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Youth Recidivism:
A Qualitative Study of Risk and Resilience

by

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THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Social Work
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

Master of Social Work

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Abstract

The rates of reoffending for Ontario youth are high and come at a significant cost to both society and the youths involved. Research to date has explored risk and protective factors. Despite this progress, the relationships between these factors and recidivism are not well understood. Knowing that a youth is exposed to any of these identified risk or protective factors does little to explain why these factors do not affect all youth equally and why some youths reoffend while others do not. Resilience theory has increasingly been used as the framework to explore the concept of recidivism. The present study investigates what makes youths successful in not reoffending and explores the ways in which they are resilient. A qualitative methodology involving in-depth interviews offered participants the opportunity to offer their own perspectives. Data were generated from ten youth participants who were residing in a secure custody facility in Ontario at the time of the study. The findings highlighted the complexity of factors that influence whether a given youth will offend and/or reoffend or not. The experiences of the ten youths in this study demonstrated that many of those influences were external and in particular structural or societal level barriers. The suggestion has been made that both the study of recidivism and interventions with at-risk youth would benefit from further enhancement of resilience theory through the inclusion of societal context and the incorporation of structural and cultural violence perspectives.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This research explores reasons that youths in trouble with the law reoffend. The central focus will be on discovering, from youths' own perspectives, the factors and processes that put them at risk to reoffend and that promote their resilience. This chapter will demonstrate the rationale for selecting this particular subject and situate the researcher within the context of the research. It will also provide an overview of the thesis by briefly outlining the content of each chapter.

1.1 Rationale of the Study

The Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services (2009-10) reported that in 2006-07 the reoffending rate for youth offenders in Ontario who had left custody in 2004-05 was 69%. The economic costs of recidivism are high and include costs associated with courts and the provision of community and custodial services (McCollister, French & Fang, 2010). In addition, there are community and social costs including compromised public safety and a sometimes reduced quality of life for both victims and offenders (Aronowitz, 2005). Young people in trouble with the law may lose the support of family and friends and may be shunned and stigmatized by their community which potentially increases the risk of reoffending for these youths.

The research to date has been successful in isolating factors related to recidivism. In particular, factors have been identified that may put youth at risk to reoffend as well as factors that may serve to protect them from reoffending. Known risk factors include age, intelligence, problems at school, family dysfunction, substance use, poverty and various structural constraints, while protective factors include comprehensive treatment

programs, community support, appropriate services to address educational, occupational and mental health needs and family intervention. Despite this progress, the relationships between these factors and recidivism are not well understood. Knowing that a youth is exposed to any of these identified risk or protective factors does little to explain why these factors do not affect all youth equally and why some youths reoffend while others do not. In the last decade, researchers have become aware of this shortcoming and suggested that the focus needs to be shifted to the youths themselves to explore their experiences and their thoughts on what leads them to reoffend (Hartwell, McMackin, Tansi & Bartlett, 2010). Emerging literature on resilience and youths facing risks goes beyond this point by noting that youths who offend, like their non-offending counterparts, are really seeking resilience in the only ways they know how (Ungar, 2001, 2007, 2012 2013; Ungar, Ghazinour & Richter, 2013). These findings suggest that an approach to research which examines youth's personal experiences and pathways to resilience may yield valuable information in the fight against recidivism.

The present study, an exploratory inquiry, considers the shortcomings of past research and the recommendations of recent research. Informed by a constructionist approach, it poses as its main research question: what do youths say they believe would help them avoid reoffending? The two core goals were: 1) to achieve an understanding of the similarities and differences between youths who have reoffended and youths who have avoided reoffending from their own perspectives¹, and 2) to acquire insight into different pathways to resilience, that is, how these youths survive well despite

¹ Two separate groups of youth, those who had reoffended and those who had not, were expected to be obtained. However, this was not possible, therefore data were obtained only from youths who had reoffended and no comparisons were made.

experiencing adversity. The research employed a qualitative methodology involving in-depth narrative interviews with ten youths in conflict with the law. Throughout this thesis these youths are often referred to as “at-risk”. This refers to the youths being at risk to reoffend and thereby remain in trouble with the law. The resulting analysis of the youths’ narratives offers insight into different pathways to resilience, an understanding of the complexity of underlying reasons why some youths reoffend, enhanced awareness of the relationship between resilience and recidivism and possibilities of future directions for both researchers and practitioners in this field.

1.2 Motivations of the Researcher

I am a social worker working in a secure custody facility for male youths. My work is something I thoroughly enjoy and for me it is more than just a job. Working with these youths over the past eight years has provided me with an abundance of knowledge regarding the issues they face as well as approaches to assisting them to be successful. In addition to recent statistics that support my beliefs that many youths return to custody for repeated offences, my work experience had also offered me anecdotal evidence that for a significant number of youths the criminal justice system is a revolving door through which they come in and depart from often several times before graduating to the adult system. My work experience has also contributed to my awareness that these youths often have multiple and complex needs and often face repeated short periods in custody, making it difficult to optimally assist them to be successful. As a professional, the struggle to help these youths in the fullest way possible is frustrating in itself. Through my work I get to know the youths and am able to look past their charges and I genuinely want to see them live healthy and fulfilling lives. I often see unreached potential and

obstacles to reaching that potential. I am sincerely interested in what leads them to reoffend and committed to doing my best to help them move in a more positive direction. Thus, from a personal viewpoint, the struggles to optimally assist these youths has often left me feeling ineffectual and like there should be more that I could do. I too know that working with involuntary clients often has a high rate of burnout but rather than let these feelings overwhelm me, I was motivated to expand my understanding of these youths and learn different and potentially more effective ways to assist them. This research was a way to bring together my professional and personal interests in a manner that would benefit not only my own practice, but also the youths with whom I work and hopefully the work of others who work with these youths and who have endured the same struggles.

1.3 Social Location of the Researcher

It is interesting to note that upon embarking on this research I felt compelled to take as objective a stance as possible. I viewed my role as that of an investigator examining patterns of recidivism and resiliency. At the time, I did not appreciate that this approach was contrary to the constructionist approach on which I planned to found my research. Over the course of conducting the study; however, I came to realize that to follow a constructionist approach is to accept that people's realities are subjective and to pursue the goal of bringing together these multiple subjective perspectives. Since these multiple perspectives include my own as the researcher it also includes my own subjective perceptions and assumptions and thus cannot be objective. Crucial to my growing awareness of these conflicting approaches were exercises that involved locating me socially. I am a researcher who came of age in a socio-political climate rife with strong support for objectivity. I began my first degree in 1991 in Psychology - a field

founded on traditional positivist science and ideological perspectives. Over the course of my life I came to value this perspective above others feeling that it was right as it allowed findings to be based in science. I have a poster in my office at work with the expression, “Does an open mind let more in?” This poster has always appealed to me because I believe that knowledge is power and that knowing other perspectives will result in greater knowledge and understanding. Despite this, I did not recognize this long established and ingrained tendency towards being objective and trying to control for factors. However, slowly but surely I began to realize that this was the case and as this happened I began to understand, and appreciate the constructionist approach more fully. I moved from being an investigator of recidivism and resilience to a co-structor with the youths of a greater understanding of the two subjects and the relationship between them. In this way I was able to recognize my social location and biases, but instead of trying to set them aside and factor them out, I strove to be conscientious of being inseparably enmeshed in the tangled webs of inequitable power relations of the broader society. Through each stage of the research I was constantly aware of the ways in which these inequalities could have and did unfold in my relationship with the youth participants, and how I could use this awareness to minimize the inequitable relations of power in my own work and in the broader society.

In terms of my specific social location, I gained a better understanding of myself through this process. I was approaching this research with some disadvantages but some advantages as well. I am a white, middle class, female social worker who turned forty while in the middle of this project. I have never been in trouble with the law. As previously noted, I have worked with youths in custody for eight years. My work

experience has shown me that many of the youths in custody are from racial and cultural backgrounds different from my own and most are from lower income groups. The population of youths in my study is male and all had committed various crimes. My background has little in common with theirs. I was born in and currently reside in a small town set in a comparatively rural area. All of the youth in my study came from larger urban areas. Going into this research, I did not possess much shared understanding with this population through common personal experiences. It is possible these differences could have compromised my study in one way or another. However, armed with my new self-awareness and committed to the role of co-structor I went in fully prepared to listen to and understand what the youths themselves had to say. I took in their narratives, turned them over in my mind, integrated them with my already established beliefs, attitudes, values and knowledge and then handed them back to the youths. The interview process continued until we formed a broader understanding together. A similar process took place during the analysis in situating the new knowledge within the existing research. I believe the difference between these youths and me enriched, rather than impoverished, my study. As will be seen, the results of my study suggest that there is a need for a comprehensive view of recidivism and resilience, one that takes in multiple perspectives. I believe that in the interviews I was genuinely committed to understanding the perspective of each of the participating youths and that they, perceiving my genuineness, were open for candid sharing. In turn, the authenticity of this process has led to a fuller understanding of the questions at hand.

1.4 Overview of the Thesis

This thesis contains six chapters. The introductory chapter will be followed by a review of the literature on this topic, examining theories of recidivism and resilience, as well as empirical research in this area. The goal of this chapter is to provide a thorough assessment of previous research and offer a comprehensive definition of the term “resilience.” Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology used in this thesis and discusses the epistemological approach to the research, research design, procedures used to invite participants as well as data generation and analysis strategies employed.

Chapters 4 and 5 form the central part of the thesis and comprise the findings of the study, a discussion of the findings and their practical implications. These chapters provide a detailed examination of the reasons youths offend and reoffend, the ways in which they are resilient and the complexity of the issues they face. Finally, chapter 5 also highlights theoretical implications, offers suggestions for further research and makes concluding remarks. It summarizes the research findings and their usefulness in facilitating a comprehensive approach to studying recidivism and intervening with youths at risk to reoffend.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

As conveyed in the introductory chapter, the goal of this study is to explore how youths embark on and travel down a path of offending and reoffending and how resilience influences and/or is influenced by this path. The conceptual and empirical background outlined in this chapter is drawn from research in the areas of recidivism and resilience. I first outline the research on recidivism which focuses on risk and protective factors and then turn to the research on resilience. This section will also include an assessment of the value of these approaches.

2.1 Risk and Protective Factors

This review focused on research conducted in Canada but also included studies based in the United States and in the United Kingdom, given the lack of relevant Canadian research. It revealed two main areas of research pertinent to the study of youth recidivism: 1) research identifying risk factors and 2) research identifying protective factors. Although I had hoped that a focus on Canadian research would enable the applicability of the findings to speak to the unique identity of Canadians and our specific youth justice system, the review did demonstrate that at least in these three countries, researchers have found similar risk and protective factors among youths. I first present an overview of each of these areas followed by a discussion of their limitations.

Much of the research that has been completed to date on recidivism has focused on determining risk factors. Zigler, Taussig, and Black (1992) identified the age of onset of criminality, intelligence, problems at school, family dysfunction, family criminal involvement, substance use, parental substance use and poverty in their review of

adolescent criminal risk factors. Other studies considered the impact of broader structural constraints on the success of these youths. In the United Kingdom, for instance, Hart (2011) found that inflexible enforcement of incidents of non-compliance, although an attempt to provide structure that the youths needed, instead set the youths up to fail. She found that for many youths, failing to comply with orders was a response to their turbulent lives rather than an act of defiance. Correspondingly, Sprott and Myers (2011) found that bail conditions placed on youths might have the unintended consequence of setting youths up to accumulate further criminal charges, specifically of failing to comply with a court order. Gray (2011) concluded that the current practice of addressing young people's reintegration needs focuses on correcting their personal deficits and need to take responsibility for their actions. She noted that reintegration failure might be due to the way the concept has been interpreted by policy makers.

In addition, a significant amount of research identified protective factors which serve to mitigate risk. Much of this research focused on intervention approaches. For example, a significant amount of research in Canada has been done on the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model (Bonta & Andrews, 2007, 2010). The RNR model is used to assess and treat youths in conflict with the law and is based on the following three principles: 1) the risk principle stresses that services should be matched to an individual's risk to reoffend, 2) the need principle emphasizes that criminogenic needs must be identified and targeted in the treatment plan and 3) the responsivity principle indicates that treatment should meet each individual's unique and specific needs (Bonta & Andrews, 2007). Vitopoulos, Peterson-Badali and Skilling (2012) found that matching treatments to RNR principles reduced recidivism for male youths. Andrews and Bonta

(2010) similarly pointed out that programs that adhere to the RNR model have been shown to reduce recidivism by up to 35%. Luong and Wormith (2011) also found that adherence to the RNR principles as part of the Case Management Plan is related to reductions in recidivism. Also related to intervention strategies, in the United States, Myers and Farrell (2008) advocated for comprehensive, coordinated planning models that focus on outcomes. Likewise, Anthony, Samples, de Kervor, Ituarte, Lee and Austin (2010), in their American study, indicated that intervening with youths involved in the youth justice system requires a coordinated, holistic approach. They suggested that social and community support, developmentally appropriate educational and occupational services, assistance in finding housing, life skills training, and services to address physical and mental health needs all contribute to reducing recidivism (Anthony et. al, 2010). In Canada, Jeff Latimer (2001) also found that family intervention treatment significantly reduced recidivism of young people in conflict with the law.

2.2 Limitations of Risk-Protective Models

Though the research to date has produced a wide-ranging list of risk factors and protective factors, there are some important limitations. As Canadian researchers Ward and Day (2010) noted, one such limitation is that researchers have not developed an “understanding of the relationship between factors linked to the onset and maintenance of offending...” (p.1). In addition, Ungar (2004), social work scholar at Dalhousie University (Nova Scotia, Canada) whose research focuses on resilience while facing adversity in children, youths and families, indicated that researchers have been unable to narrow down the causal or key factors that protect and deter youths from delinquent behaviors. Ungar (2004) went on to point out that:

While there is agreement that certain factors put children at risk and others mitigate risk, there is no universal set of conditions that can be said to protect all children. In part, this is because no one set of causal risk factors has been found, or is likely to exist, given the variability in the responses found among individuals at risk (p. 354).

Ungar (2004) felt that the main limitation of research to date is that it has been informed by an ecological approach. He noted that an ecological approach emphasizes predictable relationships between risk and protective factors but is insufficient to explain variances in individual experiences of resilience. Likewise, Ward and Day (2010) noted that further research is needed which explores the basic workings of resilience in examining criminal trajectories. In a similar vein, Hartwell, McMackin, Tansi and Bartlett (2010) noted that few studies provide the context of post release experiences from the youth's perspective including their views on the challenges they face when they return to the community. In sum, there is a growing body of research that suggests that in order to understand the reasons youths reoffend it is necessary to move beyond merely identifying risk and protective factors.

2.3 Towards a Resiliency Approach

Given this dearth of research, Hartwell et al. (2010) conducted a contextual study in the United States that explored community reintegration experiences of youths and post reintegration recidivism using a semi-structured interview that included quantitative and qualitative questions. Their findings, while consistent with research on risk factors, were enhanced through the richness of the qualitative material. They found that the youths' narratives supported some current intervention strategies and suggested ideas worthy of further exploration for helping them transition successfully into the community.

Despite Hartwell et al.'s (2010) efforts and the large volume of research to date on resilience in general, there has been little research done on resilience as it relates to recidivism. Young people in conflict with the law have been included in studies with other at-risk youth (i.e. those with mental health issues, homeless youth, etc.) and this research appears promising. For example, Ungar (2001) conducted case studies of 43 at-risk youths, some of whom had been placed in a correctional setting. He found that the youths explained their delinquent conduct as a means of successfully managing the risk factors they faced. In addition, Aronwitz (2005) explored how 28 young people, some of whom were facing legal issues, cultivated resilience and changed risky behavior in the face of continued adversity. His findings suggested key aspects in relationships with others (i.e. practitioners, family members or mentors) helped promote resilience in the young people. Despite the promising nature of such research there appears to have been no studies of resilience with the specific population of youths in conflict with the law alone. In fact, Ward and Day (2010) similarly noted that there has been little research to date with offender specific populations in general, especially in Canada. This area seems an important one given that the results from the available research on high risk youths and resilience suggested that the problem behaviors these youths engage in are actually a means by which they are intentionally seeking to enhance their self-definition in ways they have control over (Ungar, 2001). Uncovering the underlying goal of youths' delinquent behavior would enable practitioners to work with youths in conflict with the law on developing alternative pro-social means of achieving their objectives.

Finally, the study of resilience in general is fraught with discrepancies. An examination of the research on resilience revealed four main schools of thought on

studying resilience. In its early years the study of resilience focused on outcomes and the presence or absence of intrinsic qualities (i.e. self-esteem) that interact with a young person's social environment (Coleman & Hagell, 2007). Later, as the research on resilience developed, a second group of researchers began to investigate protective mechanisms and processes. These researchers reasoned that resilience should be understood as a dynamic interaction between person and environment (Coleman & Hagell, 2007). In recent years, investigators have concentrated on assets of child and youth populations and argued that resilience exists among those who have external and internal resources (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009). In addition, other researchers have expanded this perception into a fourth approach to the study of resilience. These researchers claim that understanding resilience is something influenced by context and culture and that we negotiate discursively (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009). These diverse and multifaceted perspectives have contributed to a lack of agreement as to the definition of resilience. In an attempt to bring together these different explanations of resilience Ungar (2008) suggested the following definition of resilience:

In the context of exposure to significant adversity, whether psychological, environmental, or both, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to health-sustaining resources, including opportunities to experience feelings of well-being, and a condition of the individual's family, community and culture to provide these health resources and experiences in culturally meaningful ways (p. 221).

This is the definition that served to guide the current research as it enabled the pursuit of an understanding of the individual youths in terms of not only their outcomes, but the processes that led them to their outcomes, as well as the role of their culture and context. Thus, it provided a more holistic picture of the relationship between recidivism and resilience for these youths. However, it seemed naive to assume that I, who am

living a life different from the participants, should decide the criteria for their success. Therefore, a simplified definition was posed to the youths in the study and they were invited to discuss their own views of resilience. In this way, participants were better able to define what resilience meant to them and describe how they reached that defined resilience.

2.4 Chapter Summary

This review of the literature demonstrates that much research has been devoted to identifying risk and protective factors related to recidivism. Such research has not yet been able to develop a full understanding that explains why some youths reoffend while others do not. Although including the concept of resilience in the study of recidivism is relatively new, the results are promising. Not only does resilience theory provide a more strengths-based perspective, it permits researchers to broaden their understanding of why some youths offend and/or reoffend. It does so by allowing the incorporation of different strategies to reveal the more subjective nuances of the life course on which youths at-risk embark and the factors that influence whether they offend and/or reoffend or not.

To conclude, this review of converging literature in identifying a gap in the production of knowledge regarding the reasons youths reoffend and the ways in which they can be assisted to avoid reoffending affords some arguments for implementing further research. Using a methodology that is proficient in the necessary strategies to yield results that empower a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of youths at-risk to reoffend, this study strives to address this gap. Specifically, the use of a qualitative methodology of in-depth, narrative interviews will provide richer information by revealing the youths' own perspectives. In this way, hidden factors and processes that

contribute to reoffending may be uncovered. Moreover, the incorporation of resilience theory will empower the youths to share their own versions of what they see to be their personal success thereby enabling a greater understanding of their strengths to emerge. I expect these strategies will assist in bridging the gap in the existing literature by contributing to a fuller understanding of the reasons youths reoffend and the ways they can be supported.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methods and Methodology

This chapter will outline the procedures employed to complete this study. The chapter begins with a description of the epistemological perspective and methodology of the study. The research design and data generation processes will then be presented. The chapter then moves to a description of the data analysis process. Finally, the processes employed to increase the trustworthiness of the study, as well as its limitations, will be discussed.

3.1 Epistemological Perspective and Theory

Social constructionism is the paradigm that informs this research. Specifically, social constructionism is a theory of knowledge that assumes that understanding, importance and meaning are developed in conjunction with other human beings rather than independently (Gergen, 2009). The social construction of reality is an ongoing, dynamic process that is replicated by people acting on their interpretations and their knowledge of that perceived reality and is therefore subjective as opposed to objective (Gergen, 2009). Social constructionism strives to discover the ways people take part in the construction of their perceived social reality (Gergen, 2009). The social constructionism perspective is grounded in postmodern philosophy which according to (Mitchell and Egudo, 2003) challenged modernist philosophy during the late 20th century. Where modernist philosophy accepted rationality and universal truth, and applied scientific empirical methods to problem solving, postmodernism questions the notion of objective truth (Mitchell & Egudo, 2003). Instead, postmodernism emphasizes contextual construction of meaning and the validity of multiple perspectives (Mitchell &

Egudo, 2003). For postmodernist thinkers, knowledge is constructed by people and groups of people, reality entails multiple perspectives and truth is grounded in everyday life and social relations (Mitchell & Egudo, 2003). Furthermore, as noted by Jankowski, Clark and Ivey (2000), “Social constructionism rests on the ontological assumption that reality or what can be known is constructed by persons as they interact within a social context” (p. 242).

This paradigm appealed to me, particularly given my social location as a researcher. I have come to believe that to truly understand something multiple perspectives must be considered. A personal motto for my life has been that “There is a lot to be said for clarity.” In my professional practice I often use the metaphor with clients that therapy is akin to putting together a jigsaw puzzle. Clients and I each hold some pieces and together we create a larger, more comprehensive picture of a complex issue. Together we are co-constructing the understanding of and solutions to a problem.

Furthermore, in a therapeutic context practitioners not only listen to clients’ stories that reflect their identity, they transform these stories into alternative narratives that allow them to be more adaptive and to achieve socially functional behavior (Polkinghorne, 1998). Thus, the approach of social constructionism seemed well suited to deal specifically with the issue of resilience.

Ungar (2004) also suggested a constructionist approach to studying resilience as opposed to a traditional ecological approach. Within an ecological paradigm, resilience is defined as “health despite adversity” (Masten, 2001 as cited in Ungar, 2004, p. 342). The ecological approach based on systems theory holds that relationships between risk and protective factors are predictable and that resilience factors compensate for or

neutralize risk (Ungar, 2004). Comparatively, a constructionist approach defines resilience as the “outcome from negotiations between individuals and their environments for the resources to define themselves as healthy amidst conditions collectively viewed as adverse” (Ungar, 2004, p. 342). The constructionist view holds that relationships are not predictable but rather multifaceted and resilience factors are multi-dimensional and unique to each context (Ungar, 2004). Thus, in a constructionist view, resilience is socially constructed and the relationship between risk and protective factors is complex and contextual (Ungar, 2004) and includes individual and systemic dimensions of resilience.

It is for these reasons that I was attracted to this approach. This study seeks to understand the multiple realities of the youths’ experiences in relation to offending and/or reoffending as well as resilience. It is likely that the individual youths will demonstrate distinctive interpretations of their situations. Social constructionism will not only enable these unique understandings of the youths’, it will also permit the inclusion of the researcher’s perspective. In this way, the understanding of the issues at hand is co-constructed by both participants and researcher. The multiple realities of all are thus embraced and the consequently richer descriptions may emerge and provide a more complete understanding of the problem of recidivism.

3.2 Methodology and Research Design

Employing a social constructionist paradigm suggested the use of qualitative methods as a natural choice for this research. As conveyed above, I am seeking participants’ stories, their narratives of their history and experiences. Thus in-depth interviewing seemed an obvious choice to capture those stories. As noted by Engel and

Schutt (2009), in-depth or intensive interviewing is a qualitative method used to learn about participants' experiences, thoughts, and feelings. More importantly, "It shares with other qualitative research methods a commitment to learning more about people in depth and on their own terms, as well as in the context of their situation" (Engel & Schutt, 2009, p. 309).

The use of a qualitative method was also pertinent to the study of resilience specifically. Ungar (2003) acknowledged that the use of qualitative methods has been limited in the study of resilience. He pointed out that qualitative research which pays attention to participants' personal constructions of resilience would result in a more subjective understanding of resilience and provide findings that could better inform future interventions (Ungar, 2004).

Stemming from these interlinking findings regarding the complementary nature of the social constructionist view, the study of resilience and the use of a qualitative methodology, this study will involve a narrative inquiry and in-depth interview as a data generation strategy. Mitchell and Egudo (2003) emphasize that a narrative approach "lends itself to qualitative enquiry in order to capture the rich data within stories. Surveys, questionnaires and quantitative analyses of behavior are not sufficient to capture the complexity of meaning embodied within stories" (p. 2). In addition, Gergen (2009) notes that numerous authors have reasoned that social constructionism forms a basis for the use of a narrative inquiry.

Mitchell and Egudo (2003) point out several uses of the narrative approach that are applicable to this study, including assisting in transferring and making sense of complex tacit knowledge, and gaining insight that can lead to change. Creswell (2013)

also points out several key components of narrative studies that pertain to this study. He indicates that narrative researchers gather stories from participants about their personal experiences. He further notes that these stories can reveal the unique individualities and self-perceptions of participants (Creswell, 2013). I believe that the narratives gained through the in-depth interviews in this study offer a better understanding of participants' experiences since last leaving custody, their own views on what contributed to their reoffending or not reoffending, and their thoughts on resilience and definitions of success in their own lives. I have also obtained demographic information from participants as part of the interview. The goal of obtaining these two types of data was to gain a better understanding of the factors, contexts and conditions that may lead to offending and reoffending behavior. In addition this information may provide further insight into the youths' personal constructions of their pathways to resilience.

Employing this particular methodology and research design supports my personal values and beliefs, as was discussed above in my rationale for choosing a social constructionist paradigm that defines knowledge as a construction of multiple realities. Examining various perspectives in this study will ensure that the voices of the youths, as well as my voice as the researcher, are all present in the findings and discussion. Utilizing an intensive narrative interview design also allows richer data to contribute to the discussion, thereby broadening the readers' understanding of recidivism and resilience in general.

3.3 Procedures

The following steps were taken in fulfilling this study:

3.3.1 Approval and Permission

Ethics approval was obtained from the Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board on April 22, 2013. I then obtained permission from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services Adult Correctional Services and Youth Justice Research Committee in September 2013 in order to complete the research with youths involved with youth justice services.

3.3.2 Development of the Interview Guide

Many of the concepts surrounding recidivism and resilience can be complex. As a social worker in a youth custody facility I am aware of the difficulty youth in general, and potentially cognitively disadvantaged youths in particular, may have in understanding these concepts. In order to ensure the interview questions clearly reflected the intended meaning, I conducted a pilot project with four youths in a focus group. I also asked two colleagues to critique the questions. After obtaining permission from the Youth Centre Administrator at the facility in which I am employed, I posed my initially drafted interview questions to four youths in a focus group setting and to two colleagues individually. A focus group forum was selected purely for expediency given my timeframe for submitting my proposal to the Ministry of Children and Youth Services Adult Correctional Services and Youth Justice Research Committee and staying on task with my time-limited thesis. As part of this process, I explained my research questions and objectives so they would be better able to advise me on whether my questions were meeting my goals. The feedback I received enabled me to develop an interview guide

which reflected the needs of the population I was interviewing and at the same time enabled me to collect the information I sought (see Appendix B).

3.3.3 Selection of Participant Population

Two separate groups of participants were invited to take part in and contribute to this study. These two groups were as follows: 1) Youths Inside a Custody Facility and 2) Youths Outside a Custody Facility. Inclusion criteria for the first group were any male youth between the ages of 16-18, with a diverse array of backgrounds and experiences, currently serving a sentence in an Ontario secure custody facility for youths and who had also previously served one or more sentences in an Ontario secure custody facility for youths. Inclusion criteria for the second group were any male youth aged 16-18 years, with a diverse array of backgrounds and experiences who had previously served time in an Ontario secure custody facility for youths but had not incurred any further charges for the last nine months or more.

I selected males for this study for three specific reasons. First, males make up a much larger percentage of youths sentenced to secure custody facilities. According to Munch (2012) reporting in *Youth Correctional Statistics in Canada*, “In 2010/2011, just over three quarters (78%) of youth admitted to the correctional system were male” (p. 6). The second reason for choosing males was that given the time constraints on completing this Master’s thesis project and given the low numbers of females in youth custody, accessing them in a timely manner would have been difficult. This is especially true given that sentenced youths, whom were to be accessed, made up less than half of the youths in the custody population in 2010/2011 (Munch, 2012). Given the limited numbers in both of these two groups (sentenced youths and female youths), accessing

sentenced females would have affected significantly the time frame for completing this research. Finally, given the large ratio differences between the number of males and females in custody, if females were included it is likely the sample would reflect this discrepancy thereby adding to the limitations of the study.

For the Youths Inside a Custody Facility group specifically, participants were invited from one of the larger secure custody facilities in Ontario. I note that the facility in which the research was conducted is not the same facility at which I am employed. The Youths Outside a Custody Facility participant group were to be obtained from probation offices in two selected cities in Ontario. As will be described in more detail later, I was not able to access this group for my study. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the time limitations and availability of participants, sampling strategies targeted a maximum of twenty youths (ten from the facility and ten from the two probation offices).

3.3.4 Participant Invitation

Slightly different approaches were used to invite the two different participant groups. These approaches were as follows: For the Youths Inside A Custody Facility group, potential participants at the selected facility were invited through the Social Work Department. Consent was obtained from the facility. The manager of social work services in the facility assisted me in accessing the youths and overseeing the process. I met with the manager of social work services and the unit social workers under her supervision during an initial visit to explain the goals of the study and discuss procedures for carrying out the interviews. I provided the social workers with flyers (see Appendix C) inviting participants to post on their respective units and to distribute to any youth on

their unit who fit the criteria for the study. The flyer itself outlined the criteria and directed youths to contact their unit social worker for further information or to arrange to participate in the study. The flyer also noted a deadline date for participation. Youths interested in taking part in the study directly notified their unit social workers of their interest and the unit social workers notified the manager of social work services. I also indicated my availability to discuss the study further with the unit social workers and/or any youth who would like further information; however, no further questions or concerns were noted. The manager of social work services then notified me when youths who fit the criteria were interested in participating in my study. As youths demonstrated interest in participating, arrangements were made to complete the interviews at a date and time convenient for the facility and me.

Prior to interviewing youths, I arranged for someone from the facility's clinical department to be available for debriefing with the youths following each interview, if required. Debriefing was voluntary. Following the interviews, I asked the youths if any of the questions or the interview process had in any way upset them. It should be noted that none of the youths expressed a need for debriefing.

After a period of several weeks, it became apparent that there were not enough youths who fit the specific criteria of youths who had previously served time in a custody facility and who met the remaining criteria as well. In order to fulfill my research in the expected time frame, and after discussing this issue in supervision I decided to slightly modify the criteria to include youths who had previously been involved in the youth justice system in any capacity. This permitted the inclusion of youths who had previously served time in open custody, had been under a probation order or involved in

extra-judicial sanctions. I also modified the sampling criteria to include any youth aged 16 or older. In addition, two youths were interviewed despite not meeting these criteria. One had no prior involvement with the youth justice system whatsoever while the other had spent time in secure custody but on remand status as opposed to sentenced.

Formal informed consent was obtained from participants at the outset of each interview (see Appendix A). I conducted all the interviews in person during the months of October and November 2013. Each interview took place in a private room on the unit on which each youth resided. These locations provided a setting in which the youths were comfortable, that was accessible and that enhanced privacy and confidentiality as it limited the opportunity for other youths and staff in the facility to become aware of their participation. As a gesture of appreciation for their contributions to my study, participants each received a beverage and a snack. All the youths interviewed were made aware of when the final research report would be available and ways they could receive an executive summary of the final thesis. The Social Work Department of the facility will receive an electronic copy of the study in full as will the Ministry of Children and Youth Services Adult Correctional Services and Youth Justice Research Committee. Potential participants in the Youths Outside a Custody Facility group were invited through probation offices in two selected cities in Ontario. These cities were selected as they are large urban areas. Selecting two large urban areas was expected to increase the odds of securing an adequate sample size. I initiated contact with the probation manager at each office and provided them with outlines of my proposal, which included the goals, the expected participant invitation and interview procedures and requested their participation and assistance in contacting youths. Each office distributed the proposal to

the probation officers in their office and designated a contact person, in one case the assistant probation manager and in the other a probation officer, with whom I could liaise to carry out the study. I was able to make a trip to one of the probation offices to meet with my contact person and some of the probation officers there. This offered them the opportunity to ask any questions or express any concerns in the early stages. This opportunity was not possible for the second probation office; however, due to schedule conflicts between my contact and me. Nonetheless, each office was advised of my availability to speak to any of the probation officers or youths who may have had any questions or concerns regarding the study. A copy of the flyer inviting participants was provided to each contact person, which they posted in the waiting room of each office. In addition, each probation officer in the office posted a copy of the flyer in their own office and distributed a copy to youths on their caseload who fit the criteria for the study. The flyer outlined the criteria and directed youths to notify their probation officer for further information or to arrange to participate in the study. The flyer also noted a deadline date for participation. Potential youth participants were to notify their probation officers of their interest and the probation officers in turn would notify me. At the end of the time period specified on the flyer I would arrange with the interested youths to complete the interviews by liaising with their probation officer to determine an appropriate time, date and space.

Interviews were expected to take part from September to the end of November 2013. However, by the time November arrived, and although the probation officers were actively seeking clients on their caseload who fit the criteria, I had been notified of only one youth who in fact did fit the criteria. Given the lack of potential participants for this

group, I made the decision to omit youths outside of a custody facility from the study. Although, my initial goal was to compare the similarities and differences of youths who had reoffended with those who had succeeded for a time without reoffending, the lack of potential participants for this group left that goal unattainable. Despite this turn of events, one of the advantages of qualitative research is that the initial research questions can evolve alongside the research process. Thus, I was able to modify my initial research question to fit the new situation while still keeping with my overall objective for the research. My new question became: what do youths say they believe would help them avoid reoffending? Although, the contributions of youths who had succeeded in avoiding offending for a time would have richly supplemented my study, those of the group that were obtained are nonetheless valuable and pertinent to understanding youth recidivism and resilience. As previously assured and given their assistance with this project and the fact that the results may be of benefit to them as well, each probation manager will be provided with an electronic copy of the study in full.

3.3.5 Data Generation

Ten youths, aged 15 to 20, residing in a secure custody facility for youths in Ontario participated in the interviews. Prior to administering the interviews, a formal consent form was read to each participant outlining the purpose of the study, the risks and benefits to the participant and the limits of confidentiality (see Appendix A). This was done as it was possible that some of the youths may have had learning disabilities, limited education and/or literacy issues which could have made weighing the risks and benefits of the study and the decision as to whether to participate more difficult had they been solely provided with a written copy of the form. Every effort was made to ensure

participants understood the informed consent forms and that they were under no obligation to take part in the study. They were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time and could decline or refuse to answer any question without any consequence. All information was provided in a clear manner using straightforward terms. Copies of the consent were also provided to the youths so they could read along while the material was read to them. Confirmation of their understanding was then sought verbally. Finally, signatures from participants were obtained on the consent forms.

Following the attainment of formal consent, data generation involved engaging the youths in intensive narrative interviews. Two sets of data were gathered through each interview: 1) demographic information and 2) narratives from the in-depth interviews. The demographic information obtained from each youth included their age and date of birth; employment status and educational grade level achieved; self-identified race/ethnicity and location of birth; religious or spiritual affiliation; and nature and number of previous offences. After the demographic information was collected data was generated through in-depth narrative inquiry interviews. Participants were asked a number of questions as part of this interview. I followed the interview guide for the most part; however, as youths' responses diverged into other areas of interest I was able to follow their direction to a significant degree while remaining cognizant of time constraints and the research goals. The narrative interviews focused on gaining a better understanding of participants' experiences since last leaving custody, their own views on what contributed to their offending and/or reoffending, their thoughts on resilience and definitions of success in their own lives, and their thoughts on how others could help

them to not reoffend in the future.

As approval from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services Adult Correctional Services and Youth Justice Research Committee was not granted to audio record interviews within the youth justice setting, data were recorded in writing by myself as the researcher/interviewer after obtaining permission from the facility and each youth. Permission was also obtained from the youths to include their quotes or paraphrased excerpts of what they had said. All but one youth consented to this use of their words. Names of the youths were not used in recording data whatsoever to protect privacy and confidentiality. Demographic information and the narratives for each youth were subsequently transcribed from the rough written notes into an electronic document. A back up copy was entered into an online password-secured service.

3.4 Data Analysis

Three main categories of information were gained through the narratives: the course of their experiences since their last release, knowledge regarding their definitions of personal success and resilience and their opinions on what is useful in helping youths to avoid reoffending. The following steps were then taken in interpreting the data based upon narrative qualitative research approaches described by Creswell (2013) and Engel and Schutt (2009):

- 1) Interviews were individually transcribed from their rough written note form to typed form immediately after the interview to avoid difficulties in recall and then organized into computer files.

2) Transcripts were then printed and read in their entirety several times to get a sense of the data. During this stage, I wrote notes or memos in the margins of the transcripts.

These notes were brief ideas or key concepts that seemed relevant.

3) Data were then coded by grouping the interviews into smaller categories of information (i.e. paragraphs) in an excel document. Overall, my approach involved Thematic Analysis (Creswell, 2013), which involved coding and analyzing common themes. In the early stage, in part, I employed deductive coding which involved selecting themes (i.e. resilience) prior to data collection and looking for those themes specifically. However, I later utilized inductive coding which involved looking for emerging themes and generating codes after the data had been collected and after the initial reading of the data. Through this process I developed a list of tentative codes that matched text segments. The codes I used included manifest codes (recurring terms), latent codes (themes occurring beneath the surface) and in vivo codes (terms in the language of those being interviewed). A label was attached to each code.

4) I then looked for evidence of the codes across interviews. I made preliminary counts of data codes to determine how frequently the code appeared within and across interviews. Findings from this process conveyed an idea of participants' interest in a code.

5) I continued to deconstruct my data through the process of classification. I identified several general themes. These themes were broad units of information comprised of several codes grouped together to form a mutual idea. These overall themes contained sub-themes.

6) I then made comparisons amongst the youths based upon themes identified in the in-depth narrative portion of the interview and based upon demographics to determine any similarities and differences in themes.

7) I then described and fleshed out the themes to make sense of the data and interpret the larger meanings. This final phase known as “representing the data” involved putting the findings of the analysis into words in the final report. As will be seen, the findings and discussion focus on processes, general features of the youths’ stories, and connections with current theories.

Despite the above noted formal phases, the process of analysis was actually quite iterative and took place throughout the entire process. I analyzed the data from the interviews as they were generated. As noted earlier in chapter 2, as youths responded to the questions there was a reciprocal back and forth as I examined their explanations and handed them back for clarification and deeper understanding. This, for me, was the essence of social constructionism and the beginning of co-constructing the knowledge with the youths. Following the interviews, I continued to ponder the narratives.

Transcription of the rough notes to electronic format was also an important part of the analysis, as I was absorbed in the data for a period of time during that process. In addition, I engaged in regular journaling of my thoughts following interviews, following each transcription and in between as things came to mind. All of these phases were instrumental to deepening my understanding of the data as general themes and trends began to emerge. These initial themes were often supported in the later findings in the more formal coding process.

3.5 Trustworthiness and Validation of the Study

Creswell (2009) noted that the concepts of reliability, validity and generalizability in qualitative research do not carry the same connotations as they do in quantitative research. He defines qualitative validity as occurring when the researcher has checked for the accuracy of the findings through the employment of certain procedures (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative reliability “indicates that the researcher’s approach is consistent across different researchers and projects” (Creswell, 2009, p.190). In a later paper, Creswell (2013) inserts the term validation in place of the term trustworthiness. In general, his definition of validation is the researcher’s attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings (Creswell, 2013). Validating the research process is of particular importance in the constructionist understanding of research. As a co-constructor of knowledge the researcher must consciously engage in tactics to mitigate bias. Creswell (2009) also identifies a number of procedures that can be used to validate one’s research. It is within this framework that I will present the methods that I used to enhance the accuracy of this qualitative study. I will also describe its limitations.

Creswell (2009, 2013) describes several procedures to enhance the qualitative reliability of one’s research. Although some main strategies he suggests include crosschecking codes and sharing the analysis with other researchers, this was not possible in the fullest strategic capacity given the singularity of the researcher (Creswell, 2009). Nonetheless, other steps were taken to enhance the qualitative reliability of this research. As the researcher, I strategically checked transcripts against written notes to verify no mistakes were made in the transfer of data to an electronic document (Creswell, 2009). In addition, I regularly wrote memos about the codes and their definitions and

continuously compared the data with the codes throughout the analysis process (Creswell, 2009). This was done to ensure there was no “drift” or shift in the meaning of codes (Creswell, 2009). As well, throughout the entire analysis I regularly checked and rechecked my data comparing codes and themes and general findings to confirm their consistency.

In terms of qualitative validity or trustworthiness, Creswell (2009) identifies a number of steps that can be taken to ensure the findings truly reflect the experiences of participants. In the first place, I engaged in reflexivity throughout the process of this research through regular recording in a reflexivity journal and through continual reflection. This self-reflection included comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices and orientations that shaped my approach to the study and my interpretations of the results (Creswell, 2013). I endeavored to hold myself accountable for the ways in which I had carried out the research process from my interaction with the participants to my interpretation of the data. I also strove for full awareness of my biases both as the research began and throughout the process, and consciously tracked how I moderated those biases. My strategic employment of reflexivity confirmed that I processed my own unique background, values, and perspectives that I unavoidably was bringing into the research (Creswell, 2009).

Debriefing was another method I employed to enhance the trustworthiness of my study. Throughout the study I reviewed my progress and debriefed with my thesis advisor. Given that I am employed in the field, I was also able to engage in peer consultation and share general themes with co-workers without identifying youth

participants. This enabled my research to be audited by external sources, another important aspect of trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013).

One approach used during the interviewing process was that of member checking. As permission was not granted to use a tape recorder, after writing the responses were read back to each participant for verification and to improve credibility. Throughout the interviews information was also clarified to ensure accuracy. In this way participants were able to discuss and clarify my interpretations as the researcher and to certify that their voices were effectively represented (Creswell, 2009).

The choice of an in-depth, narrative interview design enabled this study to elicit thick descriptions which described in detail the interviewee's experiences, thoughts and feelings. As Creswell (2013) noted, thick descriptions allow the reader to transfer the information to other settings thereby improving verisimilitude and quality.

In addition to Creswell's suggested steps, Jankowski, Clark and Ivey (2000) propose that taking a "not-knowing" approach to research interviews can enhance validity. They suggest that, a "not-knowing" stance in which "there is an explicit expectation that the client inform and add to the knowledge of the clinician" (p.244) "promotes collaboration and levels the hierarchy in the researcher-participant relationship" (p.248). Given that one of the fundamental principles of a social constructionist approach involves the use of this stance it was the very approach I took in conducting the research interviews (Jankowski et al. 2000). In particular, Jankowski and colleagues (2000) note several aspects of this approach that were strategically used in conducting this study including inquisitiveness, collaboration, a demonstrated enthusiasm for being informed by the youths and for broadening my understanding, and a desire to

understand their own unique experiences. I expect that my intentional use of reflexivity served to increase the likelihood that I did not force data into a preexisting framework at any stage in the collection or analysis of the material. Finally, it should be noted that the trustworthiness of this study was enhanced through my conducting a small pilot test (presented previously on page 21) to verify the credibility and dependability of the interview questions.

In terms of limitations, as noted earlier in this section, cross-checking codes and sharing the analysis with other researchers was not possible given the singularity of the researcher. As well, ideally I would have utilized some triangulation procedures by acquiring some information from other sources (i.e. interviewing the facility social workers, or reviewing youths files). The use of triangulation would have permitted the examination of multiple data sources and perspectives to be analyzed and compared against each other for consistency and accuracy (Creswell, 2013). However, given the time constraints in preparing this thesis this option was not possible. Nonetheless, it is felt that my engagement in the above-mentioned processes throughout the research process has guaranteed the accuracy of this thesis project.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the research measures undertaken to complete this study. The epistemological perspective and theory, methodology and research design, and the procedures, including data generation and data analysis, were all described. The chapter concluded by reviewing the limitations and the strategies employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

This chapter outlines the findings derived from the data generated by the youths on the subjects of offending, reoffending and resilience. To provide further background information on the youths who participated in the study, demographic and contextual information will be presented and discussed. The results from the analysis of the narrative interviews will then be outlined under the main topic areas of pathways to offending and reoffending, pathways to resilience and pathways to support.

4.1 Demographics of the Youth Participants

At the time of data collection, the youths who participated in this study were all males residing in a secure custody facility in Ontario. The ten participating youths were aged seventeen or eighteen with the exception of one twenty year old and one sixteen year old. All the youths were born in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Several had resided in low-socio-economic housing developments in Toronto and/or the GTA. Over half of the youths had parents who were born in the Caribbean Region (e.g. Jamaica) while a couple more had fathers with a Caribbean background but mothers with either a Canadian or American background. Nine of the youths identified as black with one youth identifying as white. This youth indicated that his parents were both of European descent.

In terms of religion or faith, seven of the youths identified as being Christian with one of these youths specifying that he was Catholic. Three other youths identified as not practicing any religion or faith. None of the youths who acknowledged a faith identified as being devout practitioners of that faith. Three youths noted they attend services at the

chapel occasionally when they are in custody but even less so or not at all when in the community. Two youths indicated they read the Bible on their own but otherwise don't attend church, while others considered themselves to be Christian but did not practice the faith at all.

Although none of the youths had yet achieved their high school diploma, they were all working on credits while in custody. The number of credits they had achieved varied, with a couple youths having two to five credits, a couple youths having ten credits and the remaining youths having between eighteen to twenty-five credits.

While a few of the youths had no prior work experience many of them had engaged in some form of work during at least one point in their lives. For many that work had involved manual types of work such as construction, painting, home renovations and carpentry. One youth had worked in a couple factories on an as-need basis. For most of these youths the work was paid under the table. A couple of the youths had also acquired jobs through Tropicana, a Toronto-based multi-service organization that provides opportunities for, among others, people of Black and Caribbean heritage (Tropicana Community Services, 2014).

In terms of their current offences, all but one of the youths were comfortable identifying their current and prior offences. Most of the youths were currently incarcerated for armed robberies. A couple youths were in for breaking and entering. Two more youths were in for murder related charges. One youth was in for sexual assault. Many of the youths also reported having failures to comply with either bail or probation as part of their current convictions as well.

In terms of prior offences, as noted earlier, two of the youths had no previous involvement with the youth justice system. While most of the youths discussed the nature of their past charges and convictions they did not always divulge all previous offences because for many their history was quite diverse and lengthy. Thus the youths tended to summarize or name some of the offences they could recall. From what they did disclose their histories were quite varied. Most of the youths reported prior robberies and failures to comply with either bail or probation. A couple noted having prior mischief charges. Other previous offences included theft under \$5000, possession charges, extortion, break and enter, drug related charges and aggravated assault.

Many of the youths reported lengthy histories with the youth justice system including multiple involvements at various levels such as probation, open custody and secure custody. In addition, many of these youths had spent a lot of time going in and out of custody on a regular basis. Many had been in for quite lengthy remands for their current charges as well. Date of initial placement in custody for their current charges and convictions ranged from January 2010 to August 2013.

4.2 “How it all starts and keeps going:” Pathways to Offending and Reoffending

The youths shared various ways in which the course of their lives had led them to offend and/or reoffend. Through the coding and analysis process a number of themes were identified as contributing to these paths. What follows is a discussion of each of these themes.

4.2.1 Friends and Peers

The most commonly shared theme identified by the youths was that of friends. Some youths reported a change to a new set of friends as being a turning point that led them to offend in the first place. As one youth noted, everything just kind of stopped when he got to high school. He lost his motivation to do the things he used to enjoy such as martial arts and sports and he just wanted to hang out with a different group of people. As he stated, “I guess I just wanted to fit in.” Another youth noted that in grade seven he moved from “the west end to the east end at that time so I met new people.” Each group consisted of a different type of friends, “the old group did not get into trouble, the new group did.” A third youth reported that just before he turned thirteen he began to hang out with gang members. They would tell the youth “hey come chill with us” and he would go because he was curious and their status of being cool appealed to him.

The examples just noted convey not only transitions through which the youths were adjusting but also the influence from peers that they were experiencing. The influence of peers was a factor conveyed by many of the youths as they described the need to fit in or be cool. Many talked about the pressure to engage in anti-social behavior that ultimately placed them at risk to offend or reoffend. One youth talked about his escalating alcohol and marijuana use. All of his friends were using it “so I just used it to.” He noted that, “When I first started it was more of a social thing” that he only did when he hung out with his friends, but by the age of fifteen “I didn’t have to be with people.” Others talked about the pressure from peers to skip school. One youth noted that when skipping school he and his friends would hang out, smoke weed and drink.

Although behaviors such as substance use and truancy are cited in the literature as factors that put youths at risk to offend, many of the youths discussed how the peer pressure of friends had directly led them down a path of offending and reoffending. One youth felt that the influence of peers was a main reason youths reoffend. He noted that for many youths their friends will say “come and do this” and if the youth says no then their friends will say “you’re really gonna dis me like that” so the youth feels “that’s my best friend so I should do it, it’s not like they don’t have the resiliency to say no, they just feel the pressure.” Another youth also talked about the direct influence of peers to engage in crime: “When all this happened it’s Christmas. I did not want to go out, we’re having a good time with family and friends and my girlfriend.” Then he gets a call from someone to buy drugs. The person called 30 times and he shut off the phone and then got a voicemail that “your dissing” so he responded to the voicemail and said he would drop off the weed. His girlfriend did not want him to go but he said he would be right back. By the end of that day, this youth was implicated in a murder and subsequently charged and convicted of first-degree murder. Clearly there is still a process here that needs to be better understood. It is difficult to know the sequence of events that led from the phone calls to the charge and conviction of the offence; however, there does appear to be a connection as he alludes to in his narrative.

Additionally, although it is clear that personal agency played some role in these situations, whether the youths either felt they had no agency to make their own decisions or they chose not to exercise their agency, remains unclear. Nonetheless, while agency is part of being resilient other factors such as available resources and the types and severity of the challenges one faces also play a role (Ungar, 2012). For the purposes of this

research, resiliency was viewed as a concept encompassing many factors and defined by the youths themselves, while individual aspects of resilience were not the intended focus.

One youth who was out of custody for approximately one month between two custodial placements talked about the peer pressure he experienced to offend in the first place and later reoffend after doing time. As with many of these youths, friends played a major role in his life. When he was younger, they all smoked weed and drank. Initially they were not getting into trouble but then things changed: “Someone saying they had to make some money.” Then someone showing them and telling them how to make money. Although there were some other contributing factors for this youth that converged at the same time, he notes that his friends were “all on the same page” in terms of doing illegal things to make money so he “went with the flow.” He felt his motivation to offend was “50% peer pressure.”

Finally, one youth aptly discussed how the influence of peers might contribute to a path of reoffending. He talked about looking up to older youths in his neighborhood and feeling as though he fit in with them. He described himself as the “younger kid who hung out with the older guys, the young one they all loved.” These older guys got into trouble and he got into trouble with them. He felt that who you are around contributes to offending, noting that people reoffend “because they go back to the same place they came from and probably end up doing the same things. They see the same people, are in the same neighborhood and the same stuff happens.”

4.2.2 Family

Several important themes appeared to emerge regarding family that either directly or indirectly contributed to the youths’ offending and reoffending trajectories. Many of

the youths had experienced significant transitions in their family dynamics. For many some of these transitions and dynamics may have indirectly contributed to their offending and/or reoffending.

One youth talked about going to live in a different city for a while with his dad's ex-wife upon his release from custody. He believed his father wanted him to make a fresh start. When he returned to his home community he lived with his dad for a while but soon left to live with his mother as he found it awkward living with dad and his girlfriend and there was little space in the residence.

Many of the youths discussed having parents who were separated, being a part of blended families and having many half and step siblings as well. Some youths talked about their father not being in the picture and the impact this had on them. One youth noted, "Dad, he's one of those people having lots of kids. I don't engage in those activities because if I'm having a child with someone I would be there for them." This youth felt his father had not been there for him enough. Another youth felt similarly about his mother. She had "given him" to his dad at the age of two and he does "not get along with her" for that reason and the fact "she does drugs too."

Some of the youths also had current or past Children's Aid Society (CAS) involvement and had resided in group homes and/or foster homes. One youth who resided in a group home identified that "no one in the group home" was important to him. More directly, this youth, who also had parental access, specifically felt residing in the group home coupled with his father having a stroke and his subsequent anger at life resulted in his reoffending.

As noted earlier in the discussion of demographics, nine of the ten youth participants identified as having a Caribbean ethnic background. All of the youths who spoke of being involved with the CAS had also identified as having a Caribbean ethnicity. This is particularly of interest given findings by Lavergne, Dufour, Trocmé, and Larrivée (2008), which compared the report profiles of Caucasian, Aboriginal, and other visible minority children whose cases were assessed by Child Protective Services in Canada. They found that children from visible minority groups are designated to be investigated by Child Protective Services 1.77 times more often than children not deemed part of a visible minority. Their results indicated that Blacks were the second most overrepresented group after Aboriginals. Unfortunately, due to the methodological limitations of their study, they were unable to identify the factors that contributed to this overrepresentation (Lavergne et al., 2008).

Another theme noted was that although parents strove to help their children, they appeared to struggle to implement effective parenting strategies which might have prevented or deterred the youths from offending. Some youths noted that their mothers had struggled to manage their behavior as they did not listen and did what they wanted. As one youth stated: “Nothing she can really do, she can’t tell me if I can’t go outside. I just go anyway. Before she used to be able to tell me I was staying inside but since I was fifteen not really anymore.” This youth later described being on house arrest and “Mom would say, ‘Don’t go out and get arrested’ and that.” However, he admitted that when she was not home he would sneak out anyway. In the end, he was arrested for additional charges along with a failure to comply with his bail order.

For many of these parents, their ability to effectively monitor their children may have been compromised as they themselves were dealing with stressful issues. For example, one youth talked about going through a rough patch when his mom left his dad and he and his mom had to “stay in a shelter” until his “mom got on her feet.” Another youth’s description of parental stress illustrated how it had directly contributed to his offending behavior. He explained that his “parents had to move out and live in a motel” as “they could not pay the rent in the house.” “Then (we) moved to an apartment and things got worse.” There was tension in the family due to financial hardship. “Dad got a different line of work and the pay was less and he gambled sometimes and did not pay some stuff and it all caught up with him.” At this time, the youth felt there were things he wanted but could not get and he was under stress from the situation at home. His friends were interested in making some money illegally so he “went with the flow.”

Some youths described the negative impact that their anti-social behavior had on their relationships with their parents. One youth noted that he “argued with (his mother) a lot.” Similarly, another youth indicated his conflict with his parents began “I guess when I started getting into trouble.” “My parents started getting mad at me” when he began getting probation but when he started coming into custody the conflict increased.

Many of the youths also talked about siblings and extended family such as cousins and uncles. Although the youths felt these relationships were important and supportive, in many cases they described family members as being the role models that had gotten them into their offending lifestyle. In describing his brother, one youth noted “if he gets into a fight or sells drugs, I want to do that.” One youth commented that “99% of his friends and half” of his family sell drugs. Another talked about his uncle being a

role model to him between the ages of four and ten. “He was doing the things I am doing now, back in the day.” Finally, one common theme was that although many youths termed family as important, their actions suggested their friends came first. As one youth noted when he began hanging with a different crowd he “started putting friends before family.”

4.2.3 Structural Barriers

Many of the youths talked about barriers they experienced. The youths described the impact of these barriers on the course of their lives, which sometimes resulted in offending or reoffending.

Remarkably, many of the youths reported involvement with sports that for some of the youths was an interest they took seriously and in which they had gone far. However, many youths simultaneously experienced barriers to accessing these activities. One youth talked about wanting to do boxing but it “did not pan out” due to family financial difficulties. Another youth who was very serious about soccer had made it to the provincial teams. He “made the cut” but did not have a ride to get to practices as it was in a location far from his house and his mother was too busy to drive him. He took the bus once and got a ride twice and then stopped going. Seven months later he was arrested for his current offence.

In terms of the school system, one youth talked about how after a previous release from custody he tried to make a fresh start in a different city. He was attending school in that new city but he got into a fight. The principal wanted to give him “a second chance but it was the school’s policy to not” do so and he was therefore expelled and forced to return to his hometown. Another youth noted that he avoided school due to negative peer

associations he had there. He indicated that he was in the Catholic School Board and had tried to go to a different school within that board but could not find one that would take him. An additional youth who talked about the school system suggested that suspensions are a barrier since “not all parents will ground them so it gives them more time to cause trouble.” Some youths did identify aspects of a positive engagement with school; however, most of the youths described a negative engagement with school. Most admitted to truancy indicating they were skipping some classes or not attending school at all. Half of the youths reported that they did not even register for school. As one youth noted, “Quitting school was never part of the plan,” but he felt he had missed so much school there was no point in going back. Some talked about receiving suspensions. Many described attending Alternative Schools or having to transfer schools as they were not permitted to return to their previous school because of their behavior.

Some youths talked about structural barriers in the youth justice system. One youth explained: “Charges start too early. If the kid comes into youth they want to come across as macho and all they hear about is older inmates talk about the bad things they are doing. They’re hearing that and then going home and doing that. It’s just a matter of time.” He felt this had contributed to his own reoffending. Another youth talked about barriers resulting from probation, noting that he felt having a curfew for two years of 7pm weekdays and 9pm on weekends had caused him to incur several failures to comply with probation.

One youth talked about being required to attend some programs while on probation that he had difficulty accessing. He was doing a program called “Rights” and it was about Black culture. He said he only had two more sessions but did not go as it was

“too far” and he was “too tired” to make the effort to get there. He would normally go by bus but it was a long commute. He felt this was unfortunate as the program “was helpful and made (me) not get into trouble for a long time (three months).” A few youths talked about problems accessing programs in the community. A theme expressed by more than one youth was that there is nothing for youths to do. They felt this was a barrier as it leads to offending or reoffending.

Lastly, some of the youths talked about barriers that arise from their lifestyle or the path that they are on. One youth talked about the difficulties obtaining employment when you are in and out of custody. He explained, “I worked at Tropicana in the summer of 2012 but got arrested after four weeks.” After being released from custody, he again “had a job and then got arrested in October 2012. Then this last time out (he) did not try to get work.”

4.2.4 The Role of Money

The role of money also appeared to contribute to the youths’ offending and reoffending. Many talked about being motivated to make money, often through illegal means. Among other contributing factors, one youth talked about how he ran out of money and so “I’m like yeah, I’m gonna sell drugs, so I went into that.” Seven months later he came into custody for his current offence. Another youth talked about the financial hardship his parents were experiencing and how that resulted in things he wanted but could not get such as clothing and food. This youth began working at a legitimate job and would give the money he earned to his parents. However, he also acknowledged engaging in crime to make extra money that he kept to buy the things he wanted. In explaining one of his reasons for reoffending another youth noted, “Just

trying to make money, that's really it. That's all I really cared about." One other youth indicated that immediately upon release from custody he began selling drugs to make money. He noted the allure of making \$10,000 per week. The youth, who was residing in a group home, noted that he needed money as he was expected to purchase his own clothing on \$50/month provisions. Another youth talked about how he gave up on school and decided to start making money. He noted, "Then I started selling drugs and that was just it for me." This youth directly related his reoffending to, aside from peer pressure, his money problems. As he stated, "I was broke."

4.2.5 Work

As discussed in the demographics section, many of the youths had participated in some kind of work. Despite this finding, many had not held their job for long. For many this was a result of coming into custody. In addition, although many were motivated to obtain money, many were not concurrently motivated to engage in work that would earn them money legally. As one youth noted, "To be honest, I'm not into hard labor." He later indicated, "I tried a job – got a job at KFC. I got frustrated." He worked for one day and then quit. Given this context, the appeal of easy money was enticing for many of the youth. As one explained, "I didn't think I was going to get arrested and I thought it was going to be the easy way to get what I needed." This apparent lack of motivation or choice to exercise personal agency to quit or avoid legitimate work could be embedded in other factors that affect these youths' ability to be resilient. For example, the issue of work can be complex and dependent upon whether the youth has had exposure to prior legitimate jobs and to role models in their life that hold legitimate jobs. These youths may not have the executive functioning skills such as planning and organizing to follow

through with basic job requirements let alone the skills required to do a specific job. They may lack self-confidence and self-efficacy. Although it is uncertain given the limited material gained from the narratives, it is possible that a youth faced with the difficulties I have just noted would become frustrated and not remain in a work environment for long. Although this may not seem resilient on the surface, leaving or avoiding work may be a way of feeling empowered in such a scenario. This would be an area worth further investigation as such circumstances might be remedied by the addition of supports that assist such youths to maintain legitimate work positions.

4.2.6 A Summary of Less Discussed Themes: Last but not Necessarily Least Hobbies

Many of the youths talked about the fact that they had no hobbies and were not doing anything. One directly attributed this factor to his reoffending, “When I was out just now, doing crimes and robberies and all that stuff, just doing whatever I wanted to do. I know I wasn’t making no progress. Like I got out, I wasn’t really doing anything; I just ended up back here.”

As noted earlier, some youths found that lack of access to community programs resulted in having nothing to do. Many elaborated that this led to engaging in behavior that ultimately put them at risk such as participating in undefined anti-social behavior, staying out late, hanging out/chilling, using substances, making poor decisions, incurring debt, and lying.

Losses

Some of the youths also described experiencing the death of a loved one as contributing to a path of offending. One youth described how his brother, at the age of

17 had been accidentally shot in front of him. He explained that he “did not deal with it good” and had a lot of “anger at the situation.” After that he got his first “charge of robbery and things went down from there.” Another youth who had been diligently attending an Alternative School indicated that when his friend died he did not continue to apply himself. He began skipping school to hang out with other friends. “I was angry. I would smoke weed to ease the pain.” He was sleeping all the time, staying home, skipping and “chilling.” A short time later he was arrested.

Own Feelings and Responsibility

Half of the youths also talked about internal factors that contributed to their reoffending. One attributed his own reoffending to his anger and reaching a point where he did not care about the consequences. A second youth attributed his reoffending to a “bad decision.” Two youths noted that they had believed they would get away with it. Another youth generalized that youths offend and reoffend to feel a sense of pleasure as “nothing is flowing their way.”

Several youths conveyed having responsibility beyond their years that added stress to their lives. One youth talked about needing to support his father who was dealing with substance use issues. The youth noted that his father relapses when he goes into custody because he “is not there to encourage” his dad “to stay off drugs.” He cited his father having a stroke as one of the reasons he reoffended this time.

Substance Use

Many of the youths also talked about using substances with marijuana being the most commonly used drug and alcohol a close second. A few reported using other substances, mainly MDMA (the pure form of Ecstasy) and Cocaine. One youth reported

how his use of MDMA had been a direct result of his involvement with crime “because it kept me up all night so I could do business.” Another youth described being “high” at the time of his offence on marijuana which he noted tended to make him “paranoid.”

Mental Health

Finally, a couple of youths reported having a diagnosis of Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). One youth, although he did not say that ADHD had directly resulted in his offending, did note that it did cause him to have problems in custody and he was thus transferred to a specialized treatment facility for the first part of his sentence. It seems likely his ADHD would have contributed to difficulties in the community as well, or his difficulties have contributed to the development of behaviors that look like ADHD. Research is certainly needed to clarify these associations.

Taken together, all of these factors set to contribute to the pathways upon which these youths embarked and that led them to offend and at times reoffend.

4.3 “What Makes Me Stronger:” Pathways to Resilience

For most of the youths the time they described as a time when they were really doing well was a time when they were not getting into trouble. One youth noted that during this time he was “not really doing crime.” Another stated, “I wasn’t coming to jail.” It was clear the youth equated not offending as a time of resilience. Their interviews conveyed several themes that contributed to their ability to do well. These themes are each discussed in this section.

4.3.1 Connections: Family, Friends and Other Supportive Souls

All of the youths reported their siblings to be important people in their lives who in many ways had helped them to be resilient. Some youths felt their sibling was reliable

stating the sibling was “there for me” or “has my back.” A few described themselves as inspired to do well in order to be a role model to a younger sibling. One of these youths reported that his little brother looked up to him while two other youths reported taking the time to play with and teach younger siblings. On the other hand, some youths reported their sibling was a role model to them, someone they looked up to and who inspired them to do well. Some other characteristics that the youths identified included the sibling encouraging them, supporting them both emotionally and financially and helping them to find work.

In addition, all the youths talked about their parents being important in their lives. For some of the youths, their relationship with their parents made them stronger. As one youth noted, during the time he was doing well and not offending, he was “close with my parents.” Another youth who played basketball noticed his family’s support at that time: “I had support of family to come to games.” One youth described doing well as a time when he was “just behaving, listening to my mom.” An additional youth described how after a period of dealing with a tough time he made some changes and began helping out “with my mom around the house. Every time she came home from work the house would be clean.” One youth talked about how he worked and gave his money to his parents who were experiencing financial difficulties.

Not surprisingly, given that peer pressure was described as contributing to their offending, many youths identified having pro-social peers during the times they were doing well. One youth noted, “I had a different friend basis” while another stated, “I wasn’t doing the stuff I was doing, wasn’t hanging out with the people I am now, was hanging with the good kids.” A third youth noted that his friends were not “of the state

of mind of doing illegal stuff for money” at this point. An additional youth commented “I had real friends which kept me out of trouble.” A couple of youths specifically felt that having only a few friends helped them to be stronger. One youth noted he only had one or two friends as he had moved in with his dad and was new to the neighborhood and to his school. He therefore spent more time by himself or with his dad and his dog. Other youths also felt that the key to their success was having fewer friends. As one youth explained: “The more friends you hang with the more people there are to think about things. (The) more people thinking about negative stuff gets the rest going to do negative things.”

Some youths talked about other connections that had inspired them to do well. One youth talked about how he had been starting a family at the time he was doing well: “I got this girl pregnant and I thought she was the one....” He was “very excited to have a relationship and be starting a family. I wasn’t used to being happy because there were always problems coming and going.” Unfortunately, his relationship did not last. Another youth talked about the time he had spent in a foster home. The foster mom provided a structure that he sometimes did not like, but overall felt was good for him. She also appeared to sincerely care about this youth and be interested in helping him do well. He noted she “taught me to garden” and “would go out of her way to buy us clothes. She also made sure (they) had good Christmases and would decorate the house.” He recounted how after his brother died, although he pushed many people away he felt better when she talked to him. Unfortunately, this too did not last as she retired a few years later and he was forced to move to a new foster home. He believes that if he were still at her house he would not have gotten his current charges. Another youth talked

about the connection he had felt with his now deceased grandma as instrumental to his doing well. “She was always trying to keep me out of trouble” telling him “It’s not worth it” and this inspired him to do well.

4.3.2 Youth Justice System

Many of the youths talked about life in custody as helping them to feel stronger. A number of these youths viewed being in custody as an opportunity to attend school and more generally make a fresh start. One youth noted that the times when he is doing well are, “More when I’m in jail cause that’s when I’m going to school.” He felt he was better able to “just sort everything out” while in custody “cause I don’t have distractions.” When he is out “something (is) always coming up - like I want to hang out more than I want to go to school and things.” Similarly, another youth felt that “even though (I’m) in jail (I’m) finishing school and stuff, getting stuff together for when I get out” to “make a fresh start and do good.” Another described skipping the first day of classes in grade nine and never returning. He noted his probation officer had told him he was the “least productive client” she had ever had. He stayed in this rut until he got to open custody and then he started to try. Now in secure custody he feels he is in the active stage of “planning” for his future. “I’m not only planning but I’m starting to take the steps I need to make change.” He felt the things that had contributed to his changing were participating in some services in custody, the routine and structure offered in custody and missing his eighteenth birthday “behind bars.” He now wants to be proud of himself and wants his family to be proud of him too. “I want to be able to look in the mirror and be happy and be proud of who I am.”

Some other factors that the youths attributed to their success in custody were small class sizes, the opportunity to learn what their interests and strengths are, the chance to participate in sports, the occasion to attend church and see what it is all about, and the opportunity to earn community service volunteer hours. The resilience demonstrated by these youths is especially put into perspective when one realizes how stressful navigating the justice system and dealing with the stress of facing charges can be. One youth recognized this as an example of doing well. When he first realized he was arrested for murder “there was no functioning until afterwards.” He described himself as “down, stressed...I thought I’m done.” However, after eight months in custody, he “just kept putting it in my head to go to school, get out and do good, stay away from selling and other bad stuff.”

4.3.3 Internal Resources

Half of the youths spoke about internal resources they felt had contributed to their resilience. One youth was motivated to preserve his freedom conveying that he valued his own autonomy. Similarly, another youth expressed that he did not want to spend his eighteenth birthday in custody. This youth also noted that he realized that his negative behavior was destructive. He also identified his goal of self-pride as something that helped him to be resilient. A third youth indicated that he demonstrated resilience when he realized he could not make it living on his own. He had been living in crack houses after being kicked out by his mother. In the end he was able to swallow his pride and find the courage to return home. He noted that his “ignorance and stubbornness” helped him to be resilient during that time. He also noted that his perception that things could be worse had helped him to be resilient.

4.3.4 Sports

Many of the youths discussed their involvement with sports as coinciding with times they were doing well. One youth was playing on a provincial soccer team and attributed his doing well at that time to the fact he was “doing something (he) loved.” Another expressed that after his father relapsed into drug use, hockey got his “mind off things and got the anger out.” An additional youth noted that while going through a rough patch, he continued to play basketball and “found this helpful for everything.” He pictured himself being big in basketball and did not think about what was going on in his life. One youth said that soccer got him away from where he was during the bad times. It “got (him) away from his neighborhood.”

4.3.5 School and Work

Some of the youths felt attending school was indicative of their resilience. One youth indicated he was “going to school” when things were going well. Another said that when he was doing well he “did the best in school, did not get into trouble, no suspensions....” A third described attending school during a bad time as a display of resilience. “Even though I didn’t get credits” he still went. He felt it was “something to do and I didn’t get into trouble you know?” Another youth noted that in pulling himself out of a bad time he “started going back to school and would go for a half day.” Some of the youths were also able to obtain work during tough times. One youth talked about trying to get a job after dealing with a bad time. “After a while I picked it up, I tried getting a job....”

4.3.6 Religious and Spiritual Factors

Despite the minimal role of religious or spiritual practices conveyed in the demographics section, some youths talked about the role of religious beliefs and practices in bolstering their resilience. One youth noted that during tough times he would go to church more and that “helped a bit” to make him feel better. Another youth attributed surviving during a bad time to God. He had been kicked out by his mother and had been living in crack houses and being robbed. “It was like a nightmare for a couple months. I just thank God I wasn’t living on the streets. (It) was a blessing in disguise.” In the end he was motivated to put aside his pride and return home and felt it was a lesson learned. “God told me that I needed my mom.”

These findings on the whole suggest that a variety of different factors contributed to the youths’ ability to be resilient and do well in the face of hard times.

4.4 “What Can Help Me:” Pathways to Support

Three themes were noted in the youths’ discussions of how they could be supported: areas external to the youths, areas internal to the youths and ways others could help. The findings for each of these areas is presented and discussed in this section.

4.4.1 External Barriers

Most of the youths talked about the need for assistance in making money legally and obtaining employment. “Jobs have to be offered.” “Kids try to get jobs...there should be programs to help them get jobs.” Another suggested that help is needed in “building skills, for example, job searching and resumes.” One youth felt that if youth had the options they would not be financially compelled “to do crime.”

Several of the youths talked about the need for programs and services. Some explained that programs specifically matched to youths' interests would be of benefit. One youth suggested that offerings "should not channel youth into groups or programs they are not into but focus on one's that will cultivate interest." One youth specifically felt "field trips to different places" would be useful. He himself had been in such programs and felt they had helped him to avoid reoffending for a period of time as they helped him to learn more about himself and his culture.

Many youths talked about specific types of service providers. One youth noted that more reintegration workers would be helpful while another noted that people to provide transportation and take youths to the programs would be of assistance. One youth indicated that having program facilitators who have been through similar things to the youths would also be beneficial. He himself had been in a similar program and explained "People doing it used to be just like me then they changed." He expressed that he enjoyed the program and attended all the sessions.

Many youths talked about structural and societal changes that need to be made. One youth felt that charges need to start later noting that when young kids come into custody they become toughened because of feeling the need to prove themselves. He also felt that suspensions in school need to be changed as they serve to provide youths more time to get into trouble when parents do not reinforce the consequence. One youth also suggested the need for more community support. He felt that programs need to address "problems in the community" such as the fact that there is "nothing to do for youth but to be with the people they are with."

Some of the youths recognized that families need support. For example, one youth suggested “Some families are not good and they need help, need programs in the community.” Similarly, another youth felt culture was important. He attributed his success to being “Caribbean” because people “from overseas are sometimes more strict.” He felt he had received many positive messages from his family because of the culture they had passed on to him.

4.4.2 Internal Resources

Although most of the youths tended to focus on things others can do to support and assist them, a few did speak of things they could do to make change. One youth noted that youths should “not hang around with certain people.” Another suggested the following: “Choose friends wisely. Focus on school. Be independent. Don’t be a follower, be a leader.”

4.4.3 What Others Can Do

The most common theme in terms of others helping youths is aptly conveyed in the quote “show them” which was used by several of the youths. As one youth stated, “People have to show them the outside world. For example, show them jail to deter them.” Another youth noted that others should “show them real life, for example if they are selling drugs, show them - you are selling drugs but this job here would make more money and talk about the risks. Show them the paper and salary amount on it.” One youth expressed that helpers “...need to be on top of youth reminding them and having them set goals.” He elaborated that helpers need to explain the ways in which they can help and to offer support and guidance. Similarly, one youth felt that youths need “to be

helped to look at what you are really doing” and “told the benefits of a pro-social life.” Helpers “need to make it more appealing.”

Some of the youths felt helpers, services and programs should focus on “keeping youth busy and don’t give them free time to get in trouble.” Some other helpful tips included, “need one on one attention, that’s for sure” and to develop a trusting relationship: “You don’t know what’s going on with them so (you) need to build trust with that kid.” This youth further noted that youths need role models and Big Brothers type programs. The youths also conveyed that helpers need to “support us and offer us options” and assist them to develop interests.

4.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the findings generated from this study. Overall, the youths described diverse and important themes that were interwoven to reveal each youth’s unique life course. The complexity of these individual trajectories will be discussed in the next section as they relate to the issues of recidivism and resilience and the relationship between them.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Approaches to studying youth recidivism have focused on identifying risk and protective factors, while intervening to reduce recidivism has concentrated on increasing these protective factors and decreasing risk factors. The youths in this study indeed talked about many of the protective and risk factors cited in the literature. In terms of risk factors they conveyed lengthy involvements with the youth justice system, little to no religious or spiritual faith, little awareness of their own culture, alcohol and substance use issues, few role models, peer pressure, inadequate parenting, truancy and school related difficulties, skills deficits, some mental health issues and experienced trauma, grief and loss. Protective factors were also abundant for most of the youths including supportive and strong connections with family and friends, connections with adults in their community such as coaches, some work experience, involvement with sports and other pro-social activities, attending school, some spiritual beliefs and practices, participation in community programs and participation in a wide variety of academic, pro-social, and skill building programs in custody.

However, this study indicates that despite the expected buffering effects of the protective factors against the risk factors associated with the risk-protective approach, these youths were all currently in custody. Furthermore, almost all had previously spent a significant amount of time in and out of custody or otherwise involved in the youth justice system. In addition, the fact that only one youth from the out of custody group met the criteria during the data collection period suggests that many youths do not succeed in not reoffending. This study, therefore offers a number of unique findings that

contribute to the production of knowledge on youth recidivism. Firstly, as Ungar (2004) noted, past research on resilience has viewed risk and protective factors as linear and therefore predictable. The current findings offer evidence that this is not the case and further provide a sample of the complexity of how risk and protective factors interact. Risk and protective factors are not binary. These factors cannot be merely categorized as what is protective and what is not and what is risk and what is not. Reality for these youths is much more fluid. Sometimes protective factors protect but sometimes they do not. Sometimes risk factors contribute to recidivism and at other times they do not. Furthermore, sometimes a factor may be both protective and a risk at the same time. For example, some of the youths discussed having parents who were unable to enforce parameters while at the same time suggesting that these same parents were “supportive”. For these youth, lack of rules had perhaps contributed to their not doing well in some circumstances while having “supportive” parents had helped them to do well in others. Given these findings, it would appear that the issue of recidivism is complex and focusing on risk and protective factors is not providing a full understanding of why youths offend or reoffend. Subsequently risk-protective models cannot offer maximal intervention strategies to assist these youths. This interpretation is amply supported by the research discussed in the literature review of this study. Secondly, these findings also suggest that many of these youths are at risk to proceed to adult facilities once they turn 18. This is a very distressing finding and suggests that more work needs to be done to aid in reducing recidivism in youths. The discussion below elaborates on key issues relevant to this important task.

5.1 *“My well and your well are two different things:”* Resilience Theory Revisited

For reasons noted in chapter 2, the use of a qualitative approach based in resilience theory and founded on a constructionist approach was utilized for this study. The goal was to seek an understanding beyond what the risk-protective models provide. It was felt that resilience theory offered a way to learn more about the reasons youths offend and reoffend as it recognizes the importance of the influence of subjective experience and the ways youths construct their own meanings of their realities. In fact, resilience theory has increasingly been used as a framework for further research on recidivism in an effort to explain individual variances (Bottrell, 2009). Viewing at-risk youths through a resilience theory lens suggests that at-risk youths may not achieve resilience in the same ways as not at-risk youths, but that at-risk youths achieve resilience in the only ways they know how (Ungar, 2001). One case in point from the youth participants involves a youth who, after regularly missing school due to being “in and out of jail”, eventually quit as he felt he had missed so much that it was too late to catch up. This youth decided to try to earn some money instead and so began selling drugs. He then began using MDMA as “it kept me up all night so I could do business.” Whereas a youth not at-risk to reoffend might have opted to find some way to catch up on school (i.e. summer school) or quit school but obtained legal employment, this youth made decisions that he felt were in his best interest thereby signifying his unique strategies to be resilient.

Similarly, as one youth in this study stated: “My well and your well are two different things”. For me, this quote symbolizes a rejection of the dominant one-size-fits-all discourse and highlights the fact that one size does indeed fit just one. In applying a

constructionist approach to this research it became clear that on a deeper level, the real question was in what ways are my well and the youths' wells two different things and how can we gain a better understanding of individual resilience and ensure genuinely positive outcomes for all by together co-constructing this understanding.

In listening to the youths describe their paths to offending and/or reoffending and to resilience and support it became apparent that these pathways were not solely internally driven. Rather, many youths spoke of aspects external to them that had contributed to them embarking on their path. In particular, these external aspects were largely rooted in societal level or structural constructs. For example, many of the youths talked about barriers they face such as discontinued access to schooling in the community after offending. In attempting to view this new co-constructed awareness through a resilience theory lens, it became evident that while resilience theory acknowledges youths' subjective experiences it does not continue to move forward in that direction to explore further and possibly pursue altering those external factors. Bottrell (2009) argues that:

...placing resilience work in cultural and social contexts warrants attention to societal expectations, differentiated interests and the political and governance strategies that surround and infuse local conditions and are integral to the construction of adversities faced by disadvantaged young people (p. 323).

5.2 Structural and Cultural Violence: Towards a Better Understanding of Resilience and Recidivism

Put simply, the difficulty for the two approaches discussed above is that they do not fully consider the societal context in which the youths are embedded. Through the prevailing risk-protection models resilience or adaptive behavior is construed as

complying with the dominant rules and expectations of society (Bottrell, 2009). The more strengths-based, resilience theory approaches acknowledge subjective realisms, while they similarly focus on how the individual can change to adapt to the realities of the societal context in which they are embedded (Bottrell, 2009). This creates an either/or binary, making it difficult to explore the complexities in the ambiguous areas of the in-between spaces.

A number of findings in the current study suggest that the study of recidivism and consequent interventions might benefit from an approach that includes societal context. For example, many of the barriers experienced by the youths were structural and included one size fits all school suspensions that failed to accommodate parental capabilities and community programs offered in distal locations without supply of accommodating transportation options. In addition, there were youth justice interventions that ordered youths to such programs despite the difficulty the youths had in arriving to those programs and actually meeting those expectations, thus setting them up for failure before they even started the programs. In a similar vein, expectations such as curfews that impinged on youths' normal routines, although designed to alter that normal routine and thereby reduce the likelihood of reoffending, effectively created novel offences that were difficult for the youths to avoid. These findings, along with similar findings in the literature and my own anecdotal experience, suggest that the youth justice system places youths who are already demonstrating difficulty complying with society's expectations, at a disadvantage by imposing even higher expectations upon them. Such practice seems akin to yelling louder at someone who cannot hear.

Perhaps more significant is the glaring finding that nine of the ten youths interviewed for this study were Black youths with a Caribbean background. Given the small sample for this study, I made an attempt to locate statistics on racial backgrounds of youth in Ontario custody facilities to determine if Black youth are indeed overrepresented; however, minimal information was available. Despite this absence of data, some interesting information was gleaned from this search. For example, in March 2013, the Toronto Star printed a series of articles regarding the racialization of Ontario custody facilities. The basis for those articles was data on Ontario jail populations by ethnicity obtained by Akwasi Owusu-Bempah, a then University of Toronto doctoral candidate. The figures he obtained suggested that this overrepresentation of Black youths in Ontario custody settings is real:

The Youth Criminal Justice Act came into effect in 2003 and reduced admissions of young offenders to provincial jails, which was the purpose of the act. While admissions of white male young offenders have gone down almost 40% since 2005, the same rates of decline have not been seen for... black young offenders. In 2011 black male youth made up 5% of boys in Ontario but 24% of male youth admitted to jail (Toronto Star, March 1, 2013).

Put another way: “One out of twenty boys in Ontario, aged 12-17, is black, but in Ontario’s youth jails, black boys represent, one out of five boys” (Toronto Star, March 1, 2013).

Most notable was the suggestion that there is an apparently increasing trend to suppress racial data in the Canadian criminal justice system (Millar & Owusu-Bempah, 2011). Wortley and Owusu-Bempah (2012) documented the overrepresentation of certain racial minorities in the Canadian criminal justice system including Blacks and referred to the suppression of data as an “official ban on the release of race-crime

statistics” (p.14). Owusu-Bempah and Wortley (2014) indicated that: “Race-based data in Canada are collected by a variety of criminal justice institutions, yet national reporting of racial and Aboriginal data is sparse and inconsistent, especially when looking beyond the Aboriginal category” (p. 289). They also noted that this ban hinders research on minority crime issues and impedes efforts to eradicate racism (Wortley & Owusu-Bempah, 2012).

Wortley (2006) pointed out that the racialized practices in Canada’s criminal justice system are not due to conspiracy within the system, but instead are the result of ingrained prejudices on which our society is founded. The following excerpt from one of the Toronto Star articles in the series on unequal justice noted many of the structural barriers contributing to the overrepresentation of Black youth in custody:

Young black men face racism, poverty, lack of opportunity, social isolation, violence in their neighborhoods, family challenges and unemployment. Once these men are known to police, systemic issues stack the deck against already disadvantaged groups, say academics and a library of past research, including the 1995 Report of the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System. At-risk communities receive more police attention. Police detain, leaving release decisions to courts. Justices of the peace in Ontario are demanding sureties more often these days. Making bail is harder when you have no home, are poor, or have no one to be a surety. Being held before trial leads to more guilty pleas that may set people immediately free but count heavily against them with each subsequent encounter with the law. More conditions at release time mean more of a chance of breaching them, which brings one back to jail (Toronto Star, March 1, 2013).

Millar and Owusu-Bempah (2011) note that there are problems with the way race-crime data is presently collected that impedes accurate analysis of these variables. In particular, they note that data is not categorized in a manner conducive to utilization for other purposes such as employment equity, the Census, and the General Social Survey of crime victimization and there is inconsistency in the categories themselves making comparisons difficult. They note that: “For accurate analysis of crime in its social

context, consistent variables that measure relevant constructs are needed. Canada's data on race in criminal justice are not consistent and the construct of "visible minority," when not broken down into its constituent parts, is problematic. The construct of visible minority obscures racial differences by averaging groups that are over-represented with those that are under-represented" (p. 660). These findings suggest that a multitude of structural barriers form and are formed by these practices resulting in a cycle of reoffending for many.

Indeed, my findings are clear examples of structural and cultural violence, terms created by Johan Galtung (Farmer, Nizeye, Stulac & Keshavjee, 2006; Galtung, 1969, 1990), which may offer a more comprehensive contextual framework for understanding resilience and subsequently recidivism. Structural violence describes the social structures (economic, political, legal, religious, and cultural) that prevent individuals, groups and societies from reaching their full potential (Farmer et. al., 2006). According to Galtung, it is the "avoidable impairment of fundamental human needs or...the impairment of human life, which lowers the actual degree to which someone is able to meet their needs below that which would otherwise be possible" (Galtung, 2004, as cited in Farmer et al., 2006, p. 1686). Structural violence exists when some groups, classes, nationalities, etc. have more access to goods, resources, and opportunities than other groups, classes, nationalities, etc. This unequal advantage is built into the very social, political and economic systems that rule societies (Galtung, 1990). Cultural violence is the dominant attitudes and beliefs that have been instilled since childhood and that surround us in daily life about the necessity of such violence (Galtung, 1990), for example, racist and

discriminatory beliefs. In essence, cultural violence legitimizes structural violence (Galtung, 1990).

Another significant finding in this study was that in providing suggestions for ways that they could be helped that would be of most benefit, the youths focused predominantly on things outside of themselves. The lenses of structural violence and cultural violence could be perhaps used to understand this outcome even more. One of the main subthemes here included a desire for access to programs that offer skills that develop their interests and that they have the ability to access with ease. As previously noted, one youth suggested that programs “should not channel youth into groups or programs they are not into but focus on (the) one’s that will cultivate interest.” This statement suggests that the offerings of programs and services might be better served through a consultation process with those accessing the programs. It appears that sometimes there is a disjoint between what the program developer feels is needed and what the program user feels they need. This diminishes the integrity of the user and assumes they have no idea of what is in their own best interests.

Banishing this structural barrier and incorporating youths’ perspectives into the creation of programs that they use might prove advantageous for catching and holding their attention and thereby enhance their learning and skill development. In the end, the skills and knowledge they would acquire may lead to jobs in which they feel competent and in which they are interested resulting in increased job security. Furthermore, programs in which they learn about themselves (i.e. cultural awareness, etc.) may enhance their own self-awareness and self-respect. As will be discussed further on, culture and religion are aspects that appear to be lacking in the lives of many of these

youths. It seems likely that these social dimensions have the potential to contribute to reducing recidivism. This is certainly an area that would benefit from further empirical research.

Another main subtheme of the finding that the youths concentrated largely on things outside of themselves was their expressed need for legal opportunities to earn money. This finding too could benefit from being explored through the lenses of structural and cultural violence. Looked at more closely, the consistent request for assistance in obtaining legitimate employment, for example, is very likely rooted in an experience of poverty and racism. Demographically speaking, many of these youths came from inner-city neighborhoods known for their low-income status. Galabuzi (2005) indicates that Canadian labor conditions routinely put minority groups in Canada at an economic disadvantage. Galabuzi (2005) refers to this as “the racialization of poverty” and notes it “is a process by which poverty becomes more concentrated and reproduced among racialized group members, in some cases inter-generationally. The racialization of poverty emerges out of structural social-economic features that pre-determine the disproportionate incidence of poverty among racialized group members” (p. 16). He adds that “Racialized group members are over represented in many low paying occupations, with high levels of precariousness while they are underrepresented in the better occupations with more secure jobs” (Galabuzi, 2005, p. 15).

As one youth noted, his parents were experiencing financial hardship as a result of his father losing his job. They were forced to move to a motel and although later they were able to move to an apartment this was nonetheless a downgrade as they had previously resided in a house. His father took another job but was forced to take a lower

wage. Despite some unknowns in this scenario due to the limitations imposed on this study by using a structured interview format, it is possible to demonstrate a richer understanding of the path that led to this youth's recidivism than would be afforded by other approaches.

First, structural violence can be evidenced in the unequal distribution of resources, namely income, experienced by this family. Exacerbating the situation was the fact that his father was struggling with a gambling problem. I contend that traditional approaches grounded in conservative and to some extent, neo-liberal ideologies, would view this as an individual problem. Namely, the belief that the father is solely responsible for his gambling problem is the cultural violence, the legitimizing part that perpetuates the situation by offering no structural relief of the position in which this family is embedded. This view does not consider the possibility that structural inequalities may have led to his job loss. Nor does it acknowledge that the subsequent gambling may have been an attempt to recoup some of the lost income or a means of dealing with the stress he was under as provider of the family. Viewed this way, I argue that this man may have been demonstrating resilience.

The youth talked about the ensuing stress this situation had on his family, the impact of which led him to offend. He explained that there were things he wanted and there was tension in the family. He was trying to help out by contributing his money from a legitimate job he had secured through Tropicana. Viewed this way, this youth, like his father before him, was demonstrating resilience. Nonetheless, it was not easy. The youth explained that his parents were important to him but he preferred at the time to hang out with his friends. This seems a normal reaction for most teenagers but

particularly, I would imagine, when the situation at home was tense. As Kiser, Nurse, Lucksted and Collins (2008) found, “the traumatic context of urban poverty has pervasive and systemic effects that can erode parent and family functioning and compound the direct consequences of urban poverty on children” (p. 78). Given this finding, it seems possible that the familial relationships of this youth may have been eroded. I would argue that if this were the case it would be logical that he would turn to friends increasingly for belongingness and affirmation. His friends, who were interested in making money as well, learned from other peers that there was a way to make money that was easy, albeit illegal. As he noted, he succumbed to the peer pressure and decided to just “go with the flow.” Despite the possibility that the context in which his choices played out may not have been conducive to resilience, nonetheless his own sense of agency and personal responsibility too would have played a role. Clearly, the outcome for this youth hinged on many factors.

It was not that this family and this youth did not pursue resilience in the same manner expected by the larger society, for they did just that. However, a complex, multi-leveled causal sequence of events and responses contributed to an eventual choice of pursuing resilience in a way not accepted by the larger society. I contend that where resilience theory would recognize that this youth pursued resilience in the only way he knew how, it may not amply consider the structural aspects that contributed to his selection of the path of resilience he chose. As Bottrell (2009) notes: “The significance of societal context has been minimized in resilience research as contexts such as poverty, racism or other discrimination are treated as factors of low socio-economic status, race,

ethnicity and so on and often controlled out of the variable interactive calculations” (p. 324).

Furthermore, an approach that includes overall societal context and the interplay of that context with the individual’s interpretation, would perhaps explain why some factors that may protect youth are absent. For example, in the present study religion and/or spirituality did not appear to play a significant role in the lives of these youths. Culture’s role was even less significant. Kiser et al. (2008) noted that in the United States for some African-American families, positive adaptation to high-risk contexts was linked to spirituality and shared belief systems, yet in their study very few caregivers reported using their spiritual beliefs about God in talking to their children. Given the small sample of Kiser et al.’s study it is premature to generalize, nonetheless this finding appears consistent with the lack of religion and culture conveyed in the households of the youths in this current study.

Structural and cultural violence both may offer insights into the reason such heritage is not passed down. For many of the youths in this study, their parents were first generation immigrants to Canada. It is possible that in an effort to fit in with Canadian society they have downplayed their own religious or cultural beliefs. It is also possible that faced with the stress of adapting to a new country in terms of finding employment, accessing services, learning a new language, and generally adapting to different ways has left little time for them to continue to practice the rites and rituals of their religion or culture themselves, let alone pass them on to their children. Both religion and culture could be viewed as protective factors that might insulate youths from venturing down the path of offending but perhaps structural influences play a role in why these factors are not

passed on. Structurally, do we as a society violate, oppress or discriminate against immigrants with bureaucratic structures that make it so difficult to adapt to our culture that people are unable to uphold their own? Culturally, do we abuse immigrants by expecting them to simply adopt our ways? Incorporating a structural and cultural violence framework could perhaps assist us in understanding what we could do to make it easier for these aspects of familial life to be passed on and thereby contribute to influencing the paths of these youths in a more positive direction.

In fact, the concepts of structural and cultural violence theories have been used to explain other social inequalities. For example, Farmer et al. (2006) apply the concept of structural violence to the medical field. Specifically, they illustrate the influence of structural violence on individuals living with HIV in the United States and in Rwanda and demonstrate the efficacy of addressing structural violence through structural interventions (Farmer et al., 2006). In addition, Suarez (2013) demonstrated the interrelationship of direct, structural and cultural violence and the resultant effects on Quechua women in the aftermath of the Peruvian armed conflict. Suarez explains “The unrelenting exposure to violence affecting Quechua women reflects Galtung’s three concepts of violence: the events of direct violence, which trigger the continuous process of structural violence up or down, legitimated by permanent invariant cultural violence” (p. 9).

Suarez’s analysis may serve as a model to examine more fully the roles of structural and cultural violence in the lives of the youth participants. As noted in the excerpt from the Toronto Star cited above, the structural violence that youths involved with the Canadian youth justice system encounter on a daily basis includes racism,

poverty, lack of opportunity, social isolation, violence in their neighborhoods, family challenges and unemployment. The direct violence here is their experience of being placed in custody when a youth with a different racial background might go free. It is this direct violence or their experiences of racialization of apprehension that amplifies their day-to-day experiences of structural violence, which is in turn encouraged by the “invariant” and routine discrimination of Black youths.

In fact, evidence indicates that Canadian Jamaicans, one of the larger groups of Caribbean Canadians, are regularly targets of structural violence and are relegated to the margins of Canadian society. In general, income levels for Canadians of Jamaican origin are lower than the national average. According to Statistics Canada (2007), in 2000 the average income for Jamaican Canadians was \$26, 400, almost \$3,500 less than the national average. In fact, Jamaican Canadians are more likely to have incomes that fall below Statistics Canada’s Low-Income Cut-Offs (LICO) than Canadians with other ethnic origins (Statistics Canada, 2007). In 2000, Statistics Canada found that while 16% of the overall Canadian Population resided in homes with incomes below the LICO, an astounding 26% of Jamaican Canadians fell into that category (Statistics Canada, 2007). Additionally, Jamaican Canadian youths were found to be especially likely to reside in low income situations (Statistics Canada, 2007). In 2000, 19% of all Canadian children lived in a family with incomes below the LICO compared with 34% of Jamaican Canadian youths (Statistics Canada, 2007). These statistics demonstrate that it is likely a large number of Caribbean Canadians are at a greater disadvantage than their equivalents in the overall Canadian population.

In keeping with the subject of recidivism, James (2002) has pointed out how Canadian society in general, and law enforcement in particular have constructed a view of young Black men as non-law-abiding citizens at best and dangerous criminals at worst. This has led to racial profiling practices that result in a disproportionate amount of police time being spent investigating young Black men, as opposed to other racial groups in an effort to protect the public. Although African, Black, and Caribbean people make up only 9.6% of the Canadian population, given that people of Jamaican origin make up the largest portion (3%) of that population they have received the most police attention. This has likely contributed to the widespread belief that all Blacks are from Jamaica and that they are committing significantly more crimes than other racial groups (James, 2002). James (2002) refers to this as the “Jamaicanization of crime” (p. 299). He further notes that the perception of the predominant Anglo-Saxon Canadian population is that Jamaican people’s difficulty fitting into Canadian society is not the result of inequalities, racism, and discrimination but rather due to their innate heritage and culture. I argue that this is a clear case of cultural violence in that these perceptions legitimize the continued practices of targeting Black male youths and the continued lack of consideration of societal factors that contribute to this situation.

Kumsa, Ng, Chambon, Maiter and Yan (2013) assert that “the extraordinary and brutal forms of physical violence happen only in the contexts where the subtle and invisible forms of ordinary violence have already paved the way” (p.851). Kumsa et al. (2013) explore the relationship between youth violence, violence done to youths and healing. I see the concept of resilience that I have discussed throughout this thesis as largely akin to this concept of healing. It is not that youths experience a risky situation

and then find the resilience to overcome that single situation and move on forever resilient, just as it is not that youths experience a single episode of violence, heal and move on forever healed. Indeed, there is interplay between these factors in that, as has been demonstrated, these youths experience structural, and cultural violence that leads to their own acting out in violence as a means of healing and/or striving to do well and be resilient. As Kumsa et al. (2013) note, “healing is an active constructing and reconstructing of self to mend injurious social relations” (p. 859). They go on to note the dangers of healing through violence but acknowledge that expecting youths to suppress their anger and police to contain it are not answers either. As they note, youth violence strategies

...are not healing if we look at violence and healing as simultaneous relational processes. If healing aims at mending injurious social relations, then these strategies are not healing because they either turn the violence outward towards Others (revenge fighting) or turn it inward towards Self (substance use), or postpone it (swallowing it now, exploring later), or divert it (basketball). They do not aim at mending the social relations, and this defeats the very purpose of healing (p. 860).

In considering resilience along the same lines it would appear that many of these youths’ offences could be responses to the structural and cultural violence they face and their attempts to heal and soothe their wounds as well as to adapt to these realities.

In concluding this section, I must unfortunately point out that many of the youths struggled to provide examples of ways they had done well during hard times. Similarly, a common theme in making suggestions for ways they could be helped was “show us” how to not get into trouble, make money legally, etc. These findings suggest that we are not effectively assisting these youths given we are not talking the same language. This contributes to the earlier discussion of programs being created by those who have their

own ideas about what at-risk youths need. Generally speaking, we have set standards as a society that these youths spoke of striving to achieve, while they also clearly expressed their lack of understanding how to meet them. It seems likely that this is at least in part due to the many structural barriers they face that we as the program providers and policy makers do not. How can we possibly know what is in their best interest without a thorough understanding of the context of their lives? That thorough context includes the societal context, not just from our own perspectives as the mainstream in society but from the perspective of the underprivileged too. Understanding their societal context from their perspective may provide awareness of where we are at odds and suggest ways to reconcile these differences.

I assert therefore, that future research must account for the complexity of factors and their correlated interwoven effects that influence the pathways down which these youths travel. I feel it is clear from the above analysis that social determinants may play a significant role in determining who offends and reoffends. I firmly believe that interventions informed by an understanding of structural and cultural violence and their impact on every step of the process leading up to the point where a youth offends or re-offends is needed. To borrow from similar movements in the medical field, this means working at multiple levels, from “distal” interventions performed late in the process when youths have already been involved with the system on multiple occasions, to “proximal” or more preventative interventions (Farmer et. al., 2006).

5.3 Limitations

This study presented some limitations, including, the exclusive focus on male youths and the small number of youth participants. These limitations preclude

transferability or generalizability of the findings. Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings. The study sample was small, male, and exclusive to one facility. The results are therefore not transferable to female offenders, nor can they be transferred to all other males. Had the interviews been obtained at a different facility the results may have varied. Participants were between the ages of sixteen and twenty and thus results may not be transferable to other age cohorts. Given the differences in the penal systems across provinces and regions in Canada, the findings referring to structural aspects of the youth justice system may not be transferable to other settings. Finally, due to the subjective nature of the interviews, themes and patterns identified may not be transferable to other youths. As the researcher, I attempted to enhance transferability by doing a thorough job of describing the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research. However, it should also be noted that generalizability was not the objective of this qualitative study. As Creswell (2013) notes, “The intent in qualitative research is not to generalize the information..., but to elucidate the particular, the specific” (p. 157).

A second limitation involved the data recording approach. Following the Ministry of Children and Youth Services policies, answers were handwritten by the researcher rather than tape-recorded. Although points were clarified and phrased back to the youth to confirm accuracy, writing the responses was a time consuming and complex process and it is possible that important content could have been missed. Despite these limitations, I have followed researcher reflexivity, member checking, the assumption of a “not knowing” stance, the elicitation of thick descriptions and several other procedures elaborated on earlier in chapter 3 to ensure the rigor of this study.

Finally, my decision to exclude the one available youth who met the criteria for the out-of-custody group resulted in a limitation of this study. In hindsight, although information would have been gained from only one participant, the results could have unearthed some clues as to what helps youth not to reoffend.

5.4 Contributions to the Literature

This research has explored the reasons for youth recidivism and pathways to their resilience for a small group of youths in an Ontario secure custody facility. It has also examined the relationship between recidivism and resilience for these youths. The findings in this study supported many of those portrayed in the literature review in chapter 2. For example, although the focus of this study was to explore recidivism from a resilience theory framework, aspects of risk and protective factors were clearly evident in the youths' stories. Similar to findings by Zigler, Taussig, and Black (1992) many of the youths in this study identified risk factors such as problems at school, family dysfunction, family criminal involvement, substance use, parental substance use and poverty. Likewise, findings by Sprott and Myers (2011) that bail conditions placed on youths may have the unintended consequence of setting them up for further charges were supported by the youths in this study. Additionally, the youth participants indicated that many external structural barriers contributed to their paths to offending and reoffending. Their suggestions for help also tended to focus on the need for more external provisions. These findings support Gray's (2011) discovery that current practices of addressing young people's reintegration needs focus too much on correcting internal factors such as their personal deficits and their need to take responsibility. Taken together these findings

suggest that more focus is needed on addressing those factors external to youths (i.e. structural barriers) as opposed to interventions at the internal level.

The findings in the current study also support some of the findings of the resilience research reviewed in chapter 2. For example, similar to findings by Aronwitz (2005) in his study of young people facing legal issues, many of the youths in this study were also able to demonstrate resilience and at times change risky behavior in the face of continued adversity. His finding that key aspects in relationships with others promoted resilience in the young people also resonated with the findings here as the youths discussed the importance of connections with family, friends and sometimes others in helping them to be resilient.

Finally, these research findings also support the conclusions of Ward and Day (2010) that further research is needed which explores the basic workings of resilience in examining criminal trajectories. It also supports findings by Hartwell, McMackin, Tansi and Bartlett (2010) that qualitative research offers an opportunity to gain a richer understanding of youths' experiences and that more qualitative research is needed that provides the context of their experiences from their own perspectives.

In summary, the literature on recidivism has focused heavily on risk and protective factors and less so, but increasingly on resilience. Taken as a whole, the findings of this current study and those of prior research are mutually supportive and suggest the need to build on traditional risk-protection and resilience approaches. In conjunction, these findings lend credibility to my interpretation that the role of societal context needs to be more aptly considered in the study of recidivism. The literature on

structural and cultural violence has helped to bring needed attention to the recognition of societal context as it relates to resilience. As Bottrell (2009) notes,

While the literature still refers to ‘resilient’ young people, theoretical emphasis has shifted from resilience as solely individual traits to notions of adaptation despite multiple and cumulative risks and to understanding protective factors for buffering or mediating effects of adversity. More recently, research has centred on understanding processes to account for the complexity of factors and their correlated interactive effects (p. 323).

The findings of this research are thus consistent with current trends in research on resilience within marginalized populations such as youths in conflict with the law.

5.5 Implications for Research, Front-line Practice and Social Action

In my view, resilience is two-fold: on the one hand the individual’s internal strengths (i.e. confidence, abilities, etc.), on the other external supports to which the individual has access (i.e. family, community, education system, etc.). These two aspects of resilience are intertwined. External supports are seen as bolstering internal supports. For example, some of the youths talked about sports helping them to get through a rough time such as the death of a loved one. Here sports are viewed as a community supplied opportunity external to the youths that permits them to develop pro-social relationships and develop physical and social skills. This in turn broadens the internal repertoire of resources the individual has and enhances confidence thereby helping the person successfully navigate difficult situations. The risk-protective factors model is similar in that protective factors encompass similar internal and external aspects. The more protective factors one has the more the person is protected from risk and resilience is bolstered. Resilience theory in turn, considers youths’ subjective perspectives and offers a strengths-based approach to intervention. Thus, the ideas that underlie these approaches are similar in that external aspects are considered equally important to

internal aspects in supporting resilience. Following this vein, it is clearly important to consider both internal and external aspects of recidivism.

This research builds upon these existing approaches to studying recidivism by suggesting the inclusion of a structural and cultural violence framework in the study of resilience in at-risk youths and in the practice of assisting them. Based upon my own learning from this research process, I invite both researchers and practitioners to open their minds to the concept of cultural and structural violence. For practitioners in particular, as seen by the number of youths who return to custody over and over again, attempting to enforce responsibility alone is a dead end road. In addition, as noted earlier, many of these youths are at risk of moving on to the adult system. Considering systemic factors can be intimidating to practitioners in particular as they often feel they have no power. However, such power should be viewed as a continuum. While radical change might not be practical or possible, exploring these concepts rather than excluding them entirely can permit a dialogue with clients in which creative strategies for personal and social change may be discovered. Furthermore, in working with involuntary clients, considering all aspects of their lives from an open and honest perspective will foster trust thereby enriching that relationship and the work that will result from it towards positive outcomes.

For researchers, in general, further qualitative studies, particularly in-depth narrative interviews are instrumental in gleaning hidden factors contributing to recidivism and enhanced understanding of how participants construct their own identity and realities. Such methodologies offer participants the opportunity to communicate and contribute their experiences and perspectives thereby empowering them. More importantly, I

encourage researchers to include the addition of structural and cultural violence frameworks into this methodology in research with this population. Using these frameworks while maintaining an un-assuming stance, may convey to participants that you are open to seeing the bigger picture of their lives. This will assist in building trust and permit a warm and open dialogue from which richer knowledge can be gained. In addition, research with this population can be used as a tool for advocacy. While it might not be possible to radically alter the realities of structural and cultural violence in the short term, research is a way to bring these truths to light. I am a firm believer that education can be a powerful tool, particularly when it permits people entrenched in viewing the world through a single narrow lens to broaden the scope of that lens. The more that people are aware of the effects of societal factors on the lives of at-risk youths the more likely they will be to advocate for change. The more people advocating for change the more likely those who have the power to do something will in fact do so. After all, not only is knowledge power but there is also strength in numbers.

Additionally, based upon my own experience working in a youth custody facility, I feel better communication and correspondence between policy makers, practitioners and the youth they serve might be of benefit. Policy makers are generally not the front line providers of services. Front line practitioners are not always consulted on policies but nonetheless must carry them out. The youth ordered to use these services are not normally consulted on policies but are expected to be satisfied with them and benefit from them. Given what I perceive to be gaps in the usual procedures of policy development it seems likely that structural issues might at times not be thoroughly considered in creating policies. It seems in order to bridge the gap between policy and

practice we must promote open and honest conversation between policy makers, front-line staff and the youths we serve. Perhaps routinely offering youths surveys or holding focus groups in which practitioners, youths and policy makers come together would be useful in gaining an understanding of youths' evolving needs and interests. Although it would not be possible to accommodate all suggestions, the resulting programs established through such a process might at least capture and reflect youths' voices more readily.

Finally, a good starting point for all would be to consider the suggestions offered by the youths participating in this study of ways they feel they would best be assisted. For example, "show them" the things they want to know about such as how to make good decisions while facing the realities of the society in which they live. Take them through exercises of problem solving and skills building that will allow them to broaden their horizons in the community. Help them to set practical and achievable goals that are uniquely their own. Most importantly, support them, build their trust and establish good working relationships with them. These strategies, coming from the youths themselves are excellent first steps to assist such youths in bolstering their resilience and paving the way to more comprehensive steps to help them reduce their risk to reoffend.

5.6 Conclusion

This thesis has explored the reasons that youths offend and sometimes reoffend as well as the ways in which they are resilient. The narratives that the youths provided were placed within the context of the existing literature. The traditional research on recidivism, with its particular focus on risk and protective factors, forms the building blocks of current knowledge, while the emerging incorporation of resilience theory into the study of recidivism has included the more subjective perspectives of participants.

The findings of this study illuminate the complexity of factors that influence whether a given youth may embark upon a path of offending and/or reoffending or not. The experiences of the ten youths in this study demonstrate that many of those factors were external and in particular were structural or societal level barriers. The suggestion has been made that both the study of recidivism and interventions with at-risk youths would benefit from a continued and increased incorporation of societal context and structural and cultural violence perspectives.

Engaging in this research has not only broadened my awareness of these issues and their impact but also enlightened my approach to working with these youths. Where I previously tended to work from a strengths-based resilience approach, my method was limited by societally ingrained notions of focusing solely on individual responsibility. It is difficult to get away from this practice, particularly when working from a position with limited advocacy capacity. The inclination has been to encourage youths to accept the rules of society and the structural barriers and find ways of bringing their actions in line with the mainstream. It seems to be a “yes...but” approach, “yes I hear you *but* this is the way it is so if you don’t want to keep coming back into custody you must work around it.” My approach, however, has now begun to change with my new commitment to integrate structural issues into my assessments of these youths. I must be clear that I still believe that personal responsibility is vital to success as individuals but I now feel it is important to understand and deal with societal issues as well. If we are to be responsible individuals then, in my view we ought to be responsible communities and societies as well. Awareness of structural issues will hopefully enable us to be more responsible in the ways we interact with and treat fellow citizens and in the way we organize ourselves

as communities. As members of responsible communities, the youths too must share a role in holding themselves accountable. Arriving at a consensus on what responsibility explicitly involves is a challenge, particularly in today's age of diversity when the rules of society are different for different people. Given their involvement with the law it appears that how we interpret the rules of society is different than how these youths interpret them. Thus, it has now become all the more important for me to understand clients as best as I can, the context from which they come and how they interpret that context and their role within it. In terms of my practice, I now listen more closely to their stories and do not say "yes...but." I continue to encourage responsibility but I also explore the impact of societal and structural barriers with these youths as well as ways they can potentially address these barriers themselves. I also explore ways they can still get their needs met since societal level change is unlikely to occur in the short term. Encouraging responsibility for themselves and for their communities while at the same time acquiring an understanding of the societal issues which they face appears to be a balanced approach that opens up richer dialogue and greater possibilities for change.

Despite the changes to myself as a professional, as a researcher and as a person, I have realized that there is still much to learn. Completing this research has helped me to see first-hand the complexities inherent in both recidivism and resilience and principally in the ways the two come together. In particular, I have come to truly appreciate that neither recidivism nor resilience can be explained through binary classifications. Indeed, these subjects are neither concrete nor clear, but rather, largely abstract, ambiguous and unpredictable. Recidivism and resilience in conjunction with each other are fluid, weaving in and out of each other and it is in this way that these two seemingly at odds

subjects can co-exist and at times come together. While this research project has provided some insight into the issues of recidivism and resilience for these youths, it has also left me with a multitude of further questions and led to my desire to pursue further research. In particular, it has led to my commitment to use continued research as a tool for advocacy with this particular population of at-risk youths.

In closing, many of the youths could not identify ways they had done well during difficult times. Nevertheless, their stories were rich with testimonies of just such resilience. The fact that they cannot see their own resilience is a testimony to the fact we are not speaking the same language. Why is that? The youths know what the dominant society wants them to do – stop reoffending. What they do not know is how to do that. The youths in this study shared their desire to do well but also spoke of their struggles in knowing how to do well. So why do they not know how to do well and stop reoffending? After all, we are telling them what to do, aren't we? Oscar Wilde once made the comment that: "Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation." This, I believe is the issue for these youths. Instead of defining their own identities, to a certain degree these youths have unknowingly had their identities defined for them by others who gauge their value to society by their own criteria. I believe our identities are our most valuable asset as they define who we are and who we can become. I believe that the practices suggested through the findings in this study can help free youth from these barriers by offering them the opportunity to have their true voices heard. Sharing their own perspectives in a trusting relationship may permit them the opportunity to reframe their own identity and move forward in a way that will enable them to affect positive change in their own lives.

Youths who are assisted to recognize their role in society, their responsibility to society and the ways in which society legitimately affects their progress may be inspired to make changes through personal growth and/or self-advocacy. They may feel supported by helpers to make such changes. In addition, the more youths in the position to make such changes alongside them the further support they will have to succeed. Wouldn't it be wonderful to see these youths reclaim their identities, establish a positive sense of personal agency and resilience and go on to live fulfilling lives outside of any justice system? I think it would be simply amazing.

Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

for youths inside a custody facility

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

Youth Recidivism: A Qualitative Study of Risk and Resilience

Principle Investigator: Jesse Marie Near, Advisor: Dr. Eliana Suarez

You are invited to take part in my study. In my study, I hope to learn why some youths reoffend after they leave custody and other youths do not. Only 10 youths will be chosen for the study on a first come first serve basis.

INFORMATION

If you choose to take part in my study, I will ask you some questions. You can choose not to answer any of them or leave the study at any time with no consequences. I will first ask you some questions about yourself. I will ask for your age and date of birth. I will ask where you were born and where your family is from. I will ask what grade you are in at school and about any work you have done. I will ask what religion you are. I will also ask about your past offences. I will then ask you some longer questions. I will ask you about your life since the last time you left custody. I will ask you what you think helps youths to not reoffend. I will also ask you what you think helps youths do well. When I am done, you can tell me any questions or concerns you have. Our whole conversation will take about 1-2 hours. Your answers will be handwritten by myself or an assistant on paper.

RISKS

Not all youths at the (name of facility) will be in my study. Youths who were not chosen may be upset that you were chosen. They could treat you poorly. They could be physically mean to you or say mean things. They might not let you join in social activities. This could upset you. I will do my best to make sure this does not happen. Our talk will take place in a private room so other youths are less likely to know you are participating in my study. After we talk you can ask me any questions or tell me your concerns. If you need it, I will arrange for someone else to talk with you such as your Social Worker.

BENEFITS

You will be able to give your thoughts about what helps youths do well. Your answers will help social workers and others to help youths. Your answers will also help others do more research.

participant's initials

CONFIDENTIALITY

I will not tell anyone that you are in my study. Our talk will take place in a private room. Staff will bring you to the private room and take you back to your unit after we talk. This way others are less likely to know you are in my study.

Your answers are private and your name won't be used. Your identity will be a secret but if you tell me about new crimes, or about abuse that you have experienced, or that someone else may be hurt, then I cannot keep this secret. I may have to call the police and/or the Children's Aid Society.

Your real name will not be used. In its place you will be given a number. After we talk, the notes and this consent form will be stored safely in a cabinet in a locked office in the Social Work Department at Wilfrid Laurier University. Your answers will be entered into a computer secured with a password. Only me and my thesis advisor will know the password. The computer will also be kept in a locked office in the Social Work Department at Wilfrid Laurier University. All of this information will be destroyed after my thesis is completed.

If you let me, quotes or things you say might be put in the final report. Other people might be able to figure out who you are if they read my report. Please check the 'yes' box in section 2 of this form to let me use your words. Please check the 'no' box if you do not want me to use your words.

COMPENSATION

For taking part in my study, I will give you a pop and a snack.

CONTACT

If you ever have questions about my study or you have any negative effects from taking part in my study you may contact me, Jesse Near, at (519-426-3561 ext. 227). This study has been reviewed and approved by the Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Robert Basso, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 5225 or rbasso@wlu.ca

participant's initials

PARTICIPATION

Taking part in my study is your choice. You can choose to not take part and there will be no consequences, good or bad. If you take part, you can leave at any time. You may also choose to not answer any questions. If you leave, your answers will be removed from the study and destroyed.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

I hope to finish the final report by September 2014. If you want a copy of your own, you can contact me, the researcher Jesse Near at (519-426-3561 ext. 227).

CONSENT

- Yes, my quotes and/or things I say can be used in this study.
- No, I do not wish to have any of my quotes or things I say used in this study.

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature

_____ Date _____

Investigator's signature

_____ Date _____

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

for youths outside a custody facility

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY

Youth Recidivism: A Qualitative Study of Risk and Resilience

Principle Investigator: Jesse Marie Near, Advisor: Dr. Eliana Suarez

You are invited to take part in my study. In my study, I hope to learn why some youths reoffend after they leave custody and why other youths do not. Only 10 youths will be chosen for the study on a first come first serve basis.

INFORMATION

If you choose to take part in my study, I will ask you some questions. You can choose not to answer any of them or leave the study at any time with no consequences. I will first ask you some questions about yourself. I will ask for your age and date of birth. I will ask where you were born and where your family is from. I will ask what grade you are in at school and about any work you have done. I will ask what religion you are. I will also ask about your past offences. I will then ask you some longer questions. I will ask you about your life since the last time you left custody. I will ask you what you think helps youths to not reoffend. I will also ask you what you think helps youths do well. When I am done, you can tell me any questions or concerns you have. Our whole conversation will take about 1-2 hours. Your answers will be handwritten by myself or an assistant on paper.

RISKS

Not all youths in probation will be in my study. Youths who were not chosen may be upset that you were chosen. They could treat you poorly. They could be physically mean to you or say mean things. They might not let you join in social activities. This could upset you. I will do my best to make sure this does not happen. Our talk will take place in a private room so other youths are less likely to know you are in my study. After we talk you can ask me any questions or tell me your concerns. If you need it, I will arrange for someone else to talk with you such as your Probation Officer or a counselor.

participant's initials

BENEFITS

You will be able to give your thoughts about what helps youths do well. Your answers will help social workers and others to help youths. Your answers will also help others do more research.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I will not tell anyone that you are in my study. Our talk will take place in a private room. This way others are less likely to know you are in my study.

Your answers are private and your name won't be used. Your identity will be a secret but if you tell me about new crimes, or about abuse that you have experienced, or that someone else may be hurt, then I cannot keep this secret. I may have to call the police and/or the Children's Aid Society.

Your real name will not be used. In its place you will be given a number. After we talk, the notes and this consent form will be stored safely in a cabinet in a locked office in the Social Work Department at Wilfrid Laurier University. Your answers will be entered into a computer secured with a password. Only me and my thesis advisor will know the password. The computer will also be kept in a locked office in the Social Work Department at Wilfrid Laurier University. All of this information will be destroyed after my thesis is completed.

If you let me, quotes or things you say might be put in the final report. Other people might be able to figure out who you are if they read my report. Please check the 'yes' box in section 2 of this form to let me use your words. Please check the 'no' box if you do not want me to use your words.

COMPENSATION

For taking part in my study, I will give you a pop and a snack.

CONTACT

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participant's initials

PARTICIPATION

Taking part in my study is your choice. You can choose to not take part and there will be no consequences, good or bad. If you take part, you can leave at any time. You may also choose to not answer any questions. If you leave, your answers will be removed from the study and destroyed.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

I hope to finish the final report by September 2014. If you want a copy of your own, you can contact me, the researcher Jesse Near at (519-426-3561 ext. 227).

CONSENT

- Yes, my quotes and/or things I say can be used in this study.
- No, I do not wish to have any of my quotes or things I say used in this study.

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to take part in this study.

Participant's signature

_____ Date _____

Investigator's signature

_____ Date _____

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Demographic Information

1. How old are you? What is your date of birth?
2. What grade are you in at school? Can you tell me about your work experience?
3. Where were you born? What racial/ethnic background do you identify yourself as?
4. What is your religion or faith background?
5. Have you been convicted before? If yes, how many times? What offences have you been convicted of in the past?

Narrative/In-depth Interview Questions

Three main areas of information will be gained through the narratives. These general question areas will be explored with participants.

A) Youth's Experiences since Last Release from Custody

Interviewer: I would like to ask you some questions about your life since you last left custody up until now.

1. *Tell me about some of the things you have done since you last left custody.* (If required interviewer will prompt youth to discuss the following areas: school, work, leisure time (i.e. sports, hobbies, clubs, etc.), cultural or religious activities, substance use and any negative behavior (i.e. getting into fights, suspensions, not getting along with parents, etc.).
2. *Can you tell me about the people in your life since you last left custody?* (If required interviewer will prompt youth to discuss the following areas: family, friends, teachers/coaches, service providers (i.e. probation officer, counselors, etc.); what role did these people play in the youth's life; how important were these people; why were they important/not important).

B) Youth's Personal Experiences of Resilience

Interviewer: Now we are going to move to a different topic. I would like to talk about doing well.

1. *Can you tell me, what does doing well mean to you?*
2. *Can you tell me about a time when things were really going well for you? (If required interviewer will prompt youth to discuss the following areas: what was going on at that time that made things go well; what kind of help did the youth have at that time (i.e., probation, counselor, teacher, friends, etc.); who were the people in their life at that time; in what ways did they help the youth or try to make things worse).*
3. *Can you tell me about a time when things were not going well for you or in fact going quite badly? (If required interviewer will prompt youth to discuss the following areas: what was going on at that time that made things go badly; who were the people in the youth's life at that time; in what ways did they try to help the youth or in what ways did they make things worse).*
4. *For many "resilience" means times when you are able to do well even when you are dealing with difficult times in your life. Is this your understanding of resilience?*

Following the youth's response, the interviewer will say: It is a very complex word that has many definitions, because doing well might not be the same for everyone. For example, two separate youths may have different ideas of what it means to do well. For the one youth, doing well might mean joining the student's council but for the other it might mean joining a gang. Both of these youths may in fact want the same thing (i.e. status) but they are each doing different things to achieve that goal. Does this make sense to you?

5. *When you think of the time when things were not going well that you just told me about can you tell me some ways in which you still were resilient at that time? (If required interviewer will prompt youth to re-explore some of the things they mentioned in the earlier question, i.e. if a youth said he was fighting with his parents all the time but was making all of his probation appointments he would be reminded and asked how he was able to make those appointments; youth may also be asked what things during the midst of the bad time made him feel better or good about himself.)*
6. *Thinking about the definition I gave you earlier of resilience - that resilience is when you are able to do well even when you are dealing with difficult times in your life - can you tell me about some other times when you have been resilient? (If required, interviewer will prompt youth to discuss what was going on at that time to help them to be resilient and what people (if any) helped them to be resilient.)*

7. For the youths in probation:

If I could ask you, why do you think you did not reoffend? (If required, interviewer may prompt youth to discuss: what was going on in their life that helped them to not reoffend; who helped them to not reoffend and how did they help them to not reoffend).

For the youths in custody:

If I could ask you, why do you think you reoffended? (If required, interviewer may prompt youth to discuss: what was going on in the youth's life that contributed to their reoffending; what people in the youth's life contributed to their reoffending and how did they contribute to the youth's reoffending).

C) Suggestions for Helping Youths to not Reoffend

For youths in probation:

Can you tell me some things that you think might help youths in general to not reoffend? (If required, interviewer will prompt youth to discuss what some of the things are that other people could do (i.e. family, friends, probation officer, counselor, etc.).

For youths in custody:

Can you tell me some things that would help you to not reoffend? (If required, interview will prompt youth to discuss what some of the things are that other people could do (i.e. family, friends, probation officer, counselor, etc.).

Appendix C
Recruitment Flyers

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH

Youths in Custody

I am looking for volunteers to take part in my study on what helps youths to do well and to not reoffend.

To take part in this study you must:

- **Be 16-18 years old,**
- **Be sentenced,**
- **Have served one or more sentences in an Ontario secure custody facility for youths in the past.**

Please note that it is your own choice to take part in this study. If you decide to take part there will not be any special reward. However, you will be able to share your opinions on what helps youths. Your advice may help others working with youths in conflict with the law. If you decide not to take part there will be no consequences.

A maximum of 10 youths from your facility will participate in this study. These youths will be chosen on a first come first serve basis and you must sign up no later than (date).

If you take part in this study, you will first be asked to tell me some basic information about yourself. You would then be asked questions as part of an interview. These questions are about your life since your last release from custody and your opinions about what helps youths to succeed and not reoffend. There would only be 1 interview. The interview would take about 1 to 2 hours.

To thank you for your time, you will receive a pop and a snack.

For more information or to volunteer for this study, please contact:
(Unit Social Worker's Name and contact info)

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board.

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH

Youths in Probation

I am looking for volunteers to take part in my study on what helps youths to do well and to not reoffend.

To take part in this study you must:

- **Be 16-18 years old,**
- **Have served one or more sentences in an Ontario secure custody facility for youths in the past,**
- **Have not been charged with any more offences for the last nine months or more.**

Please note that it is your own choice to take part in this study. If you decide to take part there will not be any special reward. However, you will be able to share your opinions on what helps youths. Your advice may help others working with youths in conflict with the law. If you decide not to take part there will be no consequences.

A maximum of 10 youths from probation will participate in this study. These youths will be chosen on a first come first serve basis and you must sign up no later than (date).

If you take part in this study, you will first be asked to tell me some basic information about yourself. You would then be asked questions as part of an interview. These questions are about your life since your last release from custody and your opinions about what helps youths to succeed and not reoffend. There would only be 1 interview. The interview would take about 1 to 2 hours.

To thank you for your time, you will receive a pop and a snack.

For more information or to volunteer for this study, please contact:
(Probation Officer's Name and contact info)

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board.

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