them." However, French said that he quickly realized that this approach was wrong, and that 'talking' to young people, coupled with a strong physical appearance, was the preferable route to maintaining control.

French's description of "be[ing] aggressive without being aggressive" refers to the potential *threat* of physical violence that physically strong and large staff members represented to the young people, at least in the minds of staff members. Other staff members spoke about their need to instill a kind of fear in young people about the consequences of their actions, which may result in the ultimate enactment of physical violence. John, a white staff member, when asked about what the approach to the facility management should be, said "me personally, it

should be a lot harsher as in turn not being like mean or beating you up as in harsher." Brooks, a Black staff member and a former American football player who stood at over six feet tall, and who often dominated the room as he barked commands at young people to follow rules, said that he felt that staff needed to "grandstand" a little in front of the young people to demonstrate to them that they were in authority.

The threat of physical violence was a tenuous one for staff members at the time of the research. Prone physical restraints were a 'tool' that staff members could use against young people, but only if they posed a threat to themselves or others, not as a kind of discipline. But this standard had recently been changed, and a number of staff members who had worked in the system for a long time felt somewhat resentful that they couldn't use the tool of restraints as often as they once had. In an interview with a staff member working in a unit in the large boys' facility where young people were sent for disciplinary violations, the staff member said that he felt that the number of fights between kids had gone up since the restraint policy had changed. He felt that the kids knew that the staff probably wouldn't intervene, so they felt they could "get away with more."

Exerting control over the young people in the facility environment contributed to a number of staff feeling that this would facilitate the smooth and efficient management of what was a very complex facility environment, often with large numbers of staff and young people, frequent movement throughout the facility of staff and young people, and high levels of turnaround and transition, of both staff (on daily shift changes) and young people (who cycled through the facilities for their sentences). Movements were highly orchestrated, observed and controlled. Each facility had a central unit where staff watched over extensive surveillance cameras, logged notes, and were at the ready to send out an emergency response if a staff

member 'pulled the pin,' which meant that they initiated a call for a response from multiple staff

in the case of an emergency. There were elaborate handbooks detailing rules for young people's

comportment and their behavioral regulation and control, their personal grooming, and their need

to have their trousers above their waist. Staff members spoke frequently about the importance of

these elaborate sets of rules and regulations, and at the time of the research, one of those rules,

which many staff deemed to be important for the exercise of control, had been removed. This

involved a requirement that young people hold their hands behind their backs when they moved

throughout the facility, in theory to prevent any fist fighting or physical action as they moved

throughout the facility. Graves, a Black male YDA who had been working in the system for 30

years, spoke about the perceptions of the decline in control, and why he felt that this had

changed:

> Just the whole morale has totally changed, especially with the staff. Before, all moves
> were done before. The residents, they had their hands checked behind their backs. The
> wardens didn't want the control we had. They knew they went through a lot of stupid
> things then at that time. They were told to keep their pants pulled up, which they were.
> They were dressed in order. Their uniform was basically the same.

Graves' sense was that the facility morale had declined as the ability to control young people's

physical movements declined. His perception, was, like a number of others, that the facilities

had declined into chaos and disorder, and that the staff ability to control young people's

movements physically contributed to their overall sense of control over their environment. Sally,

a white staff member for the union that represented workers, said that she had heard from staff

aggrieved members that "there are no consequences for low level behaviors, so it ends up

escalating into bigger behaviors." Yet, some of the staff members who had been brought into the

facility under the reforms, including the mental health staff, struggled within this system to

manage their roles. According to Mandel, a white woman who was a new social worker in the

facility charged with working with young people with mental health issues, since she saw the priority of the facility to be "security first," she found that it was hard to do things with the young people which were "therapeutically useful." This tension between management and development was a struggle for all of the staff, but from the different positions that they operated from in the facility.

Managing the loss of 'control'

A number of staff members also expressed anxiety and frustration about what they perceived to be a loss of 'structure' and control in the face of reforms to the system which were aimed at making the system ostensibly more rehabilitative, but which, they argued, resulted in a confused array of practices. Some wished for greater access to restraints; others felt that they had always been engaged in rehabilitation, but that the constant churning of reforms required them to focus increasingly on controlling what was a chaotic facility. YDA Tompkins, a Black woman who had worked in the system since 1979, said that she had observed staff rely *more* frequently on the use of physical restraints in the face of increasing role confusion, and that staff had used fewer restraints when she had first started, and that there was less fighting amongst the teenaged residents. She said that she felt like when she first started in the system, "we tried to rehabilitate" the kids, and "show them a different life." Now, she said, "we're warehousing" them.

Staff members often expressed a sense of frustration and difficulty in managing what they felt was a loss of control imposed on them from above by the central management. Thus, at the level of the facility unit, where they had more discretion, they would try to manage that sense of frustration by doing what they could to exert control, often through their tone of voice or their

demeanor. A number of staff members invoked the word "structure" to describe the kind of

work that they did in their day to day work of the unit; this kind of "structure" was a form of

boundary maintenance for them—it contributed to their sense that if they provided consistent

management, rules, and a firm set of demands for the young people, they would respond well.

YDA Marshall, a white staff member who worked in the large boys' facility said, "if there's no

structure, there's no use" meaning for the staff (or for their jobs), saying that "if we don't

provide structure, we're just like another set of bad parents." Residential childcare workers and

administrators have similarly expressed a desire for 'structure' (Pazaratz, 2003, Rose, 2000).

Yet, even without explicit training in boundary management, the staff members often

sought to strike a balance with the young people which required them to draw a delicate line

between being too tough and too warm. Pagano, a white YDA, expressed this sentiment when

he described his approach:

> the kids know where my line is. They know we can have a fun time, we can fool around
> … but there are lines we do not cross. There's a lot of respect. They pick on me because
> I am a big guy and I do not care about that. We don't talk about our families…They all
> know I want to have a daughter, and they would respect the fact. They would never ever
> cross that line. It is a firm affair, they know when I am on duty this is going to happen.
> They know they should be respectful and have a good time. They do get out of line
> sometimes. I just haul them back in…

Pagano describes the withholding of personal information, but also his ability to let his

guard down and "fool around" with young people, but make it clear to them that they cannot take

advantage of him.

Staff members frequently invoked their own parenting experiences –or experiences of

being parented—to describe their approach to working with the young people under their care.

This partially reflected the disconnect in training and practice for the staff, especially the

frontline staff; training programs for staff largely relied on teaching them the tools of de-

escalation, control, and administration. Very rarely, if ever, did the trainings focus on

relationship building, boundary setting, and issues of projection, introjection, and care, issues

which may typically be presented in trainings with direct care workers in other settings. Thus, in

managing their relationships with young people, staff members often reached for the tools that

were most readily available to them—their perceptions and experiences of 'good' parenting.

Some even spoke about the complex interplay between their lives at home and those in the

facility. According to a white frontline staff member at the small boys' facility, Masterson, for

example, "… you try not to be frustrated and angry with their behavior, you try to understand

their behavior, and we have, and that's what we're trying to do, behavior modification, and I'm a

single parent-bingo!-I take all this stuff home and practice it on my kids." Bryce, a white former

YDA who had moved to the central office, saw the role of the YDA as "de facto counselor" and

role model, and that their job is to set limits and rules. He described the staff as "house parents."

Expressions of Care

It was this role as "house parents" that most often revealed the staff members'

expressions of care and investment in the young people they worked with. And yet there were

tensions in their expression of care, most often around their support of the young people after

they were released. Brooks referred to the unit that he worked on as "almost like family," and

said, of the residents, "they are all our sons." YDA Bryce described his role as a "de facto

counselor," "role model," and "house parent." Another YDA said that "I'm the psychologist,

bartender, and cab driver" for the young people. Montano, a white teacher in the large boys'

facility, commented on the staff-youth relationships in this way:

> A YDA who looks like one of the boys, talks like one of the boys, I will hear saying to
> the boy, hey, that's not right, talk right, do right or they're talking about stuff and the

> YDA is counseling him. It's so nice. It's just lovely. I think it's the hidden beauty of this place. That the YDAs, each in his own way, forms a relationship with a boy and that's why you see them hugging each other so much, even shadow boxing or fake boxing. It's a way of interacting that is playful and shows a relationship.

This teacher's observations of staff-youth relationships reveal the part of the relationships which are often obscured for reformers—the banal, everyday interactions which form the glue of facility life.

Staff members would often express tenderness and care towards young people, sometimes in contravention of the rules of the agency. Although hugging and physical contact, wasn't allowed, I often observed staff members put their arms around young people and sometimes hug them.   They would engage in often complex conversations with the young people, and some saw those conversations as essential to doing their work well. According to YDA French, "If you're not talking with them, then you are having a hard day." Bonta, a white staff member who worked as a Youth Counselor at the small boys' facility said, "'if there's no relationship, we can't do anything." After a Latino YDA, Ramirez was out of work for some time after receiving an injury during a restraint, I observed young people express joy at seeing him upon his return, hugging him and giving him a pat on the shoulder. In the context of facilities which were dominated by boredom, downtime and restlessness, staff and youth relationships were often collegial, filled with humor, and built on camaraderie and fun. One weekend day at a small boys' facility, I went with a unit of boys and a young staff member in his twenties to a game room in the facility, and I observed the staff member playing pool with one of the boys, joking around with him and talking about playing pool with his friends in a local bar. The boys and the staff members shared cultural references with each other, laughed together, and teased each other. A white YDA, Taylor spoke about how much he enjoyed taking young people on outings like hiking, which he said was done a bit more in the facility, before the reforms:

> Yeah, when you do stuff like that, you can more or less kind of, it's a break for, it's kind of a break for the staff, and a break for the kids, and you have more of a chance to bond and build better relationships with them. And if you have good relationships with the kids for the most part you don't have a lot of problems, and they're more apt to trust you and listen to what you have to say, and that spills over into like your groups, your behavioral groups, and all the other groups that you teach. They're more apt to listen to you.

Taylor's argument—that trusting relationships are the cornerstone of well-managed facilities—has also been found in research conducted in adult prison contexts (Liebling and Arnold, 2004).

It was the explicit policy of the agency that frontline staff—YDAs in particular—were not to engage in planning a young person's reentry into the community. In fact, not only were the YDAs given no training in boundary management or relationship building, they were also not provided with any information about reentry resources. Yet, a number of staff members expressed despair about the rate of return of young people to the facility, and their perception that the young people weren't receiving the appropriate support or resources while they were on the inside to prevent them returning from the outside. Echoing Tompkins' comment about 'warehousing,' according to YDA Close, for example, "what we are doing is we house them so they can come right back and so we can keep our jobs."

Despite that, a number of staff members built close relationships with young people and became invested in their lives and motivations. Many of the staff did not identify as guards, but instead saw themselves as youth worker; this reflects the blended role of 'care' and 'control' that other researchers have identified. Some staff members would suggest ideas for jobs to young people, and get job applications for them to start before their release. Others would obtain university applications and help young people apply. Another particular area of concern for staff members was for the housing and foster care of young people. As has been demonstrated elsewhere, access to housing for teenagers involved in the justice system, particularly for so-called 'dual-system' youth, who have both juvenile justice system involvement and involvement in the child welfare system, is very limited. Yet, the staff members were not only prohibited

from obtaining information about housing opportunities or attempting to link young people to those opportunities, they were also prohibited from contacting the young people after they left the facilities, as there was an explicit 'no contact' policy between staff and young people imposed for the purposes of preventing sexual 'grooming.'

Staff members would often express frustration at the seeming futility of their work and investments, and they would seek to manage the complex emotions connected to working with young people who they saw cycling through the system. YDA Pagano said "Mostly I try to keep an even mind about it. Unfortunately, with statistics and figures, most of these kids are not gonna make it. You have to have to have the wherewithal to keep coming back. Maybe you will reach one."

Implications

The research with staff in New York revealed the tensions inherent in the work of frontline juvenile facility staff, particularly in the context of reforms which aim to close large scale facilities and shift to smaller 'care home' style facilities. There is thus a tension at the heart of efforts to close large institutions in favor of smaller facilities; staff will still play a major role in the lives of young people incarcerated in these facilities, and their role may still raise questions about the relationship between care and control. Juvenile justice systems in the United States have arguably experienced a near-constant 'cycle' of reforms over the last 150 years (Bernard and Kurlychek, 2010). There are not only significant implications for recent reforms for the structure of treatment and aftercare programming (Sankofa et al., 2017), but also for the ways that frontline staff themselves manage the difficult terrain of exercising structure and discipline while also facilitating development and growth, particularly for the young people they

develop close bonds and attachments to. In a clinical trial of technology transfer in a juvenile

justice office, Taxman et al write about the critical role that frontline staff members play in the

implementation of reforms:

> Building support for innovations involves more than the initial commitment by management or
> staff. In fact, organizational scholars recommend incorporating penetrating the social structures
> and networks to address the concerns of the staff as well as the practicalities of how the content
> would be implemented in each specific organization. The staff reaps both the benefits and losses
> associated with using the innovation, and ultimately are the ones responsible for determining
> whether the new practice(s) will be integrated into their work repertoires (2014, p. 12).

Taxman et al recognize how essential staff members are for the functioning of a healthy

organization, in part because, as demonstrated above, they develop such a close relationship with

young people that has implications for both their well-being. Yet, as some have recognized, the

anxieties and emotions of workers may create instability and uncertainty in an organization

(Hirschorn, 1988). In the research documented above, staff members conveyed the daily

strategies of emotion management and performance that they engaged in as they sought to

balance care and control in the juvenile facility environment. Yet, as new reforms were

introduced, those abilities were challenged.

The research above demonstrated not only the intimate and complex role that staff play in

everyday life in the facilities, but also the limitations of organizational models that neglect to

treat frontline staff members as critical participants in young people's development. In fact, staff

members have been widely criticized by juvenile justice reformers for their role in obstructing

reforms. Some work is being done, for example, by the Annie E. Casey foundation to more fully

attend to juvenile facility staff resistance to reform by equipping frontline staff members with

more ongoing support in enacting reforms (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019). Other

jurisdictions have engaged in a coaching model, where staff receiving ongoing support in

boundary management and relationship building. This could more closely resemble the clinical

supervision model employed in social work contexts, which more arguably attends to both the internal and external dynamics of relationships that exist in juvenile justice contexts (McNamara, 2010).

Juvenile prisons and detention facilities are complex environments where relationships matter. From the explicit role that violence and abuse play in harming young people, to the more subtle dynamics at play in facilities where staff seek to support young people while also attempting to manage them, frontline staff should not be neglected in the study of juvenile imprisonment. Indeed, they are essential to understanding it.

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