

**Stony Brook University
The Graduate School**

Doctoral Defense Announcement

Abstract

The Youth Perspective of Juvenile Treatment Courts

By

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The past decade has witnessed a substantial increase in the use of Juvenile Treatment Courts as an alternative to out-of-home placement for youth adjudicated as Juvenile Delinquents and Persons in Need of Supervision. While formal process evaluations have contributed to an understanding of court program structures and processes, few studies have examined the ways in which youth experience critical program components, such as intensive judicial supervision, sanctions, rewards, prosocial development programming and substance abuse treatment.

The primary data source for this qualitative study was audiotaped face-to-face interviews with thirty seven current and former youth participants in various phases of court participation. A semi-structured interview protocol inquiring about experiences in major life domains – home, school, court, peers, and treatment - was used to elucidate youth perspectives. Data triangulation was achieved through court observations, official court record reviews and a “member check” focus group with a second cohort of eight current Juvenile Treatment Court participants.

Using Grounded Theory methodology, youth were categorized into four groups: turning point, reluctant complier, active resister and first timer. Theoretical constructs derived from Stryker’s (1987) Structural Identity theory are used to offer an explanation of the mechanisms underlying increased prosocial identity salience for turning point participants.

The findings suggest that court programs facilitate prosocial identity salience through (1) reflected appraisals, (2) consequence and reward structures, and (3) increased opportunities for interactional and affective commitment to the prosocial identity. Experiencing successes in major life domains while performing in a prosocial identity served to increase youth self-esteem and self-efficacy. The study also served to illuminate the youth perspective of the role of peer networks in supporting abstinence.

The findings have important implications for the development of court program policies and procedures. Juvenile justice policy implications and recommendations for future research are discussed.

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Program: School of Social Welfare

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Place: School of Social Welfare Faculty Lounge