The Integration of Creative and Expressive Arts in a Young Adult Problem-Solving Court

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THE INTEGRATION OF CREATIVE AND EXPRESSIVE ARTS IN A YOUNG ADULT PROBLEM-SOLVING COURT

by

Ricky J. Pope

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Counseling Psychology Western Michigan University August 2018

Doctoral Committee:

Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D., Chair Joseph R. Morris, Ph.D. Jeffrey N. Jones, Ph.D.
Interaction with the criminal justice system exacts substantial costs on human potential, and alternative practices are emerging to address this social issue. This research explores the integration of creative and expressive arts in a young adult problem-solving court. The Young Adult Diversion Court (YADC) was created to help young adults 17-20 years of age complete requirements for probation. Successful completion of the program provides participants the opportunity for the initial criminal charge to be dismissed and made non-public on the criminal record. This qualitative study is informed by interpretive interactionism and narrative inquiry to provide a method to understand the lived experience of participants in the context of a problem-solving court. The purpose of this study is to explore how and why the YADC integrated creative and expressive arts to promote positive outcomes for young adults. Further, this study examines the lived experience of young adult participants and the perceived benefits of participation in creative and expressive arts programming.

While there is an increasing body of literature which has outlined a philosophy of problem-solving courts, there is a lack of studies which detail how the courts influence participants, as many problem-solving court and diversion studies are based on outcome variables that measure desistance of criminal behavior. Less is known about participants’ perspectives of how diversion programs foster an environment where individuals may adopt...
prosocial behavior.

This study illustrates how the YADC employed local community support, used community service, and integrated the creative and expressive arts as an innovative strategy to address the local issue of young adults failing to meet the requirements of probation and ultimately losing their diversion. Multiple perceived benefits resulted from the integration of creative and expressive arts in the YADC. The creative and expressive arts were used as a modality for young adults to rescript their stories, develop their voice, and identify a sense of purpose. Participants felt cared for and supported by staff in the YADC. The use of creative and expressive arts allowed participants to explore their identities, build self-confidence, and learn to regulate their emotions. Further, community service provided participants an opportunity to make positive contributions to the local community, prompting them to reflect on their own lives and integrate societal expectations into future choices.

This study tells the story of an innovative intervention in the criminal justice system, and the young adults share their own stories as they came into contact and were involved in this system. The findings presented in this study confirm and extend previous research through the systematic study of how the YADC integrated and delivered creative and expressive arts programming, and how young adult participants experienced this intervention. Unlike previous studies, this study focused directly on presenting young adult perspectives and contributes to our understanding of how they perceive benefits of program participation. This research suggests the potential of alternative approaches in the criminal justice system that intervene in the lives of young adults and that help them rewrite their own life stories.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Study Topic

Interaction with the criminal justice system often exacts substantial costs on human potential. Influential scholarship has highlighted the effect of mass incarceration in the United States of America, as the U.S. incarcerates almost 25% of the world’s prisoners, yet has only 5% of the world’s population (Alexander, 2012; Prison Policy Initiative, 2016; Shelden, 2010). The American criminal justice system holds more than 2.3 million people in state, federal, and military prisons, juvenile correctional and immigration detention facilities, local and Indian country jails, and civil commitment centers in the U.S. territories (Prison Policy Initiative, 2016). Every year, 636,000 people re-enter society after serving time in prison, meaning that 95% of incarcerated individuals will be released at some point only to return home with significant gaps in education and work history (Hughes & Wilson, 2010; Prison Policy Initiative, 2016).

The idea that mass incarceration of criminals is necessary to preserve order and safety for the public good are ideas that have dominated the U.S. system of criminal justice since the political and philosophical backlash against rehabilitative models of the 1960’s (Lanier & Henry, 2004; National Research Council, 2014). Incarceration in the U.S. is founded on the philosophical ideas of incapacitation and deterrence. Incapacitation is based on the notion that incarcerating offenders by removing them from the public is for the greater good of the citizens. Deterrence is based on the assumption that individuals are rational actors and that given the certainty and severity of a particular punishment for a specific crime, one would make a rational choice not to commit a crime. In theory, incarceration is a collective decision and an option of last resort for individuals deemed too dangerous, or their crimes too serious, to circulate freely in
the community (Lanier & Henry, 2004).

The philosophical ideas of incapacitation and deterrence combined with the war on drugs, tough on crime policies, and privatization of prisons have led to mass incarceration and specifically the disproportionate representation of African Americans in the criminal justice system (Alexander, 2012; Hughes & Wilson, 2010; Shelden, 2010). Moreover, crime control policies have exacerbated the disproportionate imprisonment of African Americans and institutionalized racist beliefs that make being a young Black man synonymous with being criminal (Chambliss, 1994). Therefore, mass incarceration can be thought of as a comprehensive system of institutions and practices that employ racialized social control as a system of racial stigmatization and permanent marginalization (Alexander, 2012). For instance, individuals released from prison are often denied the right to vote, excluded from juries, legally denied the ability to obtain employment, housing, public benefits, similar to African-Americans who were once segregated to second-class citizenship in the era of Jim Crow (Alexander, 2012). The essential argument is that mass incarceration is, metaphorically the new Jim Crow and that all those who care about social justice need to fully commit themselves to dismantling this new racial caste system (Alexander, 2012). The mass incarnation of ethnic and racial groups demonstrates the inequitable distribution of safety, justice, and freedom.

Mass incarceration is a social justice issue. Social justice within the context of counseling psychology can be a vehicle to ensure that opportunities and resources are distributed equitably. Psychologists looking to intervene must locate their intervention work within the social context to challenge policies, cultural practices, and social norms that impinge optimal functioning for underrepresented populations (Goodman, Liang, Helms, Latta, Sparks, & Weintraub, 2004; Fouad, Gerstein, & Toporek, 2006; Pope, 2013). Social justice work for counseling
psychologists involves changing social structures through scholarship and professional action
designed to change societal values, structures, policies, and practices, such that disadvantaged or
marginalized groups gain increased access to tools of self-determination.

To reiterate, get tough, or crime control policies are based on the idea that offenders
rationally choose to commit crimes, and through the enforcement of severe punishments like
mandatory sentencing and three strike laws, individuals are deterred from committing crimes
(Becker, 1963). However, get tough policies have not had the intended outcomes. For example,
individuals with mental health issues may not weigh the cost and benefits of committing crimes
in an expected way, leaving this vulnerable population to navigate the criminal justice system
without getting needed treatment (Wiener, & Georges, 2013). The same can be said for young
adults who often lack the cognitive skills related to decision making and self-regulation as the
brain regions associated with executive functioning continue to develop through adolescence and
control policies are a disastrous failure evidenced by prison overcrowding, strained state budgets,
and loss of human capital. Also, the lack of support and informal social control across multiple
contexts that include school personnel, police officers, and other adults, create environments that
lead young people to internalize criminality at a young age (Rios, 2011).

The failures of the criminal justice system have led to campaigns by local and national
organizations that focus on smart justice or criminal justice reform (American Civil Liberties
Union, 2017; National Association of Counties, 2017). The smart justice paradigm is a socio-
political movement rooted in broad criminal justice reform that aims for a reduction in
incarceration rates, fiscal responsibility, a focus on solving local community issues, provision of
treatment options rather than a sole focus on punishment, and recognition of the unique
contribution of evidenced-based practice to reform efforts. Problem-solving courts have the potential to play a pivotal role in criminal justice reform.

Problem-solving courts were created to interrupt the cycle of incarceration by addressing behavioral and social issues underlying crime. Problem-solving courts operate as social organizations that simultaneously address individual participants and community problems (Miller & Johnson, 2009). Problem-solving courts tackle issues such as domestic violence, alcoholism, and juvenile delinquency. Problem-solving courts are situated to handle broad community issues that include poverty, domestic violence, and substance use. Much of the empirical research regarding problem-solving courts has focused on drug courts which have demonstrated an average reduction in recidivism of 8 to 26 percent compared to control groups receiving traditional probation (Aos, Miller, & Drake, 2007; Huddleston & Marlowe, 2011; Latimer, Morton-Bourgon, & Chrétien, 2006; Shaffer, 2006; Wilson, Mitchell, & MacKenzie, 2006).

While there is an increasing body of literature which has outlined a philosophy of problem-solving courts, there is a lack of studies that detail how the court influences participants (Wiener, & Georges, 2013), as many problem-solving court and diversion studies are based on outcome variables that measure desistance of criminal behavior. Less is known about participants’ perspectives of how diversion programs foster an environment where individuals may adopt prosocial behavior. This study fills these gaps through the systematic study of how the creative and expressive arts were integrated into the Young Adult Diversion Court (YADC), how young adult participants experienced the YADC, and the perceived benefits of the creative and expressive arts.

As a problem-solving court, the YADC was created to reduce young adults’ future
offense-related behavior by targeting the underlying issues of that behavior (Berman, 2009; Boldt, 2009; Mackinem & Higgins, 2009a; Miller & Johnson, 2009; Winick, 2013). The YADC utilized local community support and community service, and also integrated the creative and expressive arts as an innovative strategy to address the local community issue of young adults failing to meet the requirements of probation and ultimately losing their diversion.

The remainder of this chapter provides an introduction to a dissertation exploring how a young adult problem-solving court program integrated creative and expressive arts to promote prosocial outcomes of young adults. The experiences of young adults were studied through a qualitative approach informed by interpretive interactionism and narrative inquiry which provided a method to understand the lives and stories of participants in the context of a problem-solving court program. The purpose of this study is to understand how the creative and expressive arts were integrated into the YADC. The second purpose is to systemically explore the experiences and perceived benefits of participation for young adults enrolled in the YADC.

In general, creative and expressive arts refers to programs, interventions, or therapeutic approaches that utilize art, music, dance, spoken-word, or poetry as a means to promote health and emotional well-being. The literature on creative and expressive arts is interdisciplinary and broad in nature (Bolton, 2004; Connolly Baker & Mazza, 2004; Heimes, 2011; Mazza, 1999; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010; Wright, 2004). Researchers have examined health and psychological benefits of expressive writing and applied creative and expressive arts interventions. The general findings suggest that creative and expressive writing interventions improve health and psychological functioning (Croom, 2015; Crow, 2000; Esterling, L’Abate, Murray, & Pennebaker, 1999; Frattaroli, 2006; Lepore & Smyth, 2002; Long & Davis, 2011; Lowe, 2006; Mazza, 2012; Pennebaker, 2000; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Pennebaker, Hughes, and

Creative and expressive writing interventions have been used with a diverse range of populations. For instance, early studies conducted with college students demonstrated a reduction in physician visits and physical symptoms (Pennebaker & Beal, 1986). Additional research found that the act of writing may lead to more efficient processing of trauma-related experiences, improvement of immune function, and decreased time away from work (Esterling, L’Abate, Murray & Pennebaker, 1999). Further, Richards, Beal, Seagal, and Pennebaker (2000) found that high stress incarcerated population instructed to write 20 minutes a day for three consecutive days about a past trauma had a decrease in the number of illness-related visits at six-week follow-up in comparison to the control group. Moreover, the researchers noted that the actual act of self-discourse through expressive writing is beneficial for psychological health, physical health, and overall functioning (Frattaroli, 2006). Whereas health and psychological benefits contribute to an understanding of positive outcomes based on experimental and quasi-experimental studies, this line of research does not consider the role of social support in understanding the benefits of expressive writing.

Another group of researchers focused on social support and benefits of creative and expressive arts. Research on applied programs describes how creative and expressive arts programs provided a means for identity construction, elevated mood and hope, and a place to reflect on ideas and consider alternative perspectives. Often, creative and expressive arts programs provided youth with a sense of belonging, adult mentors, and an increased sense of self, observed in participant’s actual performance of spoken word poems (Long & Davis, 2011; Weinstein, 2007; Weinstein, 2010; Wiseman, 2011). Often youth were exposed to programs
aimed at developing critical consciousness and civic engagement while using a narrative approach to restructure how the youth viewed themselves (Case & Hunter, 2014). Weinstein (2007) explained, “for researchers interested in the connections between writing and identity development, attention to young people’s poetry, prose, and song lyrics provide invaluable insights into their struggles to situate themselves within varied and sometimes conflicting worlds” (p.46). As a whole, the research on applied programs addressed social support and benefits of creative and expressive arts, yet the literature failed to adequately represent the experience of the participants. Studies typically described the activities of the program but failed to discuss the benefits of the program from the participants’ perspective. Thus, I used interpretive interactionism and narrative inquiry to understand how young adults ascribed meaning to their experience of creative and expressive arts in a young adult problem-solving court program.

**Young Adult Diversion Court (YADC)**

The Young Adult Diversion Court (YADC) was created to identify individual strengths, empower young adults, and break the cycle of recidivism. The creation of a problem-solving court explicitly targeting young adults aged 17 to 20 is innovative and the first of its kind in the United States. The program was provided to young adults in jeopardy of failing probation and losing their diversion. Through completing the program, young adult participants avoided having a criminal conviction on their public record. An original aspect of the program is the integration of creative and expressive arts to address young adult offending.

The YADC specifically targeted individuals between ages 17 and 20 who were on probation for misdemeanors. The rationale for the creation of the YADC is that individuals 17-20 years of age are still developing the cognitive faculties necessary to make adult choices. In many ways, early involvement with the justice system may have lasting consequences for future
employment or even for receiving federal financial aid in college. Individuals who completed the program avoided having a misdemeanor conviction on their record as well as avoiding jail time associated with their charges. The creation of a problem-solving court diversion program that exclusively targets young adults is unique as most problem-solving courts serve adults with a focus on a particular issue such as substance abuse, mental health or prostitution.

**Study Objectives and Framing Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how a young adult problem-solving court diversion program integrated creative and expressive arts to promote positive young adult development. The following framing questions guide this study:

1. How and why were the creative and expressive arts integrated into a problem-solving court to promote prosocial outcomes of young adults?
2. How do young adult participants experience creative and expressive arts programming?
3. What are the perceived benefits of creative and expressive arts for young adults in a problem-solving court program?

**Significance**

Without understanding the underlying mechanisms of recidivism for young adults, the criminal justice system will continue to rely on the sole use of punitive sanctions that impair young adults’ ability to find meaningful work, further their education, and procure adequate housing. Furthermore, overreliance on punitive sanctions places young adults at risk of having more frequent contact with criminals, possibly contributing to the adoption of a deviant identity at a time when identity is particularly malleable. This study contributes to an understanding of how young adults enrolled in a problem-solving court experience creative and expressive arts programming. Also, this study described how the creative and expressive arts were integrated
into a particular problem-solving court diversion program to bring about positive benefits.

Moreover, it describes an empirical account of an alternative way for the criminal justice system to influence prosocial outcomes for young adults. Prosocial outcomes refer to the perceived increase in positive behavior, development of relational skills, and positive identity development. This study may assist court officials and community-based agencies in understanding how creative and expressive arts can promote prosocial outcomes.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this review of the literature is to provide a foundation for an applied study of creative and expressive arts with young adults enrolled in a problem-solving court diversion program. There are three bodies of literature pertinent to understanding how a problem-solving court program integrates creative and expressive arts to promote prosocial behavior in young adults. The first body of literature reviewed is criminal justice literature, which involves a general overview of legislation and theories of juvenile delinquency before discussing meta-analytic and research studies of diversion programs and problem-solving courts. The criminal justice section serves two functions in this review. The first is to orient the less familiar reader with key elements of the justice system and the second is to provide a context to understand how young adults experience creative and expressive arts in a system that traditionally relies on punishment to control behavior.

Following the criminal justice section is literature concerning developmental psychology with a specific focus on identity and social development between the ages of 17 and 20 years. The third body of literature reviewed in this chapter discusses the use of creative and expressive arts. This section is divided into sub-sections that focus on the health and psychological benefits of creative and expressive writing, and interventions and programmatic applications of creative and expressive arts in academic and treatment settings. Overall, these bodies of literature are used as context for understanding how a problem-solving court program utilizes creative and expressive arts to promote youth development.

Overview of the Criminal Justice System

The section concerning the criminal justice system will begin with an overview of
legislation and theories of juvenile delinquency. The rationale for using the literature on juvenile delinquency to shape understanding of the problem-solving court diversion program targeted to young adults is due to the relative lack of literature that specifically examines young adults ages 17-20 in the justice system. In the second section, four meta-analytic studies of juvenile intervention and diversion research are reviewed. The meta-analytic studies explored the broad characteristics of effective intervention programs. One well-designed research study (Wilson & Hoge, 2013) tested the specific idea that a diversion program was more effective at reducing recidivism when compared to traditional probation. One crucial distinction between diversion programs and problem-solving courts is that diversion programs are typically offered to juveniles through probation departments while problem-solving court programs are judge-driven and may work with a probation department and community-based agencies. Following the section on meta-analytic studies of intervention and diversion research is the third sub-section that reviewed the literature on the historical background of problem-solving courts, the conceptual idea of therapeutic jurisprudence, and empirical studies of drug treatment and problem-solving courts. Note, that drug courts are a subset of problem-solving courts and represent the most researched problem-solving courts and therefore provide a basis to understand how problem-solving courts impact the participants they serve. The first section will examine legislation and theories of juvenile delinquency, the second section will review meta-analytic studies of intervention and other diversion research, and the third section will review the literature on problem-solving courts.

**Legislation and Theories of Juvenile Delinquency**

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 was implemented to deinstitutionalize youth by removing them from the adult criminal process and encouraging the
development of community-based alternatives. One application of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act is diversion programs that attempt to draw young adults away from the juvenile justice system. Diversion is a process where an individual is moved from formal legal processing into specialized community-based programming to address specific needs (DeMatteo, LaDuke, Locklair, & Heilburn, 2013). Otherwise, they are likely to be labeled and stigmatized by the court process for behavioral issues that may be addressed more efficiently in other areas (Shelden, 2008). Thus, diversion represents an attempt to both prevent youth from becoming entangled in the criminal system and also decrease adoption of a criminal identity.

Two criminal justice theories support the use of diversion. The first is labeling theory in which the enforcement of formal sanctions, actually determines who is deviant, and “tagged” with the deviant label. From this perceptive, societal structures create deviance by labeling acts as deviant. Young adults go on to adopt the roles that are expected of them; thus, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy (Becker, 1963). The second is differential association theory; the premise here is that young adults learn to commit crimes within social networks (Sutherland, 1974). Diverting young adults from jail decreases their opportunity for contact with entrenched criminal populations. In essence, the formal processing of youth in the justice system may create delinquency, whereas ignoring the behavior altogether or utilizing decriminalized approaches would allow the behavior to be normalized and dealt with through informal community-based sanctions (Shelden, 2008). Both labeling theory and differential association theory provide a theoretical basis to support the goal of decreasing the contact of youth with the criminal justice system. The main idea is that youth who are labeled deviant and have increased contact with criminal offenders will likely adopt nonconforming and role-violating behaviors. Therefore, these theories provide a conceptual framework for diversion programs and interventions. The
Selected Research on Diversion Programs and Practices

This section reviews four meta-analytic studies that explored the broad characteristics of effective intervention programs, and one research study (Wilson & Hoge, 2013) that tested the idea that a diversion program is more effective at reducing recidivism when compared to traditional probation.

Researchers investigated characteristics of effective intervention and diversion programs. Not all diversion programs operate the same way. Some programs used therapeutic approaches (e.g., counseling, skill-building and service provision) instead of control philosophies (e.g., surveillance, deterrence, and discipline); while other programs utilized a combination of therapeutic and control approaches. Lipsey (2009) conducted a meta-analysis based on 548 independent studies with the focus on identifying general factors associated with effective intervention and diversion programs and identifying the differential effectiveness of various treatment modalities. The sample consisted of participants with an average age of 15.5, who were 78% male, and coded as 43% mixed, 34% Anglo, and 23% minority. The number of prior offenses ranged from 2-8 and determined the juveniles’ risk level yielding an average of 5.4. The findings indicated that three factors are related to program effectiveness: therapeutic intervention philosophy, serving high-risk offenders, and the quality of program implementation. Therapeutic intervention philosophy refers to interventions that employ therapeutic approaches (e.g., counseling, skill-building and service provision) instead of control philosophies. Control philosophies were categorized as surveillance, deterrence, and discipline. Surveillance refers to
interventions based on the idea that closer monitoring of the juvenile will inhibit reoffending. Deterrence interventions attempt to deter the youth from reoffending by dramatizing the negative consequences of law-breaking behavior. The last intervention type falling under control philosophies is discipline. Programs in the discipline category operated on the belief that youth must learn discipline to succeed in life. Approaches that emphasized control philosophies showed notably smaller recidivism effects than the other approaches.

This meta-analysis (Lipsey, 2009) also found a relationship between risk level, which refers to the number of prior offenses, and recidivism measured as new charges following program completion. Higher risk juveniles (individuals with prior offenses) demonstrated more significant reductions in recidivism as compared to lower risk individuals enrolled on their first charge or individuals with violent charges. Note, that individuals with violent charges such as assault are considered less likely to benefit from diversion programs due to their propensity for future offending.

Lipsey (2009) also explained that counseling interventions were less useful for incarcerated juveniles than individuals facing community-based sanctions. It is possible that the effectiveness of counseling interventions for individuals involved in the justice system is related to their opportunity to apply gains occurring in treatment to their daily lives as compared to incarcerated juveniles who can apply information learned in treatment to abstract or hypothetical situations. An additional characteristic discussed by Lipsey (2009) was skill-building interventions, which were significantly more effective in a diversion setting than when offered through probation/parole or in custody. Overall, results indicated that interventions that used therapeutic philosophies were more effective at reducing recidivism than interventions that relied on the sole use of control strategies and deterrence (Lipsey, 2009).
Unlike the previous study, Schwalbe, Gearing, MacKenzie, Brewer, and Ibrahim (2012) conducted a meta-analysis that focused exclusively on 28 experimental and quasi-experimental studies of diversion programs published between 1980 and 2011. The purpose of their study was to examine the efficacy of juvenile diversion programs and to examine the moderating effect of program type and implementation quality. Program type referred to the categorization of interventions. The interventions used in the reviewed studies were coded into one of five categories: case management, individual treatment provided by the program, family treatment, youth court, or restorative justice. Implementation quality was grouped into three categories: manual, researcher involvement, and fidelity monitoring. Manual referred to the presence of a manual or written protocol outlining programmatic philosophy or principles. Researcher involvement meant that there was a researcher who implemented the program and was heavily involved in the development, supervision, and measurement of the program. Fidelity referred to studies that reported steps for monitoring fidelity through direct observation.

Fourteen of the reviewed studies employed random assignment (42.4%) with the remainder utilizing a quasi-experimental design (57.6%). Examination of all 28 studies yielded 57 experimental comparisons of 19,301 youths in 33 independent samples. The average age of study samples ranged from 12.6 to 15.9 years of age with a mean age across studies of 1. The samples were predominantly male (88%) and White (91.5%). Schwalbe and associates (2012) found that the effect of diversion programs on recidivism was non-significant across all studies. They indicate one reason for these findings is the substantial heterogeneity of diversion program research; this limited their ability to draw conclusions about program type. Their findings suggested that future programs employing experimental and quasi-experimental designs assess the efficacy of diversion programs and strengthen program design and implementation protocols.
Further, Schwalbe and associates (2012) suggested future research match interventions to clients based on population and disorder characteristics.

In light of their findings that formal diversion programs prevent recidivism no better than simple warn-and-release models or formal court processing, one could conclude that no intervention is the best intervention (Schwalbe et al., 2012). However, the authors do not advance this point; instead, they call for increased rigor in study design and implementation. Furthermore, the authors highlight literature on risk level for reoffending (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990; Andrews & Dowden, 2006) which suggests that it is best to focus interventions on high-risk youth and to leave low-risk youth alone altogether or provide different services. One rationale for accounting for an individual’s risk level is to alleviate sustained contact with the criminal justice system, which may lead to future crimes. Furthermore, assessment of risk level allows targeting interventions to individuals most likely to benefit from services.

Wilson and Hoge (2012) build on the idea of targeting interventions to the risk level of the offender. Wilson and Hoge (2012) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the recidivism rate of youth referred to diversion compared to youth processed by the traditional justice system. They reviewed 45 studies, resulting in the examination of 73 diversion programs. Among these 73 diversion programs, the average age of the diversion samples ranged from 12-18 with an average age of 14.72. Most of the diversion samples were predominantly male (54, 74%), and approximately a third were predominantly European American (26, 37%). The findings were that diversion of youth offenders did result in lower recidivism rates than traditional processing. Diversion programs were more efficient than the traditional justice system at addressing recidivism. Additionally, diversion programs targeting medium to high-risk youth were more
effective than programs that targeted low-risk youth. In conclusion, Wilson and Hoge (2012) recommend that future studies consider the effect of risk level on diversion effectiveness. They also highlight the need to expand the range of outcome variables to include additional components such as attitudes and values, school performance, and mental health functioning (Wilson & Hoge, 2012).

Sander, Patall, Amoscato, Fisher, and Funk (2012) added to the discourse by exploring juvenile delinquency interventions in relation to academic outcomes. Their rationale is the widely referenced concept of the school-to-prison pipeline. The purpose of their meta-analysis was to explore potential factors of interventions that may influence positive education outcomes on youthful offenders. Sander et al. (2012) examined 15 studies including 20 different samples across a variety of settings including school, community, and juvenile justice settings. The authors explained that literature examining academic achievement outcomes is an under-investigated area. The sample consisted of individuals age 10 through 18; race and ethnicity were not reported. The overall findings suggest that intervention and diversion programs offered to juvenile delinquents are generally ineffective at improving academic outcomes. However, the results are not precise due to the limited use of controlled and matched research designs as well as varied reporting of academic outcomes across the studies included in the meta-analysis. When the authors conducted a moderator analysis using randomized and control group designs with matched samples, they found that intervention and diversion programs offered to juvenile delinquents may have a positive effect on school attendance for older youth ages (15-18). These findings are tentative at best, but they provide limited support for focusing on the developmental assets of young adults. Individuals in the upper age may place more significance on completing school, applying for their GED, and bringing closure to school interruptions.
In a follow-up study to their (Wilson & Hoge, 2012) meta-analysis, which examined the recidivism rate of youth referred to diversion compared to youth processed by the traditional justice system, Wilson and Hoge (2013) investigated the effectiveness of the Ottawa Community Youth Diversion Program (OCYPD) to reduce recidivism compared to a traditional probation. Participants were 378 youth, 170 diverted to the OCYPD intervention and 208 sentenced to probation. Both the diversion sample (75%) and the probation sample (70%) were predominantly male, the average age was 15, and the average risk level was medium. Characteristics of race and ethnicity were not provided.

Wilson and Hoge (2013) ran a Cox Survival Analysis which focused on groups of individuals for whom there was a defined outcome often called a failure (Cox & Oakes, 1984). In Wilson and Hoge’s (2013) study, reconviction for a general offense was the failure. The Cox failure Analysis allows for analysis of a distribution of failure times and a comparison of failure times for two groups (Cox & Oakes, 1984). In Wilson and Hoge’s (2013) study, the two groups were diverted youth and youth on probation. Results of the Cox Survival analysis showed a statistically significant difference between the diverted youth and those on probation; youth on probation were two times more likely to be reconvicted for a general offense each month than the diverted youth who completed the program. Wilson and Hoge (2013) provided further support for diversion programs regarding risk level; intervention programs targeting medium to high-risk youth achieved more significant reductions in recidivism than programs targeting low-risk youth. These findings provide support for labeling theory, differential association theory, and a growing perspective which suggests contact with criminal justice system is associated with future criminal behavior (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990; Andrews & Dowden, 2006; Becker, 1963; Shelden, 2008; Sutherland, 1974; Wilson & Hoge, 2012; Wilson
Further, these findings provide preliminary support for providing pre-charge diversion to low-risk offenders, meaning that low-risk youth should not be formally processed in the criminal justice system; instead, they should be given a warning and sent on their way. Also, medium to high-risk youth are most likely to benefit from interventions. The practical implications of the study are to reduce the amount of contact on the part of the justice system with low-risk offenders and focus efforts on risk assessment to identify medium to high-risk youth who are likely to complete the program.

Overall, empirical studies of diversion programs have produced mixed results regarding the general effectiveness of diversion programs for juveniles. In one example, specific treatment modalities, programs using therapeutic intervention philosophy as opposed to control philosophies were effective (Lipsey, 2009). Other factors influencing effectiveness were program design and implementation as well as programs that enrolled medium to high-risk offenders as opposed to individuals who have only received their first charge. When looking exclusively at experimental and quasi-experimental studies, Schwalbe et al., (2012) found that formal diversion programs prevented recidivism no better than simple warn-and-release models or formal court processing; however, their meta-analytic study did not account for risk level. When accounting for risk level, Wilson and Hoge (2012) found that diversion programs were effective at reducing future offending for medium to high-risk youth. Also, a more significant reduction in recidivism was found for participants that completed the program counter to individuals who dropped out of the program before completion (Wilson & Hoge, 2013). Additionally, the literature reviewed in this section also highlighted a general need to expand the range of outcome variables beyond a measure of recidivism to account for attitudes and values, school performance, and mental health functioning. The studies that have examined juvenile delinquency interventions related to
academic outcomes are limited with minimal support for interventions that may increase school attendance. Across all of the meta-analytic studies, the samples were predominantly White male. Therefore, the literature is unclear on how diversion programs may function for female, ethnic, and racial groups.

The body of literature reviewed in this section builds a foundation for working with young adult populations (17-20) but does not provide information on how a diversion program would be offered to individuals in this age range or for diverse ethnic and racial groups. Research reviewed in this section also highlighted a need to assess individual’s risk-level and appropriateness for participation in the program as medium to high-risk individuals were found more likely to benefit. Similarly, problem-solving courts attempt to direct individuals away from jail through consideration of the specific circumstances facing individuals in the adult population.

**Problem-Solving Courts and Therapeutic Jurisprudence**

This section provides a general overview of literature about problem-solving courts and therapeutic jurisprudence. Following discussion of the historical background of problem-solving courts as well as the conceptual idea of therapeutic jurisprudence are empirical studies of drug treatment and problem-solving courts. The studies of drug courts represent the most substantial research on problem-solving courts. In many ways, the drug court movement provided the groundwork for the development of additional problem-solving courts. Occurring simultaneously, but not necessarily dependent on the drug court movement, was the idea of therapeutic jurisprudence, which is an interdisciplin ary study of how the application of law affects physical and psychological well-being (Winick, 2003). Although problem-solving courts share principles of therapeutic jurisprudence, the creation of problem-solving courts often
emanated from a local concern about a problematic community issue (e.g., substance use, prostitution, or youth violence), while therapeutic jurisprudence represents an abstract approach to criminal justice (Mackinem & Higgins, 2009a). In a sense, development of problem-solving courts was a-theoretical and often based on practical needs of a particular community as well as needs deemed essential by the judge.

This section reviews the literature on problem-solving courts and therapeutic jurisprudence and is divided into subsections. The first subsection will briefly review the history of drug courts. The second subsection will describe the establishment of problem-solving courts. The third subsection will consider the concept of therapeutic jurisprudence as it pertains to problem-solving courts. The fourth subsection will review studies of drug treatment courts.

**Drug Courts: The First Problem-Solving Courts**

Drug courts were created to address behavioral and social issues underlying crime. The use of innovative court practice to address determinates of recidivism began in 1989 with the establishment of the first drug court in Dade County (Miami), Florida (Dorf, & Fagan, 2003; Goldkamp, 2000; Hora, William, & Rosenthal, 1999). The rationale for the creation of drug courts was the traditional adversarial system of justice was designed to resolve legal disputes and was ineffective at addressing alcohol and drug abuse. In theory, traditional court practice would require an offender to deny a substance abuse to avoid self-incrimination whereas a drug court would provide an individual who admits to substance use an incentive for undergoing treatment. Further, assessing for alcohol and substance abuse is not a primary function of the traditional court, as the traditional court cannot levy rewards or consequences for individuals choosing to undergo treatment. In fact, the nature of the traditional court system reinforces rather than prevents substance use (National Association of Drug Court Professionals, 1997). One notable
finding explained that if all of the estimated 1.5 million addicted defendants in the criminal justice system were linked to treatment instead of incarceration, American taxpayers would save more than $46 billion dollars; however, only 3% of individuals arrested with an addiction have cases adjudicated in drug court (Berman, 2009).

The National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP, 1997) was formed to address the ineffective processing of substance users in the court system. The NADCP provides critical benchmarks and best practices for implementing and maintaining drug courts which include ten critical components: (a) integrate treatment services with justice system case processing; (b) use a non-adversarial approach; (c) identify participants early; (d) provide access to treatment and rehabilitation services; (e) monitor substance use with drug testing; (f) employ a coordinated strategy to govern compliance; (g) ongoing and personal judicial interaction; (h) evaluate and measure program goals to gauge effectiveness; (i) continued interdisciplinary education; (j) and forge partnerships among drug courts, public agencies, and community-based organizations. Definitions from The Bureau of Justice Assistance (2013) explain that drug courts are specialized court docket programs that target criminal defendants and offenders, juvenile offenders, and parents with pending child welfare cases who have alcohol and other drug dependency problems. The broad goal of drug courts is to reduce recidivism and substance use while increasing the likelihood of rehabilitation through intentional court practice and supervised treatment.

From Drug Courts to Problem-Solving Courts

The drug court model outlined above has grown into a problem-solving court model established to address a wide variety of social problems, often involving individuals who need social, mental health, or substance abuse treatment services (American Bar Association, 2000).
Problem-solving courts are social organizations that simultaneously address individual participants and community problems (Miller & Johnson, 2009). Casey and Rottman (2005) explained that problem-solving courts were “developed in response to frustration by both the court system and the public to the large numbers of cases that seemed to be disposed repeatedly but not resolved” (p. 35). These courts reflect a potential avenue to address intersecting psychosocial and legal issues. For instance, problem-solving courts tackle issues such as domestic violence, alcoholism, and juvenile delinquency: “Problem-solving courts may offer the promise of a more meaningful resolution of court cases involving individuals with psychosocial problems as well as legal issues” (Casey & Rottman, 2005, p. 35).

There are differences between various problem-solving courts based on local jurisdiction and targeted populations; yet, there are underlying principles universal to problem-solving courts. Problem-solving courts typically integrate treatment services, judicial monitoring, and case management. Integration of treatment and court sanctions is accomplished through ongoing judicial intervention, close monitoring and immediate response to monitored behavior, multidisciplinary involvement, and collaboration with community-based and government organizations (American Bar Association, 2000).

Another common practice is the use of a team-based approach, flexible decision-making, and a focus on practical outcomes. Often, problem-solving courts utilize psychosocial assessments to develop individualized treatment programs based on the participant’s needs, skills, and resources available in a particular community. Although participants enrolled in problem-solving courts may gain access to individually tailored community services, they are also held accountable for adhering to program criteria and may receive graduated sanctions or rewards, dependent on their progress through the program (Berman, 2009; Boldt, 2009; Miller &
Johnson, 2009). The overall purpose of a problem-solving court is to reduce repeated criminal acts through treatment of underlying psychosocial factors driving maladaptive behavior, which may also increase public safety for all individuals living in a community. Most programs depend on an active judge that aims to facilitate long-term behavioral and attitudinal change.

In problem-solving courts, the judge plays a central role and must balance treatment and punishment for individuals. This balancing act has raised concern among some scholars. Nolan (2003) questioned if problem-solving courts overstep legal boundaries, noting the distinction between treatment and punishment. Specifically, Nolan (2003) questioned if participation in the problem-solving court is coercive, and possibly a violation of an individual’s constitutional rights as participants are required to plead guilty before enrolling in a program. Overall, Nolan is concerned with protecting due process and traditional application of justice where each person receives a trial, and the judge’s role is appropriately constrained. Boldt (2009) asserts that interweaving justice and treatment are potentially problematic as the threat of legally sanctioned punishment is used to encourage treatment. Another potential issue is the increased surveillance that comes along with participation in a problem-solving court. For instance, individuals who fail to complete the court’s requirements may receive jail time, end up serving their full sentence, and may even be discharged from the problem-solving court. Additional concerns are the allocation of resources only after an individual is in the justice system as opposed to providing adequate access to treatment and resources before contact with the justice system. Finally, there is concern regarding the potential overuse of punishment as opposed to treatment or the use of intensive treatment when not necessary (Boldt, 2009).

The concerns regarding treatment and punishment are important; however, Berman (2004) explained that the reality of everyday practice in courts depends on cooperation between
judges, prosecutors, and attorneys. Berman (2004) suggested that if defense attorneys wanted to shut down problem-solving courts, they could. Berman (2004) then detailed the standard court practice, which often involves plea-bargaining (case resolved through deals pre-trial) and use of intermediate sanctions where offenders receive probation instead of going to jail. In many ways, probation, diversion, and problem-solving courts provide community-based alternatives to jail. Taken together, Nolan (2003), Berman (2004), and Boldt (2009) raise significant concerns about the legal ramifications of problem-solving courts. Miller and Johnson (2009) described the balancing act of treatment and punishment as a dialectical relationship between support and control. Miller and Johnson suggest that tension is a natural part of problem-solving court programs and requires that all social actors involved in the program take time to reflect on both their autonomy and the ways that rules and regulations constrain them.

Problem-solving court programs provide three levels of support, which operate within a dialectical relationship of support and control (Miller & Johnson, 2009). The first level of support is emotional support, which consists of program actors and program participants celebrating victories, providing encouragement during times of struggle, and helping to bolster participant’s self-confidence. Next is informational support, which is provided to connect participants with resources. Often, the information is delivered in a psycho-educational format—a handout that might have instructions for enrolling in health care, or even a guest speaker. The third kind of support is tangible support, which includes helping participants find jobs, obtain housing, and procure resources such as access to healthcare.

**Therapeutic Jurisprudence**

Another difference between traditional courts and problem-solving courts is that traditional courts focus on a narrow dispute while problem-solving courts attempt to understand
and address the underlying problem, dealing with the problem in a manner that will reduce future court involvement (Winick, 2013). The application of therapeutic jurisprudence best reflects the difference between traditional adjudication and problem-solving approaches. Therapeutic jurisprudence is guided by principles that aim to promote the positive and minimize the negative impact of law while still maintaining due process and other notions of justice (Winick, 1997). Therapeutic jurisprudence is an interdisciplinary approach to understand how the application of law affects physical and psychological well-being (Winick, 2003).

Therapeutic jurisprudence provides an avenue for social science to contribute to the practice of law. Wexler (2000) explains that therapeutic jurisprudence seeks to identify the therapeutic and anti-therapeutic consequences of the law. For instance, the use of therapeutic jurisprudence as a discursive tool makes way for a multidisciplinary critique of the law’s impact on everyday life. However, not all scholars agree with the judge’s role to adjudicate therapeutically. Nolan (2002) questions if judges should depart from the common law tradition of the U.S court system, which suggests they remain detached and objective. In fact, this line of scholarship questions if it is possible to apply therapeutic jurisprudence without circumventing defining legal principles of rights and justice (Nolan, 2003). These are significant concerns for judges and scholars to grapple with and consider.

The above subsections described the history of drug courts, the creation of problem-solving courts, and development of therapeutic jurisprudence theory. In summary, problem-solving courts were created to address underlying psychosocial effects of crime. Some scholars have concerns about judges abandoning the traditional court practice to employ problem-solving applications of justice (Boldt, 2009; Nolan, 2002; Nolan, 2003). However, the traditional approaches to criminal justice have not been effective at alleviating complex problems
underlying crime. Further, problem-solving courts are unique in the sense that they are often a response to local community issues (Berman, 2009; Boldt, 2009; Miller & Johnson, 2009) with the goal of reducing repeated criminal acts through treatment of underlying psychosocial factors. The theory of therapeutic jurisprudence is an additional tool to examine how legal decisions affect physical and psychological well-being (Wexler, 2002; Winick, 1997; Winick, 2003; Winick, 2013; Winick & Wexler, 2001). Problem-solving courts are innovative in the attempt to reduce crime and represent an opportunity to provide treatment and services instead of increased incarceration. To understand how effective problem-solving courts have been in efforts to reduce recidivism, the next sub-section examines randomized controlled studies and meta-analytic studies of drug courts and problem-solving courts. As noted above, much of the early literature on problem-solving courts was conducted on drug courts; thus, the studies reviewed in the next section are predominantly focused on drug courts.

**Empirical Studies of Drug Treatment and Problem-Solving Courts**

Gottfredson and Exum (2002) conducted a randomized study to evaluate the Baltimore City Drug Treatment Court (BCDTC), a program established in 1994 to provide an alternative to incarceration for drug-involved, nonviolent offenders. The purpose of the study was to examine outcomes across a 3-year follow-up period and to collect outcomes other than re-arrest. One additional focus of the study was understanding what mechanisms affect treatment outcomes. Two hundred and thirty-five participants were randomly assigned to either drug treatment court \((n = 139)\) or control group \((n = 96)\). To be considered for the drug court program or control group, participants had to be 18 years of age, reside in Baltimore city, and not have had any past or current convictions for violent offenses. The study participants were all adults, with an average age of 35. Approximately 89% of the sample was African American, and 74% were
male.

Data were collected on prior offense history, the offense that led to inclusion in the study, recidivism through 12 months following entry into the program, and intake measures that examined substance use, education, and employment. At the time of randomization into the study, the drug court subjects averaged 12 prior arrests, while control subjects averaged 11 prior arrests. Individuals in the program were more likely than controls to participate in drug testing and treatment and to attend status hearings. Results indicated that BCDTC study participants were 16 percent less likely than participants in the control group to be rearrested during the year following assignment into the program. An interesting finding was participants were less likely to be rearrested for violent offenses compared to participants in the control group. In fact, individuals in the control group were arrested nearly four times more than treatment study participants for violent offenses. This finding may suggest that drug treatment courts have additional effects on behavior besides the stated goal of decreasing substance abuse.

In their 2-year follow-up study, Gottfredson, Najaka, and Kearley (2003) reported that BCDTC is reducing crime in a population of drug-addicted offenders. In fact, BCDTC subjects who participated in treatment were significantly less likely to recidivate than were both untreated drug court subjects and control subjects assigned to the treatment as usual control group. At the two-year follow-up, the number of new arrests was 30% lower for the treatment than for the control subjects as 66.2% of the drug court subjects and 81.3% of the control subjects were arrested for a new offense (Gottfredson, Najaka, & Kearley, 2003; Gottfredson, Najaka, Kearley, & Rocha, 2005). At the three-year follow-up period, more than three-fourths of the participants in the drug treatment condition were rearrested, regardless of participation in the drug treatment court (Gottfredson, Najaka, Kearley, & Rocha, 2005). Although participants in the drug
treatment condition were less likely than the control condition to be arrested for most types of offenses, the differences were statistically significant only for drug offenses.

The above findings point to the need to understand what components of the program were most impactful. To analyze the effects on recidivism by the level of participation in various components of the BCDTC, Gottfredson et al. (2005) used an instrumental variables approach. Specifically, they used two-stage least squares (2SLS) approach lending further support to causal interpretations of the effects of participation in program components. In a sense, they created a composite participation variable that is the sum of the three categorical participation variables (drug testing, status hearings, and certified drug treatment). Instrumental variables analysis confirmed that a higher level of participation in the three components produced a reduction in the number of arrests. Gottfredson and associates (2005) suggested that if the BCDTC found ways to induce greater participation in the main components of the program they would obtain increased favorable outcomes for reducing recidivism.

Gottfredson, Kearley, Najaka, and Rocha (2007) build on prior work from the BCDTC. They use a structural equation model to examine program elements related to reductions in drug use and crime among Drug Treatment Courts (DTC) participants. The purpose of their study was to understand if there are specific components of drug treatment court that influence reductions in drug use and crime, and the hypothesized mediating effects of procedural justice and social control on outcomes. Gottfredson et al. (2007) explain, “individuals accept or reject the decisions made by legal authorities on the basis of their evaluations of the fairness of the procedures used” (p. 9). Despite involvement in the court system, individuals expected to be treated with dignity. In their study, social control variables referred to social bonds or attachments with others. For instance, in BCDTC social control was “building social bonds with
judges, treatment providers, aftercare sponsors, and other former drug users who have decided to go straight” (Gottfredson et al., 2007, p. 9). They found that participation in the drug treatment court increases the number of judicial hearings attended, which directly reduced the variety of drugs used. Further, participation in the drug court also reduced the variety of crimes committed by increasing perceptions of procedural justice. Also, they found that participation in the drug treatment court increases self-reports of social controls both directly and indirectly by increasing the duration of drug treatment. In summary, they found that perceptions of procedural justice reduced crime variety, and social controls reduced multiple-drug use frequency.

Initial studies suggested that individuals enrolled in drug court treatment saw a significant decrease in recidivism at 1-year follow up (Gottfredson & Exum, 2002). However, much of this literature did not account for the exact mechanisms that make drug courts effective. Subsequent studies suggested increased participation in the main components of the program might increase favorable outcomes for reducing recidivism (Gottfredson et al., 2005). Further, self-report data suggested that if individuals reported being treated with respect and felt connected to the program, they were likely to reduce offense behavior and multiple-drug use frequency.

Wilson, Mitchell, and MacKenzie (2006) explained that evaluations of drug treatment courts have led to mixed results. They conducted a meta-analysis to explore if drug courts reduce future criminal offending. The authors identified 50 studies representing 55 evaluations, which included both experimental and quasi-experimental comparison group designs. Eighty percent of the studies reviewed had samples that were mostly male and adult. Race and ethnicity were not reported. Of the experimental and quasi-experimental studies used in the meta-analyses, only five used random assignment and about half of the quasi-experimental studies failed to control for differences between drug court and comparison participants. These limitations led the authors
to provide tentative conclusions. They suggest that drug offenders participating in a drug court are less likely to re-offend than similar offenders sentenced to traditional correctional options, such as probation (Wilson, Mitchell, & MacKenzie, 2006). Specifically, when looking across all reviewed studies, they found a 26% reduction in overall offending. However, when looking only at the randomized controlled studies, the observed reduction was smaller at 14%.

Latimer, Morton-Bourgon, and Chrétien (2006) also conducted a meta-analysis to determine if drug treatment courts reduce recidivism compared to traditional justice system responses. The authors reviewed 185 individual studies; only 54 studies met the inclusion criteria. The average age of participants was 28.4. They did not provide descriptive information for race and ethnicity. The results indicated that drug treatment courts reduced the recidivism rates of participants by 14% compared to offenders within the control/comparison groups.

Shaffer’s (2006) meta-analysis builds on previous drug treatment literature by examining if differences in drug court effectiveness may be attributable to differences between the drug courts themselves. A primary aim of the study was to identify characteristics associated with the most efficient drug courts. Of the reviewed studies, 60 met the inclusion criteria leading to the identification of 76 distinct drug courts and 6 aggregated drug court programs. Program characteristics that were associated with successful outcomes included programs that excluded individuals who were violent and or non-compliant. Additional characteristics of successful programs included having control over or the ability to choose the treatment provider, requirement of regular attendance at team meetings, and the ability to obtain sustainable funding. Overall, Shaffer (2006) found that both adult and juvenile drug courts were effective; however, it appears that adult drug courts may be better at reducing recidivism than juvenile drug courts. For instance, adult drug courts, on average, reduce recidivism 10 percent while juvenile drug
courts have an average reduction of 5 percent (Shaffer, 2006). There is no apparent reason for the difference in the findings between juvenile and adult drug courts as there has not been enough evaluation of juvenile drug courts. The findings of this study also point to a need to understand individuals through a developmental perspective as discrepant outcomes between adult and juvenile drug courts are poorly understood.

Aos, Miller, and Drake (2007) reviewed 40 years of program evaluations to examine whether adult corrections programs, juvenile corrections programs, or prevention programs lowered crime rates. They reviewed 571 evaluations of individual programs, based on data gathered from 57 studies. The criterion for a study to be included in the systematic review was the evaluation had a treatment-as-usual comparison group that was matched to a program group. Findings were that on average adult drug courts could be expected to reduce recidivism rates by 8 percent. The findings point to favorable outcomes and a reduction in recidivism rates. Of the studies reviewed, only one specifically focused on youth problem-solving courts.

Madell, Thom, and McKenna (2013) conducted a systematic review of empirical studies of problem-solving youth courts. In the 24 studies reviewed, they found 20 focused on juveniles, and only 3 focused on young adults; however, these 3 studies where not conducted in the U.S. Only one study focused on young adults in the United States. The authors suggest that the problem-solving court research specifically focused on young adults or youth is in early stages of development. Further, they suggest youth problem-solving court literature suffers from methodological problems making it difficult to find a consistent pattern of results. They note three issues with this body of literature, the first being inappropriate comparison groups often led to unreliable findings. Secondly, many of the participants were not tracked long-term to assess the effects of youth problem-solving courts. Finally, the outcomes were mixed, with some
showing positive effects of court processes and others showing few substantial benefits. The article concludes by suggesting that a therapeutic jurisprudence evaluation model could be applied to future youth problem-solving court research to assist in understanding youth problem-solving court processes and outcomes.

Taken together, the review of meta-analytic studies suggests that on average drug courts reduced recidivism by 8 to 26 percentage points when compared to traditional controls (Aos, Miller, & Drake, 2007; Huddleston & Marlowe, 2011; Latimer, Morton-Bourgon, & Chrétien, 2006; Shaffer, 2006; Wilson, Mitchell, & MacKenzie, 2006). Note, that the variation in recidivism outcomes is often related to the quality of the studies with random controlled studies showing a lower percentage of recidivism outcomes. Many of the limitations in the current state of the literature regarding problem-solving courts are related to the lack of uniformity for outcome measures and standard reporting of characteristics. Thus, researchers explained that many of the findings have led to mixed results and are tentative (Wilson, Mitchell, & MacKenzie, 2006). Secondly, the literature on problem-solving courts is unbalanced, as the majority of studies were conducted on participants attending drug treatment courts; however, drug court studies represent the most rigorous research available to understand problem-solving courts. Finally, the literature could benefit from studies which examine individuals between the ages of 17 and 20 as Shaffer (2006) found a discrepancy in recidivism outcomes when comparing juveniles and adults. However, there is not a clear indication of the difference in the findings between juvenile and adult drug courts. The findings of this study also point to a need to understand individuals from a developmental perspective.

To recap, the body of literature concerned with problem-solving courts could benefit from studies that explore participant experience in the problem-solving court, as much of the
literature accounts for the experiences of the judge and administrative staff of the court. Specific to individuals, problem-solving court literature would likely benefit from understanding how juveniles, young adults, and adults differ and what these differences mean for the application of therapeutic jurisprudence and problem-solving courts. Therefore, the next section reviews the developmental literature to provide a context for understanding individuals age 17-20 and the developmental processes that characterize this age group.

**Young Adult Development**

This review has focused on the legal and organizational applications of problem-solving courts and diversion programs to redress criminal behavior of young adults. I now shift focus to discuss young adult development within the context of lifespan theory and social-emotional development. Current thinking in psychology favors developmental contextualism, drawing attention to the interaction between individual and context (Lerner, 1991, 1995). Another orienting concept is an ecological perspective, which suggests human development occurs through multiple interconnected environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1992). Taken to together, these models orient the study of young adult development to focus on the individual and the social context in which development occurs. While considering foundational developmental theories it is crucial to explicitly consider the intersections of race, gender, and social class as it relates to involvement in the justice system and the normative development of young adults.

Some scholars have called for special legal provisions in the United States that would grant individuals aged 18-24 a young adult offender status instead of a trial in the adult court (Farrington, Loeber, & Howell, 2012). Advocates calling for developmental consideration often cite cognitive neuroscience research which explains changes in the prefrontal cortex, a brain
region associated with executive function continue into adolescence and early adulthood (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006). Young adult brains are not fully developed, and the cognitive skills related to decision making and self-regulation are compromised. This limitation may explain why young adults experience impairment in resisting peer influence, controlling impulses, and regulating emotions (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Farrington, Loeber, & Howell, 2012). Also, since self-regulation, decision-making, and brain functioning are not fully developed, young adulthood represents a crucial period for intervention, as developmental and social trajectories are malleable (Gibson, & Krohn, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of the young adult development section is to highlight selected developmental theories and situate the behavior of young adults within a developmental frame.

The reader should note that the term young adult is used instead of the term emerging adult as the term emerging adult may not capture the experiences of individuals from diverse racial and ethnic groups. It is also important to note in many states an individual can be convicted of an adult crime if they are over the ages of 17 or 18. For this dissertation, individuals between the ages of 17 and 20 are conceptualized as young adults. This distinction denotes developmental status as opposed to legal status.

The literature reviewed in this section begins with Erickson’s psychosocial stage theory; this seminal work has influenced contemporary developmental theorists. The second theory I discuss is Kroger’s (2007) conception of identity development to describe identity development from early adolescence through what she calls late adolescence. Then, Arnett’s (2000) theory of emerging adulthood is discussed to provide a framework to describe individuals between the ages of 18-25. The discussion of selected developmental theorists is followed by an overview of social-emotional development, highlighting identity, narrative, and the development of youth
Social and Emotional Development

This section includes a discussion of selected concepts in the domain of social and emotional development: identity exploration and construction, development of purpose and life direction, and narrative approaches to identity.

Erickson’s Psychosocial Stage Theory

In the classic work, *Childhood and Society*, Erikson (1963) theorized that adolescents experience biological and hormonal changes as well as an increase in self-awareness. The changes involved during adolescence are complicated, confusing, and may lead individuals to experience an identity crisis. Thus, in Erikson’s life stage model, the identity versus identity diffusion stage is characterized by opposing needs, requiring individuals to reconcile self-identity with the possible self-identities available and supported by society. For Erikson, this stage is represented by an exploration of multiple roles, values, and relationships. Successful resolution is dependent on the achievement of a sense of personal identity obtained by facing crisis and emerging with a sense of self-worth. Erickson (1968) furthered highlighted the importance of identity exploration with the conceptualization of psychosocial moratorium – a period where adolescents, through free role experimentation may find his or her unique place in society. A psychosocial moratorium is a delay of adult commitments granted by society and occurring during a period of transition and self-discovery for the youth (Erickson, 1968). The moratorium can occur in institutions and organizations. For instance, Erickson explained that state-sponsored juvenile delinquency was an institutional attempt at moratorium. The importance of Erickson’s idea is that treating the delinquent or criminal offenses made by juvenile’s and young adults differently than adult offenses is an example of a moratorium that allows adolescents’ identities
not to be defined by their offense, providing further support for labeling theory. In fact, he cautioned against labeling and diagnosing individuals during the period of identity formation (Erikson, 1968). During this particular developmental period, it is essential to both promote and provide youth the space to explore their identities. This theory provides support for programs to engage youth in identity exploration, as it is normative for young people to experience a disruption in their identity.

**Kroger’s Conception of Identity Development**

In this section, I review Kroger’s (2007) work, which describes various tasks of adolescence and also builds on the work of Erickson by outlining biological characteristics, psychological features, and social contexts that interact and influence identity development over time. Kroger suggests that early adolescence occurs around 11 to 14 years of age. During early adolescence, a young person faces many changes, such as puberty, increases in cognitive capacity, more complex roles in the family, new forms of relationships with peers, and increasing demands of junior high or middle school. The biological changes taking place during puberty may shift the family system, as young people may desire privacy, decreased affection, and negotiation over chores and styles of dress. In a sense, the family response to a young person’s desire for autonomy helps them learn to establish a sense of self, which is explored in friendships and peer groups. Early adolescence is the beginning of one's quest for autonomy.

Mid-adolescence occurs between 15 to 17 years of age. During mid-adolescence, a young person will continue to make sense of relationships with family and peers, engage in romantic relationships, experiment sexually, and consider potential careers. There is an increase in cognitive capacity where one can imagine alternative futures and possibilities, which is key to identity formation (Kroger, 2007). Social institutions also play an essential role by providing a
framework that shapes identity formation and regulates the expression of identity. For instance, a high school may define what permissible behavior is, and that student learns to express their identity within the established rules. One critique of existing social structures is that young people are often told what behaviors to avoid, yet there are limited instructions and public policies which promote optimal identity development (Kroger, 2007).

Late adolescence as conceived by Kroger (2007) occurs during the 18 to 22 years of age. During late adolescence young people find vocational paths, meet intimate partners, form new ways of relating to their family and develop values that set the stage for their adult life. Typically, biological changes are finished, and individuals have their adult body. This period marks a time of identity-formation as late adolescents can reason in the abstract and make choices based on their value system.

**Arnett’s Theory of Emerging Adulthood**

In addition to the biological and hormonal changes proposed by Erickson (1963, 1968) and the developmental tasks described by Kroger (2007), industrialization is another critical component of development which influences identity development, especially for young adults. Industrialization is when a society moves from an agricultural economy to an economy based on technology and production of goods and services. In such societies there is less need for adolescents and young adults to contribute to the workforce; instead, they are encouraged to pursue post-secondary education to qualify for specialized jobs created in an industrial society.

The theory of emerging adulthood proposed by Arnett (2000) describes the developmental period of youth from the late teens through the twenties, with a particular focus on ages 18–25. The theory of emerging adulthood is driven by industrialization, which provides individuals a period of psychosocial moratorium or time to experiment with various roles. During emerging
adulthood, individuals stave off both marriage and childbearing responsibility to engage in identity exploration, across three areas: love, work, and worldview (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adults are tasked with exploring and deciding how these areas will affect and inform subsequent life choices as adults. Arnett puts forth the concept of emerging adulthood as normative life stage theory for individuals in industrialized societies, noting variations across country, culture, and social class (Arnett, 2000).

The concept of emerging adulthood offers a lens to view individuals aged 17-20 who are enrolled in a problem-solving court program. Arnett (2006) describes five features that distinguish emerging adulthood as a distinct developmental period from adolescences and adulthood (Arnett, 2006). The first distinguishing feature described is the *Age of Identity Explorations* where individuals are likely to explore various possibilities in the areas of love and work. During the age of identity exploration, emerging adults must reconcile their worldview, values, and beliefs and decide how they will be similar or different from their parents (Arnett, 2006). The second distinguishing feature is the *Age of Instability*, which is characterized by residential changes as individuals leave their parents' home for the first time. The *Self-Focused Age* is the third distinguishing feature of emerging adulthood, which is characterized by an increased focus on the self while having minimal social obligations and commitments to others. The *Age of Feeling in-Between* is the fourth distinctive feature that suggests that most emerging adults do not subjectively identify as adults. In fact, it is not until emerging adults can accept responsibility, make independent decisions and become financially independent that they feel they have reached adulthood. The last and fifth distinguishing feature of emerging adulthood is the *Age of Possibilities*, which represents a time of optimism and hope for the future. It also represents a time for young people to transform their lives and choose their environments.
In many ways, emerging adulthood is the period that shapes adulthood. For individuals enrolled in a problem-solving court at the ages of 17-20, this becomes a potential turning point where they have an opportunity to circumvent traditional consequences of their actions. During this critical transition period, young adults would benefit from policies that forgo jail and criminal charges and engage young adults in programs aimed to address the offense-related behavior. Based on the five features above, problem-solving court programs looking to intervene in the lives of individuals aged 17-20 should expose them to future possibilities (e.g., GED preparation, vocational training, volunteer work). Further, programs should take stock of living situations (e.g., if individuals are homeless, or in unsafe living situations) and help participants explore identity (encouraged by counseling and mentors) and build problem-solving skills.

The conceptual strength of Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood is that it captures the unique developmental experience of individuals aged 17-20. In many ways, these individuals have a sense of increased autonomy, but often lack the resources, socio-emotional development, and self-awareness needed to make adult decisions. Given the strength of Arnett’s conception of emerging adulthood, one limitation is the relative absence in describing the experience of racial and ethnic groups. Although the theory of emerging adulthood acknowledges that development varies across country, culture, and social class (Arnett, 2000), race and ethnicity were not explicitly discussed. Given the rich diversity of the United States and the legacy of racism and discrimination, it is essential to consider how the application of theory applies to racial and ethnic groups.

Given the limited research that assesses the role of race and ethnicity for emerging adulthood, it is not clear how the concept applies to race, ethnicity and social class (Syed & Mitchell, 2013). Therefore, the theory of emerging adulthood must be contextualized to
accurately examine the experience of racial and ethnic groups within the U.S. Within Arnett’s conception of emerging adulthood; individuals spend time reconciling identity issues as they consider worldview, values, and beliefs. Awareness of ethnic differences may begin in early adolescence and represent an additional prompt for identity exploration (Phinney, 2006; Syed & Azmitia, 2008). As individuals have increased contact with strangers and new environments, physical appearance may have illicit negative consequences and reactions (Phinney, 2006). In a racially stratified system, individuals from racial and ethnic groups encounter racism and additional barriers that may prompt identity exploration but constrain expectations. At the same time, structural barriers push some racial and ethnic youth to develop resilience and learn to move past struggles (Syed & Mitchell, 2013).

In summary, the theory of emerging adulthood must be problematized to examine the experience of racial and ethnic groups accurately. As conceptualized by Arnett, the theory of emerging adulthood may contain assumptions that vary by race and ethnicity in addition to country, culture, and social class. Despite the limitations, the theory of emerging adulthood provides a conceptual framework to examine identity development during a specified developmental period.

Summary of Selected Developmental Theory and Consideration of Race

In the above sections, significant developmental theorists were selected to outline the biological, hormonal, and social contexts that interact and influence identity development within an industrialized society (Arnett, 2000; Erickson, 1963, 1968; Kroger, 2007). Essentially, the normative developmental tasks occurring during 11 to approximately 25 years of age are critical and set the stage for adulthood. It is vital to understand the experiences of individuals involved in the legal system from 11 to 25 years of age. It is also important to explicitly consider the
intersections of race, gender, and social class and how these constructs relate to the normative development of young adults and their involvement in the justice system. Race, developmental theory, and involvement in the criminal justice system will be discussed in later chapters through the stories and narratives of young adults studied in this dissertation. However, it is necessary to foreshadow the unique experience that some adolescents have. For instance, a young adult who self-identified as African American held a door open for a man he described as appearing White. The young adult went on to explain that the man did not acknowledge his presence as he held the door for him. Further, the young adult felt as if the man was afraid of him. These incidents accumulate over time in the lives of people from various racial and ethnic groups and provide subtle but powerful messages about how one may be viewed and valued in society. Awareness of ethnic differences may emerge in early adolescence as individuals have increased contact with strangers and new environments and one’s physical appearance may have illicit negative consequences and reactions (Phinney, 2006; Syed & Azmitia, 2008). Therefore, a normative developmental task is understanding racism, gender bias, and oppression, and as social constructions with potentially life-altering consequences. To reiterate, the explicit consideration of race as a component of normative development will extend scholarly knowledge and understanding of young adult development as making sense of racism, gender bias, and oppression as an essential task for young adults.

**Differentiation: A Critical Developmental Task**

Other developmental theorists describe a key process that occurs during young adulthood, which involves reconciling multiple self-representations across different relational contexts (Harter, Bresnick, Bouchey, & Whitesell, 1997). This process called differentiation is a critical task of adolescence, where the construction of multiple selves in different roles and relationships
occurs (Harter et al., 1997). Differentiation represents a developmental period where young people began to acquire the cognitive abilities to reconcile the experience of conflicting identities in various relationships. Underlying differentiation is the idea that individuals will experience conflict across varying social roles. As individuals learn to integrate attributes across different contexts with peers, parents, and other spheres of social influence, they are likely to experience conflict. Conflict was described as a normative process; however, excessive conflict may put individuals at psychological risk (Harter et al., 1997).

Given the complexity of identity development for young adults in general, identity development tasks may present an additional challenge for individuals facing criminal sanctions. For instance, youth facing criminal sanctions are susceptible to internalizing a criminal label. Therefore, as youth engage in identity exploration, they may internalize the views of others, and these views can contribute to the adoption of a criminal or non-criminal identity. Furthermore, the task of differentiation is described as being more complex for individuals in racial and ethnic groups who must interact in multiple contexts and learn to adapt in environments where their family of origin values may not be shared (Harter et al., 1997). Systemic racism along with the varied ways that one learns or does not learn to adapt in relational contexts account for unique challenges faced by individuals from racial and ethnic groups.

Finally, the task of differentiation is characterized by increased cognitive development enabling individuals to resolve contradictory aspects of the self and display varied self-perceptions in different relationships without experiencing conflict. Thus, resolution of identity conflicts may also include integration of a non-criminal identity without threatening a young adult’s subjective sense of self. Further, successful creation of a unified self may be aided by narrative construction. Narrative construction involves the continual process of crafting and
revising the stories of our lives (Harter et al., 1997). Conceptions of narrative identity suggest that narrative approaches may be developmentally appropriate for programs and interventions attempting to influence prosocial outcomes for young adults.

Young adults are equipped with a developing awareness (Phinney, 2006; Syed & Azmitia, 2008) and increased cognitive skills (Harter et al., 1997; Kroger, 2007) to explore and reconcile inherent contradictions, which may enable them to rescript their stories as this developmental period is noted for its flexibility. For instance, college-bound youth are placed in a social structure which encourages identity exploration through exposure to new ideas, people, and experiences which allows students to reconsider the values and beliefs they hold. Implicit in the concept of identity exploration is a search for purpose and meaning.

**Development of Life Direction and a Sense of Purpose**

Damon, Menon, and Bronk, (2003) define purpose as “a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self” (p. 121). In a sense, purpose involves a personal search to discovering one’s life goals and revealing the way in which these goals may contribute to larger society. Purpose is a compass that guides one’s life. Meaning is a similar concept to purpose, and meaning is defined as “the extent to which people comprehend, make sense of, or see significance in their lives, accompanied by the degree to which they perceive themselves to have a purpose, mission, or over-arching aim in life” (Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009, p. 43). The discovery of one’s purpose is an essential component of development that occurs in the context of social influences (Jones, 2017). Programs designed to serve youth can be created to aid youth in developing a sense of purpose, meaning, and direction in life. The creation of interventions which foster development of a positive identity for young adults involved in the justice system is important.
for optimal development across the lifespan.

**Narrative Identity**

The narrative identity section contains three sub-sections. In the first sub-section, I will review McAdam’s (1988) conception of narrative identity, which provides a model to understand how individuals began to construct stories that form the basis of identity in adolescence. In the second sub-section, I will review two narrative approaches that are specifically targeted for working with individuals in the criminal justice system. In the third sub-section, I will review two qualitative studies that have used narrative approaches with individuals facing criminal sanctions.

**McAdam’s Narrative Identity**

The concepts of emerging adulthood and differentiation drew attention to the normative and complex undertaking of resolving identity conflicts. Narrative identity models provide insight to understand how individuals may begin to resolve identity crisis. Narrative identity “is the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make sense and meaning out of his or her life” (McAdams, 2011, p. 99). This story is constructed by personal recounts of past experiences as well as an individual’s expectations for the future.

The individual begins to construct their narrative identity during late-adolescence and emerging adulthood. For individuals facing criminal sanctions, the process of identity exploration is critical as these individuals, in particular, are susceptible to having the legal consequences of their actions ascribed to internal attributes rather than poor choices that can be corrected. This process was described earlier in the discussion of labeling theory which suggested that youth described as deviant and tagged with a label go on to adopt the roles expected of them; thus, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy (Becker, 1963). Interventions using
narrative approaches that promote identity exploration may interrupt youth internalization of deviant labels. McAdams and McLean (2013) explain, “narrative identity reconstructs the autobiographical past and imagines the future in such a way as to provide a person’s life with some degree of unity, purpose, and meaning” (p. 233). An individual’s life story is integrated with memories and future goals, and the narrative identity is then constructed to provide the individual a way of making meaning through an understanding of the past, present, and future.

**Narrative Approaches With Individuals Facing Criminal Sanctions**

Ward and Marshal (2007) outlined a narrative model applied to individuals facing criminal sanctions. The purpose of the article was to describe a conceptual model called the Good Lives Model of offender rehabilitation and to use the Good Lives Model to inform treatment approaches. The Good Lives Model operates on two principles. The first “is focused on the utilization of individual offenders’ primary values in the design of treatment programs” and the second is to “equip individuals with the internal and external conditions necessary to implement a life plan founded on identified values” (Ward & Marshal, 2007, p. 280). The authors contend that successful rehabilitation of offenders depends on the construction of an adaptive narrative identity. Adaptive narrative identity was defined as a, “reflective understanding of an individual’s life that captures what is of importance to him or her and how these commitments evolve over time in response to his or her personal circumstances and the various people with whom he or she is acquainted” (Ward & Marshall, 2007, p. 280). Seemingly, as individuals can gain increased awareness of their values, beliefs, and capabilities, they can make informed decisions, which may lead to prosocial outcomes.

The model outlined by Ward and Marshall has implications for intervening with offenders. One suggestion is that treatment programs focus on helping individual offenders
identify values and then equips them with the internal and external capacities to implement a life plan based on the identified values. Limitations of the theoretical model are the lack of empirical studies documenting the effectiveness of the Good Lives Model in reducing recidivism (Netto, Carter, & Bonell, 2014). Nevertheless, for this dissertation, the model proposed by Ward and Marshall represents initial thought on how a narrative identity approach may be applied to individuals facing criminal sanctions.

A similar narrative approach is described in Vaughan’s (2007) discussion of the internal narrative of desistance. Vaughan asserts that there is much emphasis placed on the social environment to instill law-abiding behavior and not enough on the individual’s internal experience or turning points that may lead an individual to alter their behavior (Vaughan, 2007). The internal narrative of desistance is conceptualized as moving through three distinct phases. The first phase is discernment where an individual is exposed to possibilities (e.g., job and school) and is also open to change. The next phase is deliberation. In this phase, an individual considers the pros and cons of adopting prosocial behavior. The deliberation phase also represents a reflective and sometimes emotional process where the individual considers how others view their identity. The final phase is the dedication phase where an individual decides to commit to a new identity. The commitment is represented by the individual recognizing the criminal behavior as incompatible with the new identity. One limitation of the model is that not all individuals can identify values and beliefs that are in their best interest. Vaughn refers to these individuals as fractured reflexives – individuals who lack the personal identity and a sense of control over their own lives (Vaughn, 2007).

The two narrative approaches discussed in this section, the internal narrative of desistance and the Good Lives Model (Vaughn, 2007; Ward & Marshall, 2007) demonstrate how
a narrative identity approach was utilized with individuals facing criminal sanctions. Narrative approaches may be useful for young adult diversion program participants as studied in this dissertation. Young adulthood is a developmental period, which offers institutions a unique opportunity to promote adoption of prosocial behaviors as young adults’ identities are particularly pliable as they attempt to integrate their life-stories into a coherent narrative. Narrative approaches may guide individuals facing criminal sanctions to view their past behaviors as bad choices rather than view themselves as a bad people. The next section reviews two qualitative studies that utilize narrative approaches with individuals facing criminal sanctions.

**Qualitative Studies of Narrative Approaches**

Case and Hunter (2014) conducted a 9-month case study ethnography to explore how a group of offender-labeled African American youth engaged in narrative identity work through participation in an intervention program. The research site was a 6-year-old peer ambassadors program that targeted African American youth (aged 10–19 years) who had involvement with the juvenile justice system or corrective systems at school. The program’s goals are to reduce recidivism, psychological symptoms, and problematic behaviors such as fighting and substance use. Youth engaged in the peer ambassadors program attended weekly meetings, participated in community-based projects and also received a weekly stipend ranging from $150 to $250 per week based on hours worked. The sample consisted of 3 youth (2 male and one female), with an average age of 18.67. The participants were enrolled in alternative high school or community college. The youth in the study also reported contact with the criminal justice system and disciplinary process in school. Two adult participants were also interviewed; both were paid staff working with the program for 4 years. The staff identified as African American and had an
average age of 41 years.

The interviews ranged from 50 minutes to 1.5 hours and followed a semi-structured protocol. In addition to interviews, observations were made of participant’s involvement in the setting and with each other during weekly meetings and community events. The analytic approach combined interviews and observations and the different perspectives of the youth and adults. The findings suggested that the peer ambassador program was affirming for offender-labeled African American youth who participated in the program. One noteworthy finding was the description of the program’s impact on individual narratives: “The intervention was to really kind of like empowering them to say ‘Okay, I had a bad experience, and I’ve learned from my bad experience, and therefore I can reach out and help other youth learn from their experiences’” (Case & Hunter, 2014, p. 914). This quote described how one peer ambassador used their own negative experience to teach other youth and possibly influence their behavior.

Overall, the findings described how youth were exposed to programs aimed at developing critical consciousness and civic engagement while using a narrative approach to restructure how the youth viewed themselves. Case and Hunter’s (2014) description of a peer ambassador self-disclosing their own negative experience represents a reimagined personal narrative. For youth in their study, “occupying these roles seemed to have an additional function of aiding them in shedding internalized societal narratives that questioned their worthiness and potential” (p.918). Limitations of the study are the small number of participants. However, given these limitations, findings of this study describe the importance of supporting the identity exploration of youth facing criminal sanctions.

Soyer’s (2014) study analyzed field notes and interviews to understand incarcerated juvenile’s motivation and narratives for maintaining a non-deviant identity after release from a
juvenile detention facility. Note, that this study differed from the above study as the participants were incarcerated in juvenile detention facilities. This distinction is vital as juvenile incarceration disrupts the life course creating gaps in education and employment. Further, counseling interventions have been shown to be less effective for incarcerated juveniles when compared to individuals facing community-based sanctions (Hughes & Wilson, 2010; Lipsey 2009). The study described how incarceration affected life outcomes and also described the offender’s subjective perception of incarceration as a decisive turning point. Soyer (2014) contends that incarceration can represent a turning point where individuals at least consider change; however, many institutions do not provide youth with the viable skills to adopt a crime-free identity and maintain a life free from crime.

The sample is based on three years of ethnographic fieldwork with 23 juvenile offenders. Data was collected in Chicago and Boston. Of the 23 participants, 15 were from Chicago. Thirteen of the Chicago participants identified as African American and 2 identified as Latino. The Boston sample consisted of 8 participants. One participant identified as Biracial (Latino/African American background), 2 identified as Latino, and 5 identified as African American. The participants were between 15 and 18 years of age. Across both samples, the offenses ranged from theft, assault, armed robbery and unlawful use of a weapon to domestic violence. Soyer (2014) used semi-structured interviews and participant observations in court, juvenile-justice facilities, and the teenager’s home to collect data. Each youth completed a minimum of five interviews. Youth in the study also received some form of group counseling from the juvenile facility, but it was not clear how often or what type of counseling.

During both group and individual meetings, participants described a desire to have a crime-free life; however, more than half of the individuals in the sample committed additional
offenses following involvement in the study despite expressed desire to have a crime-free life. Soyer (2014) explains the expressed desire of crime-free life through the concept of ‘imagined desistance’ to describe how young men envisioned their future life without crime yet due to structural impingements were unable to maintain a life free from crime following release (Soyer, 2014). The key point is that juvenile incarceration, as described in Soyer’s study, is one example of a failed turning point and amplifies the importance of institutional structures to promote agency and move youth toward adopting prosocial behaviors (Soyer, 2014). Overall, incarceration is described as a potential turning point; however, the structural forces to promote narrative identity exploration were not available for most youth in the study. In fact, many of the youth spent a considerable amount of time in detention facilities where they participated in groups and often articulated a desire to maintain a crime-free life. However, the youth were removed from their communities which may explain difficulties of establishing prosocial behavior upon release from detention.

**Section Summary**

Overall, the section on young adult development focused on development within the context of lifespan theory, narrative identity development, and differentiation. In general, developmental theories and research point to the possible need to consider specialized legal provisions for individuals aged 18-24 as they are susceptible to deficits in resisting peer influence, controlling impulses, and regulating emotions. Further, this developmental period marks the beginning of identity exploration and represents a time of possibilities. Young adults gain increased cognitive capacity making narrative approaches developmentally appropriate. For individuals facing criminal sanctions, narrative approaches may provide a way to view their involvement with the criminal justice system as a turning point; thus, providing them the
possibility to make meaning of the experience. In this way, narrative approaches may disrupt the stigma often associated involvement in the criminal justice system. Specifically, by providing a framework for individual’s to integrate memories, present situations, and future goals.

Community-based programs targeted to young adults may provide benefits that are not available to youth who are incarcerated. These benefits may revolve around the idea of being able to implement right away the insights and gains provided from participating in an intervention rather than imagining a crime-free identity upon release from jail. Ideally, programs should help young adults explore and reflect upon their identity while taking into account that youth are not yet adults. Individuals who are involved with the criminal justice system during this crucial period of development may miss out on the benefits of identity exploration. Worse, they may come to see themselves as criminals before they have had the opportunity for self-exploration. Premature identity foreclosure may prevent youth from adopting prosocial norms and benefiting from positive youth development programs. Therefore, given the salience of identity exploration, programs and interventions should employ treatments that facilitate self-exploration.

One cost-effective approach to working with individuals across multiple settings has been the use of creative and expressive arts. Creative and expressive arts can be used as a treatment modality to help individuals access their trauma and make meaning of experiences. The next section reviews both conceptual models and research studies regarding expressive writing, creative and expressive writing interventions, and the broad health and psychological benefits of creative and expressive arts.

**Creative and Expressive Arts**

In this section, I review the literature specific to creative and expressive arts. In general,
creative and expressive arts refers to programs, interventions, or therapeutic approaches that utilize art, music, dance, spoken-word, or poetry as a means to promote health and emotional well-being. Stuckey and Nobel (2010) grouped creative and expressive arts into four categories based on published studies. The four categories of creative and expressive arts consisted of music engagement, visual arts therapy, movement-based creative expression, and expressive writing. Engagement in the arts had positive effects on outcomes across the four categories reviewed by Stuckey & Nobel (2010). In this review, I will focus specifically on studies of expressive writing as young adult participants in the problem-solving court program engaged in activities that fit this category.

The literature on creative and expressive writing is diverse; therefore, I grouped the literature into two categories. The first category consists of literature that focused on the health and psychological outcomes of creative and expressive writing. This body of literature is represented by the work of psychologists and health researchers that have studied expressive writing under controlled laboratory conditions. Psychologists and health researchers primarily conducted experimental studies to determine if an expressive writing task could be used to improve health outcomes and psychological well-being.

Following the section on the health and psychological outcomes of creative and expressive writing, I will review the second category of literature. The second category of literature reviewed in this section consists of literature that focused on interventions and programmatic applications of creative and expressive arts. The contributions in this body of work are represented by educators and practitioners in counseling, psychology, and social work that study the programmatic outcomes of creative and expressive arts interventions. The studies are often conducted in outpatient and residential treatment settings, academic settings, and
community-based spoken word programs. The research reviewed in this section is conceptual and descriptive. Although a few studies utilize and describe sound qualitative methodology, most do not. A trend in this body of literature is many studies are written from the perspective of the program facilitator with the goal of describing how other practitioners can implement creative and expressive arts approaches in their work.

It is important to note that the two categories concerning creative and expressive writing are organized in such a way to bring clarity to a diverse body of literature. Other researchers such as Wright (2004) characterized the research on the process and outcomes of expressive writing as falling in two traditions; the humanities approach which often uses case study methods and the scientific approach which relies on experimental and quasi-experiential studies. However, categorizing this diverse body of literature may be more complicated as studies that Wright would group in the humanities tradition can also be considered scientific. Therefore, as discussed above, I have organized the two categories as health and psychological outcomes of creative and expressive writing and interventions and programmatic applications of creative and expressive arts. Both approaches are useful for understanding the effects of expressive writing (Bolton, 2004; Wright, 2004). Taken together, these diverse bodies of literature will help to develop a framework to understand the perceived benefits of an applied creative and expressive writing program offered in a young adult problem-solving court.

**Health and Psychological Outcomes of Creative and Expressive Writing**

The literature reviewed in this section is concerned with the effects of expressive writing on health and psychological outcomes. In this section, I review studies concerning the health and psychological outcomes of expressive writing, a key meta-analytic study, which reviewed 146 expressive writing studies, and conceptual articles which offer theories regarding the positive
benefits of creative and expressive writing and the mechanisms which may promote positive changes. This section will begin with the classic work of Pennebaker and Beall (1986), which examined writing under experimental conditions. The pivotal work of Pennebaker and Beall is reviewed as it generated a line of studies that tested the idea that written disclosure of personal experiences could improve health and psychological functioning. Then, I will review selected studies conducted in the tradition of Pennebaker and Beall’s classic study which examined the general health and psychological findings generated by psychologists and health researchers that have studied expressive writing under controlled laboratory conditions. This section will conclude with a discussion of a possible mechanism that may explain how expressive writing promotes positive outcomes.

The work of Pennebaker and Beall (1986) examined writing under experimental conditions. In the classic study, Pennebaker and Beall (1986) randomly assigned 46 participants to write one of four types of essays for 15 minutes each night for four consecutive evenings. The participants were enrolled in a psychology course and completed the study as a part of a course requirement. Of the 46 participants, 34 were women, and 12 were men. No other sample characteristics were provided. The control condition \((n = 12)\) wrote about trivial topics. The trauma-emotion group \((n = 12)\) wrote about their feelings associated with one or more traumas. The trauma-fact group \((n = 11)\) wrote about facts surrounding traumatic events whereas the trauma-combination group \((n = 11)\) wrote about both their feelings and facts surrounding the trauma. Health records were collected from the health center at the beginning and end of the study. At each writing interval, participant’s blood pressure, heart rate, self-reported mood, and symptomatology were taken. Participants were contacted 4 months following the conclusion of the study to complete questionnaires.
The results of this study revealed that participants in the trauma-combination and trauma-emotion group were physiologically aroused at each writing session. Health records of participants in the trauma-combination and trauma-emotion group reduced illness-related doctor’s visits. Alternatively, individuals in both the trauma-fact group and control group did not reduce illness-related visits. One unexpected finding in the article reviewed was that participants who wrote about an upsetting personal experience but only focused on the facts of the event were not physiologically aroused and did not produce any long-term changes. These findings demonstrated a relationship between emotions and trauma and led to a line of studies that would test the idea that writing about traumatic or emotional events might lead to psychological and health-related benefits.

The classic study conducted by Pennebaker and Beall (1986) generated a body of studies on the effects of expressive writing on health and psychological outcomes. Much of the health-related outcomes suggest that expressive writing was associated with improved immune functioning, reductions in blood pressure, lowered heart rate levels, decreased physician visits, and decreased time away from work (Crow, 2000; Esterling, L’Abate, Murray, & Pennebaker, 1999; Lepore & Smyth, 2002; Lowe, 2006; Pennebaker, 2000; Pennebaker, Hughes, & O’Heeron, 1987). In a study of 98 psychiatric prison inmates, Richards, Beal, Seagal, and Pennebaker (2000) found that participants assigned to the writing intervention group visited the physician less often than individuals assigned to the control condition, and at the six week follow-up, the intervention group maintained a lower number of illness-related visits in comparison to the control group.

In addition to health-related benefits of expressive writing are the psychological effects of expressive writing. The psychological effects of expressive writing include reductions in
depressive symptoms, rumination, and general anxiety in the weeks following participation in an expressive writing intervention (Lepore, 1997; Pennebaker, 2004). In a study to examine if expressive writing influences psychological and physical health, Sloan and Marx (2004) used psychological assessments to understand if changes in psychological health are clinically significant. Participants in this study were 49 female undergraduate psychology students. Participants were required to have at least one traumatic experience and were excluded from the study if they were already receiving psychotherapy or taking psychotropic medication. Approximately half of the participants were European American, 13 were African American, 4 were Hispanic, 4 were Asian American, and 4 were of mixed racial background. The average age of the participants was 18.9 years. Participants were administered measures to assess psychological and physical functioning. The measures used in the study include the Posttraumatic Stress Diagnostic Scale (PDS), Beck Depression Inventory, Second Version (BDI-II), and the Pennebaker Inventory of Limbic Languidness (PILL). Cortisol samples were obtained through the collection of saliva samples as well as self-report information to measure participant’s level of arousal before and after the writing session. Similar to previous studies, participants were randomly assigned to either a written emotional disclosure condition \((n = 26)\) or a control writing condition \((n = 23)\). Writing instructions for each condition and session were replicated from the protocol used by Pennebaker (1997) and took place across three consecutive days, with all participants writing 20 minutes each session.

Individuals in the disclosure condition demonstrated greater cortisol reactivity as compared to the control group. Elevated cortisol reactivity suggested the first writing session was more stressful for participants in the disclosure condition than the control condition. Individuals in the disclosure condition also self-reported more unpleasantness and arousal as
compared to the control group. However, elevated stress markers decreased across writing sessions for individuals in the disclosure condition.

Overall, findings suggested that participants in the written disclosure condition reported fewer days sick and fewer physiological symptoms at follow-up when compared to the control condition. Disclosure participants also reported a decrease in clinical depression symptoms but not post-traumatic stress. The findings obtained by Sloan and Marx (2004) may suggest that expressive writing is ideal for individuals who are experiencing mild to moderate trauma symptoms. If so, these findings are promising for participants enrolled in the young adult problem-solving court program as individuals in the criminal justice systems are often underserved and unlikely to receive clinical services. If expressive writing can reduce clinical depression and address moderate to mild trauma through writing, then it may be an ideal intervention for young adults.

In an important meta-analytic study, Frattaroli (2006) examined the effects of expressive writing on health and psychological outcomes. To be included in the analysis, studies had to include some variation of the writing task developed by Pennebaker and Beall. Also, studies had to be randomized and include a neutral control group. The studies had to contain statistical information to compute the effect size as well as an outcome variable measured at least 1 day after the writing intervention was completed. The studies also had to present data that was not previously reported elsewhere. From the 250 studies reviewed, 146 studies were included in the meta-analysis. The sample characteristics for 146 studies included in the meta-analysis consisted of an average of 29 years of age with 34% percent of study participants being male. On average, 72% of study participants were European American, 12% of study participants were African American, 7% of study participants were Asian American, and 5% identified as Hispanic/Latino.
American.

The findings of the meta-analytic study suggested that the expressive writing task was particularly helpful for psychological outcomes related to emotions such as depression, anxiety, subjective well-being, anger, and distress. Further, findings suggested self-disclosure (the act of disclosing personal information about an event) through expressive writing is beneficial for one’s psychological health, physical health, and overall functioning, with an average effect size of .075. The effect size of .075 indicates that the expressive writing task which only required four 15-minute writing sessions over a four day period had significant effects at the scheduled follow-up time which was often several weeks following the intervention. This finding supports the view that organizing emotions into words is helpful for general psychological functioning. The findings have implications for interventions using self-disclosure through expressive writing. Essentially, “as a person repeatedly confronts, describes, and in essence, relives the thoughts and feelings about their negative experience, this repetition and exposure should eventually lead to the extinction of those thoughts and feelings” (Frattaroli, 2006, p. 859). Practice implications suggest that individuals with a history of trauma would benefit from self-disclosure through expressive writing. Additionally, there should be, at minimal, three writing sessions lasting at least 15 minutes each. Overall, the findings from the meta-analytic study provide additional support for interventions leading to self-disclosure.

The above studies have described the efficacy of writing about past experiences on mental and physical health outcomes for a variety of groups to include college students, individuals involved with the criminal justice system, and people suffering from depression and chronic pain. Collectively, the body of literature examining the health-related and psychological benefits of expressive writing suggests that writing improves health and well-being, may
increase self-understanding and may bolster an individual’s emotional self-efficacy (Lowe, 2006). Although there are many positive outcomes from the expressive writing interventions, researchers are not sure why expressive writing produces positive outcomes.

Some speculations for why expressive writing produced positive outcomes are based on cognitive theories which suggest that expressive writing produces positive benefits through efficient assimilation of the trauma-related experiences leading to less effortful processing and lower chronic stress (Esterling, L’Abate, Murray, & Pennebaker, 1999). Further, the act of generating a coherent narrative surrounding the thoughts and emotions of a traumatic event may be necessary for psychological and health-related benefits as the act of constructing stories or narratives helps individuals organize deep thoughts, feelings, and traumatic experiences (Pennebaker, 2000; Smyth, True, & Souto, 2001).

Given the complexity of the mechanisms involved in the psychological processes of expressive writing, it is likely that multiple dimensions are responsible for the effectiveness of expressive writing to include cognitive, physiological, cultural, and social dimensions (Smyth & Pennebaker, 2008). In fact, Jacobs (2010) situates the benefits of expressive writing in an emotional management model. She uses advances in neurological research regarding brain structures and functioning to explain the emotional benefits of expressive writing. Consistent with other work, Jacobs recognizes that science in the current state cannot explain how or why writing works but that there is mounting neurological evidence that can shed light on specific brain structures involved in the writing process.

In the model, according to Jacobs (2010), the act of writing integrates both brain function and subjective experience. Primarily, the act of writing coordinates brain structures “that regulate arousal and motivation, the limbic structures which assess the personal valence and importance
of stimuli, the cortex which synthesizes inputs, and especially the neocortex which makes plans and understands the flow of time” (Jacobs, 2010, p. 26). In theory, expressive writing detangles emotional association’s resultant from past trauma; therefore, as young adults write about trauma and nothing terrible happens, the memories are less likely to evoke strong reactions (Jacobs, 2010). Furthermore, expressive writing may provide psychotherapeutic benefits that decrease the impact of a traumatic event; thus, helping to regulate the brain’s emotional system. Similarly, Broals (2012) suggested that one reason expressive writing may be useful is meaning making - a cognitive process involving restructuring or integrating stressful events into a coherent narrative, which may lead to beneficial outcomes.

This section has focused on the psychological and health benefits of expressive writing and how expressive writing may help individuals make sense of traumatic experiences by organizing, desensitizing, and managing emotions into a coherent narrative that may mitigate future consequences of past traumatic behavior. One limitation of the expressive writing studies is that researchers have not yet studied the social effects of participating in an expressive writing intervention. A second limitation is that researchers have not studied how social interactions with peers and facilitators influence outcomes. Investigating the use of expressive writing while accounting for facilitators and other group members may lead to an increased understanding of the benefits of expressive writing. These social benefits may stem from social support, which may influence individuals to reconstruct traumatic experiences while receiving social support in a safe environment. Despite these limitations, the scientific approach to studying expressive writing provides support for the fact that expressive writing leads to positive health and psychological outcomes. Additionally, expressive writing as a potential intervention is both low cost and low risk and has many associated health benefits. In summary, this section reviewed
studies documenting the positive benefits of expressive writing on health and psychological outcomes. The research documenting the positive psychological and health outcomes of expressive writing builds a foundation to understand the perceived benefits of creative and expressive writing as an intervention for participants in educational and therapeutic contexts.

**Interventions and Programmatic Applications of Creative and Expressive Arts**

In this section, I will review literature that has focused on the perceived benefits of creative and expressive arts interventions. This section is divided into three subsections that reflect the multidisciplinary nature of the creative and expressive arts literature. The first subsection reviews educational applications of creative and expressive arts. Educational studies were selected which emphasize how educators used the arts to influence the prosocial behavior of students. Studies following the educational approach describe how teachers, educators and community artists used creative and expressive arts to engage youth in academic and non-academic contexts. The second subsection reviews therapeutic applications of creative and expressive arts. Studies falling under the criteria of therapeutic applications of creative and expressive arts are those studies that utilized a creative arts therapy in conjunction with a licensed social worker, counselor, or psychologist. The literature reviewed in the therapeutic applications of creative and expressive arts subsection will describe how practitioners utilized creative and expressive arts to promote psychological well-being with participants in outpatient treatment settings, substance abuse treatment groups, and adolescents in residential treatment facilities. The third subsection will also review literature from practitioners but focuses on the specific application of Hip-Hop and rap lyrics into creative and expressive arts therapy. The review of Hip Hop or rap therapy as a specific application of expressive and creative arts is essential as it demonstrates how some practitioners and educators may account for the cultural
context when working with ethnic and racial groups.

**Educational Applications of Creative and Expressive Arts**

Educational applications of creative and expressive arts refer to programs that are led by teachers, educators and spoken word artists who most often work with students and young people in academic and afterschool settings. It is important to note that facilitators who run creative and expressive arts from an educational approach may bring different training to groups than practitioners who utilize a therapeutic approach or have clinical training. The educational approach often focuses on the use of creative and expressive arts to motivate and engage students. The use of creative and expressive arts in this context has been referenced as the youth spoken word movement, which refers to school and community-based organizations that offer programs, workshops, and open mic poetry series to youth (Weinstein, 2012). Youth spoken word programs were taught by teachers in classroom settings and also in arts organizations located in the local community with the goal of motivating students to pursue prosocial behaviors and bolster self-confidence and self-esteem (Reyes, 2006; Williams, 2015; Weinstein, 2007). Researchers who study youth spoken word programs have been interested in how participants in spoken word programs use writing to negotiate identity, develop writing skills, confidence in learning, self-awareness, and social consciousness (Weinstein, 2007; Jocson, 2006). Some of the perceived benefits of integrating creative and expressive arts into classrooms through spoken word poetry programs are that young people are provided a safe space where they are encouraged to share their stories and develop their voices (Reyes, 2006; Williams, 2015).

Much of the youth spoken word literature is based on conceptual articles, descriptive studies, and qualitative methods. A strength of youth spoken word literature is the rich
description of the programs and detail provided regarding program processes. In this sub-
section, I will review studies describing creative arts in academic and non-academic or 
community-based settings. I will also review qualitative studies that describe the development of 
youth spoken word programs. Youth spoken word programs are community-based interventions 
often used to promote prosocial behavior. Studies in this sub-section will demonstrate how the 
creative and expressive arts have been utilized to engage youth in identity exploration and 
promote prosocial behavior.

Jocson (2006) described a poetry program called, Poetry for the People (P4P) facilitated 
by student-teacher-poets (STPs) for urban youth in a high school setting. The purpose of the case 
study was to identify how a poetry program helped students gain writing skills, confidence in 
learning, self-awareness, and social consciousness. A three-part definition of poetry guides P4P's 
work: Poetry (a) is a medium for telling the truth, (b) reaches for maximal impact with a minimal 
number of words, and (c) demands the utmost precision from words (Jocson, 2006).

The site for this study was a high school in the East Bay area of San Francisco, 
California. Facilitators went to English classrooms approximately three times a week for a four 
to six week period where they collaborated with teachers and students. The purpose of P4P is to 
provide 9th to 12th-grade students and their poems the kind of personal attention typical of any 
writing workshop (Jocson, 2006). The sample included 7 students of color. Of the 7 students 
selected, 4 identified as representing an underserved student population (meaning that they were 
on free or reduced lunch). Data collection utilized several methods to include survey, interview, 
participant observation, the collection of poetry-related artifacts, and official documentation 
(Jocson, 2006). A framework called PPP, which refers to poetry as practice, process, and 
product, guided the analysis. This analytical framework was used to analyze the poems and
discover patterns in the students’ writings.

Jocson (2006) describes a participant in the study named Damon, a biracial 17-year-old high school senior. Damon created a poem entitled, “Identity” where he explored his biracial identity. In the first few lines Damon writes, “Half and half since the start of my path, mixed with the best of both worlds, genetics turned my naps into curls…” Jocson (2006) then explains how Damon was able to consider the complexities of his racial identity while also learning about the writing process. The example of Damon demonstrates the salience of identity exploration during this developmental period while also highlighting expressive writing as one format to engage individuals in identity exploration. The findings of the study describe how one program can build community partnerships and use creative and expressive arts to help student’s access matters that are important in their lives.

In a study examining poetry and group process, Wiseman (2011) used qualitative methodology to understand student participation in a classroom poetry workshop. The purpose of her study was to describe how students write poetry to develop and reflect a more in-depth understanding of themselves and the world while building on ways of expressing and synthesizing knowledge in the classroom. The study was conducted in an eighth-grade English classroom in the United States at an urban middle school. The sample consisted of 19 African-American students, 2 Hispanic students, and 1 Asian-American student. There were 9 males and 13 females. Participant observation and interviews were used to collect data. The analysis process consisted of an inductive approach that led to the development of 4 themes: families, personal identity, faith/religion, and community or current events. Wiseman (2011) explained that the poetry program allowed students to engage in critical thinking while integrating learning from multiple contexts. For instance, “students used their poetry to describe themselves in
powerful positions and quite often their poetry reflected their growth and understanding of themselves as individuals” (Wiseman, 2011 p. 75). Further, the students voiced their desire for additional space to explore their identity. Overall, this study provides additional support for the use of creative and expressive arts with youth as participants in this study were able to reflect on their experiences while considering alternative perspectives through a poetry workshop.

Another researcher studied youth spoken word programs in alternative school and community-based settings. Weinstein’s (2007) ethnographic study was based on 3 years of field research and interview data that analyzed the poetry, lyrics, and prose of 10 young adults. The purpose of the study was to understand how youth use writing to negotiate identity. The sample consisted of 10 inner-city Chicago youths, seven of them attended an alternative school where Weinstein worked as an English teacher. Five of the youth identified as African American and 5 as Latino. Their ages ranged from 15 to 21 years old. The participants engaged in extracurricular imaginative writing. Specific details regarding the format of the writing process were not provided. The participants were observed in a variety of settings to include an alternative high school, their homes, and an open-mic event at a local community. In addition to the observations documented in field notes, Weinstein (2007) conducted at least one sit-down interview with each participant as well as collecting their writing. Results of the study explained that youth found extracurricular writing beneficial for identity construction, an outlet for expression, and a way to vent emotional frustrations. For instance, a participant in Weinstein’s (2007) study named Dave wrote a poem entitled, “Bitch” where he expressed his anger toward women; yet, Dave also wrote a poem entitled, “A Female Deserves Better” where he expressed his desire to treat women with respect. The titles of Dave’s poems seem to indicate a contradiction; however, Weinstein (2007) explains that the poems represent Dave’s attempt to make sense of male-female
relationships. Weinstein (2007) concludes by suggesting that the stories of young people may provide valuable insight into how youth construct their identities while negotiating constrained spaces. The findings of this study demonstrated how writing became a means for identity construction, experimentation, and an outlet for expression.

The above studies described the use of creative and expressive arts in an academic setting while the next study reviewed was conducted in a local community organization. Weinstein (2010) conducted a case study of WordCrew using qualitative ethnographic methods. The purpose of the study is to understand the typical experience and benefits of participation in youth spoken word programs. The study is based on interviews with WordCrew, a poetry-based leadership council, adult teaching artists, and youth poets involved with a youth spoken word program called WordPlay. Data was collected using ethnographic research methods consisting of participant observation, and interviews between 2005 and 2009 as the researcher attended school writing workshops and weekly WordCrew meetings. Weinstein (2010) suggested that youth were able to achieve literate identities through their participation in WordCrew. For example, Weinstein (2010) described the personal nature of writing about one’s individual experiences and then sharing those experiences in a group setting required a level of support and safety amongst group members and facilitators. Some limitations of this study are that specific sample characteristics were not provided, and the analytical process was not detailed in the methods. Despite these limitations, the study presented descriptive information about how youth spoken word programs may promote identity development and prosocial behavior of youth. These benefits may be obtained through the act of writing and also through social support from facilitators and other group members.

In sum, the sub-section on the educational applications of creative and expressive arts has
described how youth spoken word programs have been applied to youth in school and non-school settings. Much of the available literature on youth spoken word programs seems to suggest that these programs are useful for engaging youth and promoting prosocial behavior. General limitations of the youth spoken word literature are the limited amount of systematic research studies and inconsistent way that the existing studies have been described. Despite these limitations, the general findings of youth spoken word literature suggest that youth spoken word programs provide youth a safe place for identity exploration, a place to develop self-confidence and self-esteem, and an outlet for expression. The perceived benefits of participating in a youth spoken word program include experiencing a sense of belonging, having adult mentors, development of social skills, and increasing a sense of self that is observable in the actual performance of a spoken word poem.

**Therapeutic Applications of Creative and Expressive Arts**

In this subsection, I reviewed literature that focused on therapeutic applications of creative and expressive arts interventions. Studies that are similar to the YADC program are reviewed in depth. Studies falling under the criteria of therapeutic applications of creative and expressive arts are those studies that utilized a creative arts therapy in conjunction with a licensed social worker, counselor or psychologist. The literature reviewed in the therapeutic applications of creative and expressive arts subsection will describe how practitioners utilized creative and expressive arts to promote psychological well-being with participants in outpatient treatment settings, substance abuse treatment groups, and adolescents in residential treatment facilities.

Scholars following what Wright (2004) called the humanities tradition often point to the deep roots of poetry and writing as methods that have been used since ancient times to aid in
healing. There are descriptions of the healing power of arts dating back to antiquity as the Egyptians believed writing was a direct conduit to god and could provide curative benefits; yet, it was not until the 20th century that practitioners focused on therapeutic benefits of creative and expressive arts (Bolton, 2004; Heimes, 2011; Mazza, 1999). Contemporary practitioners have now adopted creative and expressive arts as an integrated method to promote healing (Connolly, Baker, & Mazza, 2004). Some clinicians, based on their clinical work with clients, have described the benefits of creative and expressive writing as providing clients the opportunity to externalize feelings, develop a sense of self-esteem, and allows them to share painful memories in a manageable form (Philips, Linington, & Penman, 1999). The perceived benefits of expressive writing and poetry may parallel traditional psychotherapy as both poetry and psychotherapy seek to explore inner feelings to resolve inner conflict (Mazza, 1999). The benefits of expressive writing seem to be rooted in the process of helping individuals overcome challenges through reframing the meaning of events and integrating the past and present. Expressive writing makes events and emotions more manageable by writing them down and providing the writer with an element of control (Connolly Baker & Mazza, 2004; Mazza, 1979; Mazza, 2003; Philips, Linington, & Penman, 1999).

The body of literature documenting the therapeutic use of creative and expressive arts is represented mostly by conceptual articles and what I would consider case study research. There is a limited amount of qualitative and quantitative studies that systematically studied the therapeutic use of creative and expressive writing interventions. Often, conceptual articles explained how journaling or other written activities were used as an expressive arts intervention (Mazza, 2012; Utley & Garza, 2011). General findings from case studies of creative and expressive writing studies described how collaborative poetry used in a large group setting could
help participant’s process personal experiences, gain self-awareness, increase self-expression, and help clients link emotions to symptoms in order to reframe their perspectives regarding the troubles they may be experiencing (Alschuler, 2000; Gillespie, 2001; Mazza, 1999). In a case study of a group of women incarcerated in Cook County jail, expressive writing provided a means to explore and reconstruct identity (Stanford, 2005). Croom (2015) suggested that practicing poetry could contribute to improved psychological well-being by positively influencing emotions, engagement experiences, social relationships, and one’s sense of purpose in life.

Alschuler (2000) presented a case study detailing a strength-based perspective of how poetry may help clients develop a sense of self-efficacy, identify innate abilities, and provide them with the self-awareness needed to make better life choices. Alschuler (2000) facilitated both an outpatient and residential drug treatment group and used poetry as a creative arts modality. The residential substance abuse treatment group had an average age of 30 years of age, with a range between 20 and 50 years of age. The groups were described as heterogeneous concerning race and gender. Exact demographic information was not provided. At each meeting, the residential substance abuse treatment group had approximately 30 individuals in attendance.

The residential substance abuse treatment group was required to attend the poetry session once a month as a part of treatment. The residents were required to read or recite poems, stories, and songs. The themes for each group were developed by the facilitator and residential staff. A stimulus was presented at the beginning of each group session for the residents to reflect on. Next, the facilitators used one of three writing strategies: freewriting, clustering, or the use of a word basket to engage group members in a writing activity. The residential substance abuse treatment group would then have the option to share what they had written by discussing it
during the group session. To create a safe environment, residential substance abuse treatment
group members were given three options for sharing: read what you wrote, read only part of it, or
pass altogether. Additionally, there was less emphasis on grammar or rhyme; instead, the group
was encouraged to express themselves. Alschuler (2000) explained that for individuals dealing
with substance abuse, having a non-judgmental and accepting environment is essential and often
leads group members to express appreciation for merely having the ability to express themselves.

The outpatient group Alschuler (2000) facilitated combined clients on parole/probation
and those who were classified as general outpatient. Before the start of the outpatient group,
individual staff members were invited to attend a training where they were introduced to poetry
therapy and were able to experience a mock therapy group session. The staff was then provided
referral forms at the training session to refer potential clients to the outpatient group. Thirty-five
referrals were made, 7 individuals never came, 6 tried participating in the group once, and 8
individuals stayed for no more than 3 session’s total. The outpatient group was co-facilitated and
met weekly for 8 months. Of the 28 clients who attended the outpatient group, 22 had criminal
justice referrals. During the 8-month open outpatient group, 14 members participated on a
consistent basis. The average age of members in the outpatient group was 29 with a range of 21
to 51. Poems chosen for the outpatient group were at a high school reading level and centered on
improving self-efficacy and relapse prevention. The most consistent outpatient group members
were described as having creativity, at least a 10th-grade reading level, and display a feeling of
hope that things would change. Furthermore, these individuals were described as having an
increase in their ability to express themselves verbally and in writing (Alschuler, 2000).

Alschuler (2000) described two different formats for facilitating a poetry therapy group.
Additionally, she provided examples of poems and the participants’ anecdotes regarding their
experience in the program. Alschuler (2000) shared the writing of one group member in particular, “I never thought that I would open my mouth in here. But the people showed me that it is okay to let go of the hurt that you’re going through at that time and that things you don’t understand will help put a clear picture on things” (p. 172).

Similar to the residential substance abuse treatment and outpatient program described above, Gillespie (2001) provided a conceptual article, which detailed the use of collaborative writing techniques in a dual-diagnosis drug and alcohol treatment program. The purpose of the article is to describe how collaborative poetry is used in a large group inpatient setting. The group consisted of 45 participants required to complete 28 days of inpatient treatment. Issues included drug and alcohol addiction, mood disorders and unresolved trauma. The participants in the program ranged from 18 to 72 years of age. There were more men than women; however, the specific characteristics for race, age, and gender were not provided. According to Gillespie (2001), the format involved three aspects: (a) the writing of poetry as a way to organize and process personal experiences, (b) writing poetry as a way to develop insight for oneself and others, and (C) writing poetry can be public and private. The facilitator would then introduce the format for the poetry group and establish a contract outlining group rules.

Overall, Gillespie (2001) described how a dual-diagnosis alcohol and drug treatment program used patient-generated collaborative poetry to stimulate group discussion. Further, Gillespie (2001) suggested group discussion provided participants the opportunity to clarify their values. The principal focus of the program was to leverage group dynamics, group writing, and individual writing experiences as a means to process personal experiences and to achieve insight into oneself and others.

Poetry and creative writing strategies were also integrated into a two-week sports
program to promote positive youth development (Mazza, 2012). The program was a pilot study designed to help middle school students develop problem-solving skills, interpersonal awareness, and conflict resolution skills through the use of sports activities followed by art, poetry, and creative writing activities (Mazza, 2012). The sessions lasted for 75 minutes and were conducted by student-athletes, faculty, undergraduate and graduate students. The sample consisted of 21 middle school students; 20 middle school students were African American, and 1 was European American. Eleven of the middle school students were male, and 10 were female between the ages of 11 to 14. Following sports activities, the students were introduced to the expressive writing component, which was guided by Mazza’s (2003) R.E.S model. The model consisted of a receptive/prescriptive component, which involved the introduction of poetic material into practice. The second component was the expressive/creative activities, which involved written and oral expression. The third component of the R.E.S model was the symbolic/ceremonial activities, which involved the use of symbols, ceremonies, and rituals. For instance, the students were introduced to Maya Angelou’s poem, Alone, and Whitney Houston’s song, The Greatest Love of All. The poem and the song were activities created to help the youth understand friendship and the importance of dignity. Through the 2-week program, the students were asked to write their poems in response to the expressive writing activities. Students were also invited to share their poems with the group. Given the preliminary nature of the study, findings are limited; however, the study describes how a program integrated creative and expressive arts to promote positive youth development.

In a quantitative study, Long and Davis (2011) utilized a quasi-experimental design to examine the effects of expressive writing on adolescent’s psychological and emotional well-being. The purpose of the study was to understand if participation in an expressive writing
activity would lead to an improved level of optimism, life satisfaction, and positive mood. Their sample consisted of 25 males living in one of three residential homes. The majority of the youth were White (88%), and their age ranged from 13-17 years old with an average age of 15. Youth were instructed to write 15 minutes a day. They were assigned to one of three conditions: life goals condition \( (n = 10) \), gratitude condition \( (n = 8) \), or expectations for tomorrow condition \( (n = 7) \). Results indicated that the three treatments were equally effective at enhancing mood and hope but not in life satisfaction. The authors also conducted a content analysis of 102 written entries generated by the youth. The findings from the content analysis revealed that the youth in their study who valued connections with their family looked forward to obtaining future education and avoiding future contact with the criminal justice system. Two limitations of the study were the small sample size and the fact that youth did not always adhere to the treatment protocols that required them to write 15 minutes a day. Despite these limitations, findings suggest that meaningful self-expression may lead to improvement on some indicators of well-being.

In sum, mostly conceptual articles and what I would consider to be case study research represent the subsection on the therapeutic use of creative and expressive arts. There is a limited amount of qualitative and quantitative studies that systematically studied the therapeutic use of creative and expressive writing interventions. Often, conceptual articles explained how journaling or other written activities could be used as an expressive arts intervention (Mazza, 2012; Utley & Garza, 2011). A trend was that studies were often written from the perspective of the program facilitator with limited analysis focused on the experience of the participant. Despite these limitations, general findings described how collaborative poetry used in a large group setting could help participant’s process personal experiences, gain self-awareness, increase self-expression, and help clients link emotions to symptoms in order to reframe their perspectives.
regarding the troubles they may be experiencing (Alschuler, 2000; Gillespie, 2001; Mazza, 1999). The one consistent finding across all studies is that self-expression may lead to improvement in perceived well-being for participants in creative and expressive arts interventions and programs (Alschuler, 2000; Gillespie, 2001; Long & Davis, 2011; Mazza, 2012). Self-expression through creative and expressive arts activities may promote prosocial behavior as participants increase their ability to express themselves and gain insight and awareness into their own experiences.

**Hip-Hop Therapy, Rap Therapy, and Creative and Expressive Arts**

In this subsection, I will review studies and conceptual articles which focused on the specific application of Hip-Hop and rap lyrics into creative and expressive arts therapy. The selected studies are studies which use rap lyrics as a stimulus to engage youth in written expression.

A group of researchers have studied how Hip-Hop, spoken word poetry, and rap lyrics, were incorporated into interventions with the goal to engage adolescents and young adults in a therapeutic relationship designed to promote prosocial behavior (DeCarlo, 2013; Elligan, 2004; Levy, 2012; Olson-McBride & Page, 2012; Tillie Allen, 2005; Tyson, 2002; Tyson, 2004). Hip-Hop is a cultural practice that includes Breakdancing, Rap, Graffiti Art, Deejay, Beatboxing, Street Fashion, Street Language, Street Knowledge, and Entrepreneurism (KRS-One, 9 Elements, 2003). Note that rap and Hip-Hop are often used interchangeably to reference the music and lyrics that artist create. Integration of Hip-Hop music and rap lyrics into therapeutic practice typically involve the use of music and lyrics that are politically conscious and deliver a message to evoke critical thinking (Tyson, 2004). The facilitator or clinician introduces the music and lyrics and then works with the client to interpret and make meaning of the lyrics.
Incorporating rap/spoken word lyrics into an intervention may help youth build a sense of self while drawing from their cultural context.

Rap therapy, Hip-Hop spoken word therapy, and group rap therapy have subtle differences, but all the approaches share the common goal of engaging clients in their cultural context with the aim of promoting prosocial behavior. Elligan (2004) outlines a five-stage model of rap therapy and provides 10 clinical case studies demonstrating how rap therapy can be used with individual clients. Rap therapy follows a five-stage plan that requires the facilitators to (a) assess and plan, (b) build an alliance, (c) reframe thoughts and behaviors, (d) reinforce behavior through writing, and (e) maintain change.

The assessment stage is the foundation for understanding the existing influence of rap music in the client’s life and, if and how much they are influenced by Hip-Hop culture. The assessments help to develop a plan for how rap music will be used to promote behavioral change. The next step in the model requires the clinician to build a working alliance with the client, and this is accomplished by incorporating the client’s musical preference in the session as clients are asked to bring in their favorite music. After listening to the music with the client, the content is discussed and processed in a nonjudgmental way. The process of sharing and the openness created by sharing one’s favorite music sets the foundation for a working alliance. In the third stage, the clinician works to broaden the client's appreciation of other forms of rap music that promote values and ideas that the client has not yet considered or in the past overlooked. In this way, the clinician or facilitator incorporates prosocial and positive forms of rap music in subsequent sessions. Working with the conflicting messages in rap music may help the client understand their internal conflicts and clarify their values which may then lead to the client’s adoption of prosocial behavior. In the fourth stage, clients are challenged to write raps or poems.
The actual writing of their poems requires the client to engage with and take responsibility for what is written. In a sense, the act of writing brings awareness to the decisions that the clients are making. In the final stage, the client may complete questionnaires and surveys to measure their behavior following the rap therapy intervention. The overall goal of rap therapy is to help the client gain awareness of the changes they are making.

Elligan (2004) explains that the five stages outlined above may vary in the order that they are completed. Elligan (2004) then presents ten case studies of clients to document the use of rap therapy. In general, the clients discussed in Elligan’s (2004) case studies struggled with anger issues, depression, and low self-esteem. Rap therapy was used to help these clients by increasing their insight and critical thinking skills regarding consumption of rap music and Hip-Hop culture. By broadening the client’s rap music interests, they can find and enjoy rap music that includes positive messages and promotes prosocial behavior. This process is what allows the client to begin the internalization process and incorporate new cognitions into their behavior (Elligan, 2004, p.168).

Two additional models are Hip-Hop spoken word therapy and group rap therapy. Both approaches aim to have clients analyze the content of lyrics and poetry and then write their poetry with the goal of the client exploring their emotions and affect (DeCarlo, 2013; Levy, 2012). At the core of both Hip-Hop spoken word therapy and group rap therapy is the goal of using rap lyrics as a culturally meaningful psychotherapy technique to develop prosocial behaviors. A difference between the two models is that Hip Hop spoken word therapy is a model that integrates person-centered theory and cognitive behavioral techniques, while group rap therapy is a group psychotherapy technique that grew out of a need to intervene with youth placed at risk in urban environments. In addition, group rap therapy was an approach that has
resonated explicitly with African American youth (DeCarlo, 2013; Levy, 2012). Tyson (2002) found that when rap lyrics were used with a group of African American and Latino youth, the youth tended to improve their sense of self-identity, harmony, and cooperation in the group process. Findings further suggested that the youth enjoyed Hip-Hop therapy group more than other groups, wanted the groups to continue, and expressed appreciation that the facilitator respected their music (Tyson, 2002; Tyson, 2004).

Ciardiello (2003) conducted a case study to describe a Hip Hop therapy group provided to adolescents in a residential treatment setting. The participants were approximately 9 adolescent males and females in a residential treatment program. The group operated as an open group and took new members as existing youth left the treatment facility. Group members met an hour each week and would listen to and read rap lyrics. After the song was over, the participants were encouraged to write down their reactions and were then invited to share them. As the group built cohesion and trust, the facilitator was able to incorporate music and lyrics that were more emotional. The model described by Ciardiello (2003) incorporates group-based activities, Hip-Hop therapy, and psychoeducation. The model also incorporates cognitive behavior principles of peer modeling and positive reinforcement as members learned to confront and challenge undesirable behavior in the group. Ciardiello (2003) provided an excerpt of a group meeting where five residents processed the song, Love is Blind, which is a song about a young woman who is a victim of domestic violence. The group participants described how domestic violence had influenced their life. One member, in particular, was Edwardo who disclosed how his mom was assaulted by his stepdad and described how her assault made him mad (Ciardiello, 2003, p. 113). The excerpt highlighted how rap lyrics were used as a stimulus to help adolescents self-disclose, identify, and connect with emotions in a group therapy setting.
Tyson (2002) conducted a quasi-experimental study on treatment outcomes of a Hip-Hop therapy group with 11 adolescents at a residential treatment facility in Miami. There were five participants in the Hip Hop treatment group: 2 were African American males, 1 was a European American male, and there was 1 Hispanic male and female. The average age of the participants in the Hip-Hop therapy group was 15.4 years of age. The comparison group included 6 participants: 2 were African American females, 1 was a European American female, 2 were African American males, and one was a Hispanic male. The average age of the comparison group was 16.2 years of age. Each participant completed a pretest and posttest survey that measured self-concept and peer relationships. Participants in the Hip-Hop therapy group participated in 12 sessions in which participants listened to Hip-Hop songs and then processed their reactions with the group facilitator. Due to the small sample size, the quantitative findings were inconclusive. Tyson (2002) asserted that even though the findings were inconclusive, they trend in the predicted direction. The trend suggested that participants in the Hip-Hop therapy group had the greatest improvements in self-concept and peer relations. Therefore, Tyson (2002) conducted in-depth debriefing sessions with each of the participants. The data collected during the in-depth debriefing was presented as qualitative data analysis. The findings indicate that participants enjoyed the group more than other groups, youth expressed excitement and enthusiasm for the group, and also expressed a desire to create their songs and then share them during group. Although the findings of this study are limited, it demonstrates how Hip Hop therapy can be used to promote engagement and self-expression.

DeCarlo and Hockman (2004) conducted a quasi-experimental study to compare treatment outcomes of group rap therapy to psychoeducational group therapy. The sample consisted of 21 African-American males, 13 to 15 years of age, who were enrolled in the eighth
through tenth grade from a large Midwestern city. The average age of the participants was 14 years of age. The sample of participants consisted of three group conditions that were tested against each other. Of the 21 participants, 7 were incarcerated for violent offenses, 7 were on probation, and 7 were students without a criminal background. All participants attended both the psychoeducational group and the Rap therapy group once a week for 6 weeks. In the Rap therapy group, participants were asked to analyze lyrics from rap songs and then to write responses to excerpts on specific topics such as female gender abuse, anger management, impulse control, reasoning, morality, responsibility, and identity. Participants or group leaders chose the psychoeducational group topics. Each of the participants completed the RAP Therapy Assessment Scale (RATS), a post-test measure created for the study to evaluate group work usefulness. The Rap therapy assessment scale was designed to measure group member’s affective responses, prosocial skills, and preference for Rap group therapy or psychoeducational group therapy. The findings of the study suggested that the participants were in favor of Rap therapy as this method was enjoyable, the one they preferred the most, and the one they believed their schoolmates would prefer. Further, Rap therapy was the preferred treatment to discuss and understand anger management, impulse control, avoidance of delinquent behavior, development of moral behavior, female gender abuse, and decision-making. One of the most robust findings of the study is that group Rap therapy strengthened participant’s prosocial skills.

Olson-McBride and Page (2012) conducted a specific poetry therapy intervention, which incorporated Hip-Hop and Rap lyrics to engage adolescents that were considered high risk. The purpose was to use the poetry therapy in conjunction with creative writing to engage youth and promote self-disclosure and self-expression for adolescents participating in poetry therapy group. The curriculum used in their study was designed to move through three phases. In the first phase,
popular music and lyrics were used from rap and R&B genres to engage and capture the group’s interest. In the second phase, the group facilitator guides the group to create their poem. In the third phase, the group reads their poems out loud and receives feedback from their peers. The typical poetry therapy group would meet 45 to 60 minutes each week, and each group lasted for ten sessions.

The sample consisted of participants selected from an alternative school and a transitional living program. The researchers asked the caseworkers at the alternative school and a transitional living program to select youth that might benefit from participation in a creative arts-based group therapy intervention. The sample consisted of three groups. Group one consisted of four males and one female enrolled at the alternative school. Five of the six participants were African American, one participant was European American, and the average age of the group was 14.85 years. Group 2 consisted of six African American females and one African American male from the transitional living program, and the average age of the group was 17.29 years. Group 3 had five African American males enrolled at the alternative school, and the average age of the group was 15 years. A majority of the individuals in the sample had behavioral problems as they were removed from traditional school. Participants in groups 1 and 3 were in state custody as a result of involvement with the juvenile justice system.

Olson-McBride and Page (2012) utilized a video camera to record each group session and later transcribe those observations. The researchers conducted a content analysis on each transcript to determine the presence of and possible changes in the development of self-disclosure over the course of the intervention. They coded self-disclosure when a participant’s statement revealed personal information to the group. Findings indicated that the use of song lyrics operated as a neutral and safe starting point to participate in the group. Olson-McBride and
Page (2012) described this process as, song to self. The lyrics operated as the stimulus to evoke self-disclosure and self-expression from the group members. One example of a song to self-statement that occurred following the presentation of Talib Kweli’s song, “Get By” as a group member was able to connect with a lyric about individuals selling drugs out the back of their homes to get by. Group members were described as being able to discuss personal information about their past, present and future selves. Through self-disclosure, group members discovered similarities and differences. The acts of self-disclosure helped group members to develop positive relationships with each other.

In sum, the subsection on Hip Hop therapy, rap therapy, and expressive arts described how a group of researchers incorporated rap lyrics into creative and expressive arts interventions to engage adolescents and young adults in a therapeutic relationship designed to promote prosocial behavior. One of the perceived benefits is that the use of rap lyrics engages clients in their cultural context, which may strengthen interventions designed to promote prosocial behavior (DeCarlo, 2013; Elligan, 2004; Levy, 2012; Olson-McBride & Page, 2012; Tillie Allen, 2005; Tyson, 2002, 2004). Tyson (2002) found that when rap lyrics were used with a group of African American and Latino youth, the youth tended to improve their sense of self-identity, harmony, and cooperation in the group process. Findings further suggested that the youth enjoyed Hip Hop therapy group more than other groups, wanted the groups to continue, and expressed appreciation that the facilitator respected their music (Tyson, 2002, 2004).

The general findings are that rap lyrics used in conjunction with creative arts therapy may help participants engage in the expressive activities and begin the internalization process to incorporate new cognitions which may promote the development of prosocial behavior (DeCarlo, 2013; Levy, 2012; Elligan, 2004, p. 168). One of the most influential findings was that group rap
therapy strengthened participant’s prosocial skills (DeCarlo & Hockman, 2004). Another important finding was that acts of self-disclosure helped group participants develop positive relationships with each other (Olson-McBride & Page, 2012). Overall, the studies in this subsection described how the use of rap lyrics in therapy could be a culturally meaningful psychotherapy technique to help participants take responsibility for what they write while gaining awareness of the changes they are making. Therefore, the use rap lyrics as a creative and expressive arts intervention may promote prosocial behavior as participants increase their ability to express themselves and gain insight and awareness into their own experiences.

**Chapter Conclusion and Summary of Integrating Creative and Expressive Arts**

The literature reviewed in this chapter covered theoretical articles, meta-analytic studies, and research studies from criminal justice, humanities, and psychology disciplines to develop a framework to consider how a young adult problem-solving court program integrated creative and expressive arts to promote prosocial behavior of young adults. The chapter began with a discussion of the criminal justice system, relevant legislative decisions, and selected theories of juvenile delinquency. Two goals of the criminal justice section were to orient the less familiar reader with critical elements of the justice system and to provide a context to understand how young adults experience creative and expressive arts in a system that traditionally relies on punishment to control behavior. The literature reviewed in the criminal justice section suggests a trend toward therapeutic jurisprudence or problem-solving courts where courts and judges make decisions with the goal of reducing future criminal acts through treatment of underlying psychosocial factors (Aos, Miller, & Drake, 2007; Huddleston & Marlowe, 2011; Latimer, Morton-Bourgon, & Chrétien, 2006; Miller & Johnson, 2009; Shaffer, 2006; Wilson, Mitchell, & MacKenzie, 2006). Decisions made from a therapeutic jurisprudence or problem-solving court
model run counter to the traditional punitive models as therapeutic jurisprudence allows the judge to consider developmental research and theory when making decisions about a defendant (Mackinem & Higgins, 2009b; Wexler, 2002; Winick, 1997, 2003, 2013; Winick & Wexler, 2001). While there is empirical support for therapeutic jurisprudence and problem-solving court models, much of the literature accounts for the experiences of the judge and administrative staff or aggregated participant outcome data (Aos, Miller, & Drake, 2007; Gottfredson & Exum, 2002; Gottfredson, Najaka, & Kearley, 2003; Gottfredson, Kearley, Najaka, & Rocha, 2007; Gottfredson, Najaka, Kearley, & Rocha, 2006; Huddleston & Marlowe, 2011; Latimer, Morton-Bourgon, & Chrétien, 2006; Shaffer, 2006; Wilson, Mitchell, & MacKenzie, 2006). Less is known about participant experience in the problem-solving court setting. The lack of research focused on participant’s experiences in a problem-solving court warrants further investigation.

The second section of this chapter provided an overview of selected developmental theories to provide a context for understanding young adult participants aged 17-20 and the developmental processes that characterize this group. The fundamental idea from this section is that young adulthood represents a stage in life where it is normative for young people to experience a disruption in their identity. Young adulthood is a crucial developmental period where individuals are vulnerable to deficits in resisting peer influence, controlling impulses, and regulating emotions; but, they also have increased cognitive capacities for identity exploration (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Erickson, 1963, 1968; Farrington, Loeber, & Howell, 2012). Thus, young adulthood represents a time of possibilities (Arnett, 2000, 2006; Erickson, 1963, 1968). Individuals involved in the criminal justice system during young adulthood may come to see themselves as criminals and prematurely foreclose on a deviant identity before they have had the opportunity for self-exploration. This section highlighted the importance of facilitating self-
exploration for young adults enrolled in interventions and programs aimed at influencing prosocial behavior.

The third and final section of this chapter reviewed two categories of literature specific to creative and expressive arts. This section covered health and psychological outcomes of creative and expressive writing as well as interventions and programmatic applications of creative and expressive arts. The framework developed in this section highlighted the positive benefits of writing to improve health and well-being, increase self-understanding, and bolster one’s capacity for emotional regulation. The section also highlighted how the creative and expressive arts could be applied in varied contexts of school, community-based agencies, and residential treatment settings. Often individuals who participated in interventions and programmatic applications of creative and expressive arts benefited from having a safe place for identity exploration, self-expression, and for developing self-confidence (Croom, 2015; Crow, 2000; Esterling, L’Abate, Murray, & Pennebaker, 1999; Frattaroli, 2006; Lepore & Smyth, 2002; Long & Davis, 2011; Lowe, 2006; Mazza, 2012; Pennebaker, 2000; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Pennebaker, Hughes, & O’Heerow, 1987; Reyes, 2006; Sloan & Marx, 2004; Smyth & Pennebaker, 2008; Smyth, True, & Souto, 2001; Williams, 2015; Weinstein, 2007). Taken together, the body of literature reviewed in this section demonstrates that self-expression through creative and expressive arts activities may promote prosocial outcomes such as participants increased ability to express themselves and gain insight and awareness into their own experiences. Furthermore, creative and expressive arts interventions can be created to engage participants in their own cultural context which may further strengthen interventions designed to promote prosocial outcomes (DeCarlo, 2013; Elligan, 2004; Levy, 2012; Olson-McBride & Page, 2012; Tillie Allen, 2005; Tyson, 2002, 2004).
The goal of the sections covered in this chapter was to provide a conceptual framework and to situate this dissertation study within the growing psychological and interdisciplinary literature aimed at providing services to underrepresented populations. Three research questions guide this study. The first research question asks how and why the creative and expressive arts were integrated into a problem-solving court to promote prosocial behavior of young adults. The second research question asks how young adult participants experience creative and expressive arts programming. The third and final research question asks what the perceived benefits of creative and expressive arts are for young adults in a problem-solving court program. The three research questions were constructed to understand effective practices and prosocial outcomes through investigation of the Young Adult Diversion Court. Through the specific focus on the stories that young adult participants tell about their experience in the YADC, I represent the experiences of a population that is typically underrepresented. Further, through understanding the unique experiences of young adults in the context of a problem-solving court program, I reveal innovative ways of engaging young adults through creative expression and thus influencing adoption of prosocial behavior and identity. The method for making sense of the participants’ stories in the context of a problem-solving court program and to also understand the influence of creative expression as the young adults navigate the court system is presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the method of inquiry and rationale for a dissertation exploring the integration of creative and expressive arts in a young adult problem-solving court program designed to promote prosocial outcomes for participants. In this dissertation, I used existing data from a study that explored the broad organizational strategies and participant experience in a young adult problem-solving court diversion program. The use of pre-existing data originally collected for other purposes is an appropriate method for generating knowledge about populations that are protected, vulnerable, and hard to reach such as individuals in this study who were facing criminal sanctions (Boydell, Gladstone, & Volpe, 2006; Heaton, 2004, 2008; Kovandžić et al., 2011; Sandelowski, 1997). In this dissertation, existing qualitative data from a 20-month ethnographic study will be examined within in a new conceptual framework based on new research questions and analytical model developed for this dissertation.

In this dissertation, I build from and expand upon, the original study by focusing on the integration of the creative and expressive arts. I used an analytic approach informed by interpretive interactionism and narrative methods to understand how young adults explain their experiences through culturally-influenced story form (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; McAdams, 1993). Narrative contributes to this research in multiple ways: as a method to understand lived experience, as a theoretical construct to understand identity development and emotional regulation, and as an artifact - textual data to be analyzed.

This chapter is divided into five sections which describe the overall research method for this dissertation: (a) The Original Study, (b) Qualitative Framework for Dissertation Study, (c) Sources of Data for Dissertation Study, (d) Method for Data Analysis, and (e) Review of
Research Rigor.

The first section provides information to describe the original study from which the data for my dissertation were collected. The second section describes the framework used for the dissertation study. The third section describes the sources of data used in the analysis. The fourth section describes the method for data analysis. The fifth section describes the promotion of rigor in this applied research study.

**The Original Study**

The following section will describe the original study and is divided into three subsections: (a) Research Site and Setting, (b) Sample and Participants in the Original Study, and (c) Data Collection for the Original Study. The subsection, “Research Site and Setting,” provides information about diversion laws and regulations that inform how young adults are admitted into the program, information about how the problem-solving court functions, and information about the weekly programming sessions where the creative arts activities took place. The subsection, “Sample and Participants in the Original Study,” will describe the sample of participants who agreed to participate in the original study. The third and final subsection, “Data Collection for the Original Study,” will describe the methods used to collect data, and all the sources of data collected in the original study.

The original study used an interpretive ethnographic approach (Denzin, 1989), a cultural view of qualitative research that drew inferences grounded in field observation and inquiry based on interactions with participants. The original study was also guided by narrative inquiry to describe how individuals explain their experiences through culturally-influenced story form (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; McAdams, 1993). The focus of the larger study was the broad organizational strategies and participant experience in a young adult problem-solving court
diversion program (Jones, Pope, & Tinnon, 2014; Pope, 2015; Pope, Jones, & Tinnon, 2014).

Over a 20-month period, the research team observed weekly program sessions, bi-weekly court sessions and YADC staff meetings, and community service activities (see HSIRB documents in Appendix A). While observing the young adult problem-solving court diversion program, the research team wrote field notes to document relevant experiences and conducted surveys and interviews. The following description of the research site and setting provides information about diversion laws and regulations which describe how young adults are admitted into the program, information about how the problem-solving court functions, and information about the weekly programming sessions where the creative arts activities took place.

**Research Site and Setting**

The Young Adult Diversion Court (YADC) is a probation program of the 8th District Court of Kalamazoo County. The program operates as a collaborative community-based model, which involves multiple local organizations and grant funding from community organizations. The program is an alternative to traditional probation programs based on a punitive approach. This alternative program is designed to empower first-time offenders to find their voice and self-worth and to explore their role in their families and communities. It is hoped that by empowering these young adults in this type of treatment it will reduce the risk of re-offending; thus, breaking the cycle of recidivism. To be eligible for admission into the program an individual must meet the following criteria: participants must be between the ages of 17-20 and be on probation under a diversion status established by several state laws. These laws are discussed next.

**Diversion laws and regulations.** Holmes Youthful Trainee Act (HYTA) is a state law, which allows a judge to assign individuals between ages 17 and 20 to the status of youthful trainee. A youthful trainee represents an individual between the ages of 17 and 20 who is given
the opportunity to avoid having a criminal history. To receive HYTA, youth who have allegedly committed a crime must plead guilty and demonstrate a measure of responsibility for their actions. The individual may then be placed in prison or on probation at the discretion of the sentencing judge. HYTA sentencing allows for a deferred judgment, which means an offense is not reported as a conviction and stays out of the public record unless the individual fails to complete probation. Individuals charged with a felony for which the maximum punishment is life imprisonment, a major controlled substance offense, or a traffic offense are excluded from receiving diversion under the state law.

Another state law applies to individuals who do not have any prior convictions for controlled substances. When an individual pleads guilty or is found guilty of possession of a controlled substance, the court can grant diversion status. To receive a controlled substance diversion, the individual must first plead guilty then they are placed on probation without entry of the plea. If probation is completed, then the charge does not go on their record (Legislative Council State of Michigan, 2009).

Similar to the process involving a controlled substance, when an individual who has not been convicted previously of an assaultive crime pleads guilty to or is found guilty of assault, they too are eligible for diversion. Eligibility depends on if the victim of the assault is someone in close and significant relation as opposed to a stranger. Then the court, without entering a judgment of guilt and with the consent of the accused, prosecuting attorney, and the victim, may defer further proceedings and place the accused on probation (Legislative Council State of Michigan, 2009). Cases falling under these circumstances also allow the judge to require the accused to participate in a mandatory counseling program and to pay reasonable costs of the mandatory counseling program. The judge can also order the accused to participate in a drug
treatment court. The referral process for the diversion program in the proposed study follows a similar pattern. Individuals may be referred to the diversion program by their probation officers or by order of the sentencing judge. If the youth completes the program, they can keep their diversion and thus avoid having a criminal charge registered in their personal history.

**Problem-solving court.** The broad goals of the Young Adult Diversion Court are to address the criminal charges that brought the individual to the court's attention and also uncover and address the underlying issues of the criminal behavior. In this way, the problem-solving court diversion program can be conceptualized having two primary components, the actual problem-solving court, and the programming. The primary function of the court is to address criminal charges. Criminal charges are addressed in the mandatory bi-weekly court review sessions with the judge. In the court review sessions, young adults stand before the court to discuss how they are meeting the stated goals of their diversion. Common goals involve abstaining from substance use, finding a job, finishing education requirements, and for some, getting access to counseling services. Young adults are also required to meet with their probation officer on a weekly basis. During this meeting, youth may be tested for substance use. The probation officer may also expose participants to time management activities, provide them with bus tokens, and offer vocational assistance. Following court review, individuals attend programming events, which are provided by community-based agencies collaborating with the court.

**Programming.** Young adults are expected to attend programming one evening each week. In programming, young adults are given the opportunity to work toward establishing their identity and self-worth while also learning to assume personal and community responsibility. Programming is structured to provide participants with individual support, a warm meal, and
encouragement of personal development and accountability to themselves. A primary component of programming is a curriculum informed by creative and expressive arts. A typical programming night involves the facilitators introducing a topic or model poem to engage participants in the group discussion. Following group discussion, young adults participate in writing assignments revolving around the chosen topic or prompt. They then may individually choose to share insights with the group. Further, these weekly writings may also become a part of the required final performance piece. The final performance piece, a “letter to the court,” is often a narrative account where the young adult appears before the court and describes what they gained from the problem-solving court program. They share their individual goals as well as their hopes for the future. These narratives are a requirement before graduating the program; however, not all participants graduate the program.

The following subsection will describe the sample and participants in the original study. Description of the sample and participants are divided into three categories based on the source of data. These three categories include Survey sample, Broad interview sample, and Program administration interview sample. The survey sample consisted of 31 young adults who completed instruments to measure youth assets and outcomes. The survey data was collected for the original study and was not used in my dissertation. I did use data collected from the broad interview sample, and program administration interview sample, and expanded on this dataset with the addition of follow up interviews and observations focusing on the expressive and written arts.

**Sample and Participants in the Original Study**

The observational sample in the original study contained 55 participants who were observed for 20 months by the research team across multiple settings over the course of the
study. These settings that were described earlier included problem-solving court proceedings, weekly programming, and community-based activities. The participants were 55 young adults on probation that were in jeopardy of failing regular probation and subsequently enrolled in a young adult problem-solving court program. Thirty-four participants were male, and 21 were female. Thirty-five participants were African American, 15 were European American, 2 identified as Biracial and 3 Hispanic. The young adults ranged in age from 17 to 20 with a mean of 18.2. Twenty percent were enrolled for being a minor in possession of alcohol, 32.7% of participants were enrolled in the program due to having a first time drug charge, 20% were enrolled for minor in possession of an illegal substance, 18.2% were enrolled for retail fraud and 29.1% were enrolled under Holmes Youth Trainee Act (HYTA). Typically, a young adult participant eligible for HYTA had charges such as destruction and or theft of personal property. In this sample, 18.2% percent of the individuals successfully graduated the program. Fifty-five percent failed to complete the program and were often terminated for failing to appear. At the completion of data collection, 20% of the young adults were still enrolled, and 7.3 were on warrant status; meaning that the participants failed to complete the requirements of probation. A table is provided below to describe the sample involved in the original study.

**Survey sample.** The survey sample consisted of 31 young adults who completed instruments to measure youth assets and outcomes. The first survey with YADC participants assessed the quality of life indicators (Patrick, Edwards, & Topolski, 2002), and the second focused on developmental assets (Klein et al., 2006) and career aspirations and efficacy. Nineteen participants in the survey sample were male and 12 were female. Twenty-two were African American, 5 were European American, 2 identified as Biracial, and 2 were Hispanic. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 20 with a mean of 18.1 years of age.
### Table 1

*Sample of Original Study*

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</tbody>
</table>

The first measure was the Youth Quality of Life Instrument-Research Version (YQOL–R, Patrick, Edwards, & Topolski, 2002). This instrument assesses essential areas of young people’s lives as previously defined by adolescents, their parents, their teachers, and health care providers (Edwards, Huebner, Connell, & Patrick 2002). The YQOL–R is a self-report paper and
pencil instrument that is readable at the U.S 4th grade reading level. The YQOL–R consists of 41 perceptive items and 15 contextual items. Perceptual items are those known only to the adolescents themselves and cannot be observed by others, while contextual items are those that are potentially verifiable by others. The scales of the YQOL–R demonstrated internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.77 to 0.96), reproducibility (ICCs = 0.74 to 0.85), expected associations with other constructs and ability to distinguish between known groups (Patrick, Edwards, & Topolski, 2002).

The second measure was the Rochester Evaluation of Asset Development for Youth Tool (READY, Klein, et al., 2006). The READY tool is a self-report, pencil and paper instrument designed to be completed by program participants ages 10 and older. The survey is written at a 4th-grade reading level and takes, on average, about 10 to 15 minutes to complete. The READY tool consists of 24 items designed to measure 5 constructs; staff relationships, program effectiveness, self-control and empathy, communication, and decision-making. Reliability estimates for past test scores of the READY tool ranged from (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.61 to 0.85).

**Broad interview sample.** The broad interview sample consisted of 20 interviews that explored participating in the young adult diversion program. The broad sample consists of 20 participants of which, 13 were male and 7 were female. Fifteen participants were African American, 2 were European American, 2 identified as Biracial and 1 identified as Hispanic. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 20 with a mean of 18.2 years of age. Participants in the broad interview sample were interviewed with Interview Protocol 1, which asked 17 open-ended questions about the general experience of the young adult participants (see Appendix A). Participants in the broad interview sample were also interviewed with Interview Protocol 2, which asked 16 open-ended questions about the general experience of the young adult
participants and change over time (see Appendix A).

**Program administration interview sample.** The program administration interview sample includes 8 interviews of the program coordinators, programming facilitators, the judge, and probation officers. Inclusionary criteria for adult coordinators included their involvement in the coordination and implementation of the problem-solving diversion program. These professionals (ages 25-60) were from the court and community-based agencies. The YADC staff were interviewed with the Interview Protocol for Coordinators, which asked 24 open-ended questions about their role in problem-solving court program (see Appendix A).

**Procedures and Data Collection for the Original Study**

As discussed earlier the data described in this dissertation were collected using qualitative methods by a three-member research team over a 20-month period. In the following subsections, I will describe my role as a researcher and provide details regarding the procedures used for data collection. The following subsections describe how the original data was collected and detail the procedures used to collect each source of data. I also discuss ethical considerations for collecting data with specialized populations. I have organized this subsection into seven subtopics: (a) researcher as an instrument, (b) participant recruitment, (c) procedures for conducting observations, (d) procedures for conducting interviews, (e) procedures for collecting written artifacts, (f) procedures for conducting surveys, and (g) ethical considerations for collecting data with specialized populations.

**Participant recruitment in the original study.** Young adult participants were recruited for interviews through an announcement at weekly programming (see Appendix A). Individuals were informed of the objectives, activities, and requirements of the study. They were told that participation was voluntary, confidential, and was in no way connected to their case or progress.
in the diversion program. The consent procedure was explicitly designed so that court officials were not involved in acquiring consent and did not know who was participating in the study. The adult program coordinators were asked to step outside the room so that coordinators were not a part of the recruitment process. The research team passed out consent forms to young adults and then collected the informed consent forms in a large envelope. Individuals provided informed consent by signing and returning the form or declined to participate by returning the form unsigned. The research team then responded to young adults who expressed interest in the study by contacting them in person at a regular program session to schedule an interview. Adult program coordinators were recruited through an announcement at the problem-solving court diversion program team planning meeting. Program coordinators were informed of the objectives, activities, and requirements of the study (see Appendix A). They were told that participation was voluntary and confidential.

**Procedures for conducting observations in the original study.** Over the 20-month period, observations were collected by Dr. Jeffrey Jones, the principal investigator of the original study, an undergraduate student majoring in criminal justice, and myself. Observations were collected across three settings: court, programming, and community events such as volunteering at the mission or feeding the homeless. Observations in the court setting included team review meetings with judge, adult coordinators, and probation staff. Often, in team meetings, programmatic decisions were made and discussed. Bi-weekly court sessions involved a one-hour meeting and a one-hour court review where the judge, probation staff, and program coordinators reviewed the progress of each young adult in the program. Following court review, the young adults appeared before the judge and discussed their progress through the program. The next setting where observations were conducted was programming. On a weekly basis, the
The research team attended programming which took place at the community mental health building. Programming typically lasted from one hour up to 3 hours depending on that week’s presentation. During each programming session, the youth were provided meals. The third setting in which observations were made included community events. For instance, the youth were required to conduct community service to work off hours. The youth volunteered at various places. For example, the youth volunteered at the gospel mission and were required to feed the people in attendance. They were tasked with serving meals and rationing out portions in an appropriate manner. They also helped to rearrange the stock room. Community events lasted between one hour and up to 3 hours.

**Procedures for conducting interviews in the original study.** The research team had conversations and conducted interviews with young adult participants, program coordinators, probation officers, and the judge. The semi-structured interviews with the program coordinators, probation officers, and the judge included open-ended survey questions (see Appendix A). Interviews with the adult coordinators lasted between 30 minutes up to 90 minutes. Similar interviews were conducted with the young adults. These interviews lasted from 15 minutes up to 60 minutes. The semi-structured interviews with the young adults included open-ended questions (see Appendix A). The interviews were taped and transcribed.

**Procedures for collecting written artifacts in the original study.** Written artifacts included letters to the court, reflective writing assignments of young adults who consented to be in the research study, and handouts obtained from programming and various presentations. Handouts were scanned and uploaded as PDF files for analysis. Letters to the court and other written artifacts were obtained from the program coordinators.

**Procedures for conducting surveys in the original study.** The research team also
collected surveys to assess developmental assets and quality of life indicators. The surveys were used to inform interviews with participants and to contextualize data sources with observations at YADC planning, court, and programming sessions. The first survey with YADC participants assessed the quality of life indicators (Patrick, Edwards, & Topolski, 2002) and the second focused on developmental assets (Klein et al., 2006) and career aspirations and efficacy.

**Ethical considerations for collecting data with specialized populations in the original study.** It is important to note that this population of young adults is a vulnerable group and protected class because of their involvement in the justice system. Additionally, some of the youth were 17 years of age, so a waiver was granted by the review board as the young adults were considered adults in the court system. To ensure participants protection, the original researchers consulted several Western Michigan University (WMU) faculty who researched juvenile and young adult populations. The original researchers also consulted research in the area of juvenile and young adult populations (specifically National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2013; Wolbransky, Goldstein, Giallella, & Heilbrun, 2013) to identify appropriate measures to ensure ethical and proper research. The consultations with both faculty and existing literature led the research team to make deliberate decisions about data collection - a “firewall,” or barrier, between the court and the research study, was implemented. The original research team did this by planning to recruit participants during programming and not during the court session. This choice allowed the research team to reduce perceived coercion (or the perception that participation is required as a part of the probation process). Court officials did not introduce the study, and the court was not notified who was in (and who was not in) the study.

**Qualitative Framework for Dissertation Study**

This dissertation aims to explore a problem-solving court program’s integration of creative and expressive arts to promote the prosocial development of young adults. The research questions grew out of the original study, which focused on the broad organizational strategies
and participant experience in the young adult problem-solving court diversion program. During the original study, I observed the importance of the creative and expressive arts in shaping young adult behavior and revised the interview protocol to examine the use of creative and expressive arts specifically. The original HSIRB application was revised and approved, and I conducted 12 follow up interviews explicitly targeting the young adults’ experience of the creative and expressive arts (see Appendix B). Following HSIRB approval, observations of programming specifically focused on the creative and expressive arts activities. The new HSIRB protocol also requested the use of written artifacts such as reflective writing assignments and letters to the court. The path from the larger organizational study to the specific focus on the creative and expressive arts involved revising the HSIRB protocol, conducting follow up interviews, focusing observations of programming on the creative and expressive arts, and gaining access to the expressive writing of young adults.

Therefore, the data collected in the original study was analyzed through a new framework which focused on the participants’ experience of the creative and expressive arts, and new data were collected to focus on this area of interest. The framework used to analyze the data blended two approaches: interpretive interactionism and narrative inquiry. The combined approaches of interpretive interactionism and narrative research provided a method to make sense of the participants’ stories in the context of a problem-solving court program and also to understand the influence of creative expression on young adults as they navigate the court system.

The following subsections describe the philosophical assumptions and qualitative approach that will be used to analyze the data. This section is organized into four subsections: (a) Philosophical Assumptions of Qualitative Research, (b) Interpretive Interactionism, (c) Narrative Research, and (d) Researcher as an Instrument. Following these four subsections, I will
describe the specific method of data analysis.

Philosophical Assumptions of Qualitative Research

An interpretivist-constructivist paradigm informs this dissertation. A paradigm refers to a set of beliefs about the world that guide how it should be understood and studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). An interpretivist-constructivist paradigm assumes knowledge is both individually and socially constructed. Further, this paradigm rests on the assumption that it is possible to understand the subjective meaning of social action in an objective manner (Schwandt, 2000). The interpretivist-constructivist paradigm operates on the assumption that reality is not separate from the knower; instead, it is constructed both in the human mind and in complex social interactions (Morrow, Rakhsa, & Castaneda, 2001). At the core of this system are beliefs regarding the role of the researcher and the individuals being researched.

This belief system assumes that understanding and meaning are developed through interaction. Thus, the purpose of research in this paradigm is to uncover the meanings people construct or to understand how those meanings are constructed (Morrow, Rakhsa, & Castaneda, 2001). Working from an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm allows researchers to use open-ended questioning and observations to study the interactions between people within a given setting. The researchers then attempt to interpret the meanings that others have about the world (Creswell, 2013).

In the next subsections, I will detail both interpretive interactionism and narrative research methods. The analytical steps detailed in these two subsections guided my analysis but were not explicitly followed. Instead, I used interpretive interactionism and narrative research methods to analyze the data. The specific steps for how I analyzed the data will be discussed in the section method for data analysis for dissertation study. I will now review interpretive
interactionism, followed by narrative research methods in the next subsection.

**Interpretive Interactionism**

Interpretive interactionism is a framework within the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm that combines symbolic interactionism, hermeneutics, feminist social theory, and critical theory (Denzin, 1989, 2001). Interpretive interactionism aims to describe and interpret the lived experience that individuals ascribe to social interactions. The analysis of my dissertation study was informed and guided by Denzin’s (2001) interpretive interactionism. Interpretive interactionism highlights everyday experiences or turning points that forever change and shape individuals’ lives. Denzin explained that interpretive interactionism emphasizes the epiphany, which he conceptualized as interactional moments that alter and shape the meanings persons give to themselves (Denzin, 1989, 2001). These interactional moments may shape people’s lives in positive and negative ways. For this study, identifying participants’ epiphanies is a suitable approach to the research question seeking to understand how a young adult problem-solving court program integrates creative and expressive arts to promote prosocial behavior in young adults. Denzin (2001) identified four types of epiphanies: (a) the major epiphany is an experience that shatters a person’s life and makes it never the same again; (b) the cumulative epiphany occurs as the result of a series of events that have built up in a person’s life; (c) the minor or illuminating epiphany reveals underlying tensions and problems in a situation or relationship; and (d) the relived epiphany refers to a person that relives, or goes through again a major turning point in his or her life (p. 37). Overall, interpretive interactionism aims to describe and interpret the lived experience that individuals ascribe to social interactions.

Through understanding the participants’ stories, experiences, and possible epiphanies, this approach may provide insight into how involvement in the court may or may not lead to
transformation, completion of the program, and adoption of prosocial behavior. Through examining the public act of allegedly committing a crime, being arrested, and mandated to participate in a court program the young adults’ private and often untold thoughts, feelings, and beliefs become public. Identifying epiphanies concerned with the interactional situation of young adults’ involvement in the justice system is one way of identifying how personal troubles become public issues, as in the case of young adults referred to the problem-solving diversion court.

The interpretive interactionism methodology consists of six phases: (a) framing the research question, (b) deconstructing and critically analyzing the prior conceptions of the phenomenon, (c) capturing the phenomenon, (d) bracketing the phenomenon, (e) constructing or putting the phenomenon back together, and (f) contextualizing or relocating the phenomenon (Denzin, 2001). The first two phases occur before data collection and analysis. First, is the formulation of the research question. Next, is the deconstruction phase, which consists of a critical analysis of how the phenomenon has been studied in the past. The deconstruction phase occurred within the review of the literature.

The third phase involves capturing the phenomenon, which involves locating and situating what is to be studied in the natural world (Denzin, 2001). I captured the data in the original study and will review the existing transcripts, field notes, and written artifacts, which are a collection of multiple stories, narratives, and personal histories from young adult participants enrolled in a problem-solving court diversion program and adult program coordinators. Denzin (2001) suggests that by capturing multiple stories, the researcher can compare and contrast the stories of multiple individuals across different phases of the research study. Through accessing these stories, I endeavored to capture the epiphanies that manifest as the young adults learn to
navigate the problem-solving court program. By obtaining multiple stories and narratives, I built an understanding of how the young adults make sense of the creative and expressive arts programming. Further, I captured the patterns and themes that emerged from each participant while also comparing and contrasting experiences across the narratives of the participants.

The fourth, fifth, and sixth phases of interpretive interactionism are described below. Note, that I plan to use phases four, five and six as guidelines and further comment after the description of these phases. The fourth phase of interpretive interactionism involves bracketing the phenomenon. Bracketing is the process of dissecting social phenomena to reveal, define, and analyze its essential elements and structures (Denzin, 1989, 2001). Bracketing consists of five steps: (a) locating key phrases and statements within the personal experience story that speak directly to the phenomenon in question, (b) interpreting the meanings of these phrases, as an informed reader, (c) obtaining the subject’s interpretations of these phrases if possible, (d) inspecting the meanings for what they reveal about the essential, reoccurring features of the phenomenon being studied, and (e) offering a tentative statement or definition of the phenomenon (Denzin, 2001, p. 76). Essentially, bracketing is about suspending prior knowledge obtained in the literature review and instead focusing on the participant’s experience of creative expression in problem-solving court program.

Following bracketing is the fifth phase of interpretive interactionism, which involves constructing the phenomenon. Constructing the phenomenon consists of reassembling it back into its coherent whole (Denzin, 2001, p. 78). This stage in the analytic process consists of four steps (a) listing the bracketed elements of the phenomenon, (b) ordering these elements as they occurred within the process or experience, (c) indicating how each element affects and is related to every other element in the process being studied, and (d) stating concisely how the structures
and parts of the phenomenon cohere into a totality (Denzin, 2001, p. 78). The fundamental goal of the construction phase is gathering and organizing the lived experiences that relate to the phenomenon being studied.

The sixth phase, interpretive interactionism, consists of contextualizing the phenomenon. The contextualizing phase builds on both bracketing and construction by locating the phenomenon back into the natural social world. Contextualizing is a four-step process which involves (a) presenting personal experience stories in full detail, (b) presenting contrasting stories that will illuminate variations on the stages and forms of the process, (c) indicating how lived experiences alter and shape the essential features of the process, and (d) comparing and synthesizing the central themes of the stories so that their differences may be brought together into a reformulated statement of the process (Denzin, 2001, p. 79). Each phase builds on the prior phase to provide a method to interpret the lived experiences ascribed to social interactions. Overall, interpretive interactionism is a method to describe how lived experience alters and shapes the phenomenon being studied. I will now review narrative research methods.

**Narrative Research**

Narrative research is an interdisciplinary approach, which seeks to describe the meaning of experience for participants as they construct stories about their lives (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In general, narrative approaches provide a way of understanding lived experience through the stories people tell. The researcher re-stories the collected data into a narrative chronology, which combines the participant’s perspective with the researcher’s interpretations (Creswell, 2009). Personal narratives and life stories reveal cultural and social patterns through the lens of individual experience (Patton, 2002). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that narrative inquiry “is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of
places, and in social interaction with milieus…simply stated narrative inquiry is stories lived and
told” (p. 20). These stories are located in the transcribed interviews, field notes, and written
artifacts of participants enrolled the diversion program. The young adult participants have
authored various writings, and these narratives may inform understanding of how the creative
and expressive arts influenced their behavior. Jones, Warnaar, Bench, and Stroup (2014) utilized
narrative methods to study the experience of adolescent participants enrolled in a community-
based social action peace program. Narrative methods were used to explore themes and patterns
across participants and to develop a narrative account, which described commonalities and
variations of program involvement (Jones, Warnaar, Bench, & Stroup, 2014).

Narrative analysis is an inter-disciplinary and multi-method approach to engage in
analysis of narrative data such as transcribed interviews, typed field notes, and archival
documents to include letters and other personal writings. “Narrative analysis refers to a family of
methods for interpreting texts that have a common storied form” (Riessman, 2008, p. 11). As a
qualitative method narrative analysis can be used for a variety of analytic practices as narrative
may refer to the phenomenon being studied or the method used in a study (Creswell, 2013). In
this dissertation, narrative analysis was used as a method to interpret how people made sense of
the world they live in (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011;
Riessman, 2008). I used thematic narrative analyses to focus on the thematic meanings or the
main points that were gleaned from field notes, written artifacts, and interviews. Thematic
analysis is a method that focuses on what is said and allows for identification of themes as the
young adults explain them.

In summary, the data analysis conducted in this dissertation was informed by interpretive
interactionism and narrative methods. Interpretive interactionism places emphasis on turning
points that alter the meaning that participants enrolled in the program ascribe to themselves and the narrative approach offers a window into the cultural and social meanings of the stories shared by participants (Patton, 2002). Thus, the combination of interpretive interactionism and narrative inquiry created a method to understand the young adult participants’ experience of creative expression and the perceived benefits of creative expression to influence their prosocial behavior.

**Researcher as an Instrument**

As a member of the three-person research team that collected the original data, I can describe my role as a researcher and how my role changed over time. My initial role was more of an outsider. During all court sessions, I sat in the jury box and took observational notes during court review. During programming is where my role began to change as I gradually moved from observer to participant observer. During programming each week the participants sat around the table, and the facilitators asked them to recount the high and low points of the prior week. As the weeks went on, I found that I had opportunities to give my highs and lows regarding personal struggles and accomplishments from the prior week. For example, the adult coordinators and the young adults would ask me about my daughter. As I built rapport and trust with the young adult participants, many would confide in me and discuss their struggles to “get right.” Additionally, program coordinators would ask me to consult with particular youth that was struggling with personal issues. My background as a doctoral student in counseling psychology positioned me to have a certain level of empathy for the human struggle as I watched the young adults both succeed and fail to reach their goals.

As an African American male raised by a single parent my experience connects with several young adults in the study. I attended public school in California and was rarely affirmed
for academic abilities. For instance, I did not know how to enroll in college, what a FASFA was, and I thought that the only way to attend college was on an athletic scholarship or if your parents were wealthy. I came to a decisive moment in my late adolescence where I decided to drop out of high school and work full-time. Throughout my time in public school I was labeled as a “bad kid,” and it was not until my upper division criminal justice courses at San Diego State University (SDSU) that I understood why. I learned about the concept of labeling theory which explains how individuals may take on the roles and self-concepts that are expected of them, and how society reinforces the undesired behavior by labeling those who are different from other youths when in reality, they are different because they have been ‘tagged’ with a deviant label.

In light of my many experiences in the public school system, I found myself attending a university. One pivotal experience was when I realized that I might not want to work in the legal profession. For me, it was a surreal experience as I sat in the three hundred-seat lecture hall as one of two Black males in a sea of non-Black faces all studying to become police officers, border patrol agents, and possibly lawyers. That day, in particular, I will never forget. A professor who was the liaison for the prison tour, came to the class to recruit seniors to participate in the five-day prison tour. For $1000.00 and a fifteen-page paper due at the end of the tour, junior and senior students would be able to meet the three-unit capstone requirement for graduation. The way it was presented made me feel as if I was at home watching a late night infomercial, waiting for the announcer to say “but wait…we will throw in said complimentary item just pay separate shipping and handling”. I felt lonely in a room with three hundred people as I watched the promotional video that depicted the charter buses and hotels along the route to visit four or five various prisons and correctional facilities in California. The men in the video all had faces that looked like mine. Some of the men depicted in the video seemed as if they lost their humanity
and others seemed to be making the best of a bad situation; nonetheless, I realized that I did not want to help people as a criminal justice employee. Instead, I wanted to develop preventive measures. I believe the proposed study will contribute to my interest in understanding one way to divert youth from jail and possibly provide them the opportunity for self-discovery through creative expression.

Life experience and worldview influences what a person can see and interpret. Thus, reflexivity is a means of attending to the context in which knowledge is constructed while accounting for the effect of the researcher throughout the research process. Further, disciplined subjectivity refers to a continual analysis of bias and the position of the researcher (Jones, 2011). It is important to note that I have facilitated psychotherapy and psycho-educational groups in the past with juvenile and young adult populations. These experiences informed my research interests to explore and attempt to understand young adults’ experience of creative expression in a problem-solving court program. As a qualitative study, findings and interpretations should be considered within the context of the participants’ stories and narratives.

Sample and Sources of Data for Dissertation Study

In this section, I will describe how the creative arts sample and each source of data from the original and expanded study were used in my dissertation. Each source of data contributes to the analysis uniquely. Therefore, I describe the creative arts sample and each source of data, which includes the interview transcripts, field notes, and written artifacts.

Creative and Expressive Arts Interview Sample

The creative and expressive arts interview sample consisted of 12 interviews which explored the specific theme of participation in the creative and expressive arts component of the program. The creative and expressive arts interview sample consists of 12 participants of which,
6 were male, and 6 were female. Seven participants were African American, 3 were European American, 1 identified as Biracial and 1 identified as Hispanic. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 20 with a mean of 18.3 years of age. Participants in the creative and expressive arts interview sample were interviewed with the Revised Interview Protocol which asked 24 open-ended questions about the general experience of the young adult participants enrolled in the program and the creative and expressive arts specifically (see Appendix B).

**Sources of Data for Dissertation Study**

As stated earlier, the original study utilized three interview protocols. The three interview protocols consisted of interviews of YADC staff, a broad program interview of young adult participants, and a follow-up interview with participants (see Appendix A). For the dissertation, I added a creative and expressive arts interview of young adult participants (see Appendix B). The protocol for YADC staffs began with a broad question asking each person to talk about how they became involved in the young adult diversion program. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. YADC staff were asked questions regarding their understanding of how the program was structured to address the needs of the young adult participants. The broad program interview protocol of young adult participants began with a general question asking each person to talk about what led them to the young adult problem-solving court. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended.

Questions asked about the young adults’ experience in the program, their favorite activities in the program, and if participation in the program made them think about their purpose in life. I developed the creative and expressive arts interview protocol to directly ask young adult participants about what led them to the young adult problem-solving court. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. Questions asked about their experience of writing activities,
what it was like to share their thoughts in the group, and if they found themselves influenced by
what other participants shared.

The field notes are a rich source of data that provide insight into the setting. In general,
researchers in the original study engaged in participant observation by embedding themselves to
some degree at a research site, with the goal of understanding the cultural and organizational
practices that occurred. The original study field notes were collected in court, programming, and
community service settings. The researchers acted in the role of participant observers and
recorded both observations and preliminary interpretations (Creswell, 2009). The field notes
were initially unstructured and consisted of the researcher’s interpretations of the participants’
behaviors and the activities that took place at the research site. At various points during data
collection meetings were held to refine the collection of observational notes. In particular, I
noticed the therapeutic benefits of the creative and expressive arts during programming. Field
notes then emphasized the creative and expressive arts activities that occurred during
programming. For the dissertation study, I examined the field notes to describe programming and
document how young adults responded to the creative and expressive arts activities. Field notes
described the weekly programming sessions as well as the dialogic process between the young
adults and the facilitators.

Written artifacts provided a rich source of data that helped to understand the cumulative
experience of the creative and expressive arts activities that young adults participated in each
week. Notably, the letters to the court written by the young adult participants highlighted how
participation in the YADC was beneficial or not. Since letters to court were written by young
adults who successfully graduated the program, the letters may be a source of data that provide
insight into the mechanisms of the program that was most beneficial for youth. It is important to
note that letters to the court were written by young adults who were close to graduation from the young adult diversion problem-solving court program. Often, these letters detailed the events leading to involvement in the program, struggles to graduate the program, and hopes for the future and adoption of a crime-free life. The letters to the court do not necessarily represent the experience of young adults who failed to complete the program; therefore, other written artifacts were reviewed. These other written artifacts included weekly writing assignments completed by the young adults and program materials such as writing prompts, poems, and other weekly activities.

**Method for Data Analysis for Dissertation Study**

The above section described each source of data from the original and expanded study to be used in my dissertation. In this section, I will outline the data analysis used to address the three research questions that guided this study:

1. How and why were the creative and expressive arts integrated into a problem-solving court to promote prosocial outcomes of young adults?
2. How do young adult participants experience creative and expressive arts programming?
3. What are the perceived benefits of creative and expressive arts for young adults in a problem-solving court program?

Five sources of data were used to answer the research questions; however, some sources of data were better suited to answer specific research questions. A graphic is provided below as a visual organizer to understand how each source of data was used in addressing each question.
Table 2

Source of Data by Research Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Field Notes</th>
<th>YADC Staff Interviews</th>
<th>Interviews with Young Adult Participants</th>
<th>Expressive Arts Interview of Young Adult Participants</th>
<th>Written Artifacts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1 (Integrated)</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>Tertiary</td>
<td>Tertiary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ2 (Experienced)</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ3 (Perceived Benefits)</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each source of data is categorized as either primary, secondary, or tertiary. Sources of data categorized as primary are sources of data that are proximal (or near) in reference to answering a particular research question. Sources of data categorized as tertiary are sources of data that are distal (or far) in reference to answering a particular research question. In a sense, tertiary sources of data provide contextual information but are the furthest from providing a firsthand account of a particular experience. Secondary sources of data are neither proximal nor distal, but somewhere in the middle. In general, secondary sources of data provide additional detail about setting and the interactions that took place between YADC Staffs, young adult participants, and the research team.

![Figure 1. Categorization of primary, secondary, and tertiary data sources from proximal to distal.](image)

Sources of data that are categorized as primary are the sources best suited to answer a particular research question. For instance, the first research question asks how and why the creative and expressive arts were integrated into a problem-solving court to promote prosocial
behavior of young adults. To answer the first research question I used the YADC Staff interviews as the primary source of data. The rationale for using the YADC Staff interviews to answer the first research question is that the YADC Staff are the individuals responsible for creating and maintaining the problem-solving court diversion program. Field notes are the second source of data used to answer the first research question. Field notes are a secondary or supporting source of data to understand how and why the creative and expressive arts were integrated into a problem-solving court. The third source of data in this example is the interviews with young adult participants. I used the interview transcripts of young adult participants as a tertiary source in understanding how and why the creative and expressive arts were integrated into a problem-solving court.

To answer the second research question, which asks how young adult participants experience creative and expressive arts programming, I used interview transcripts of young adult participants. The interview transcripts of young adult participants are a primary source of data as the interview transcripts of young adult participants are firsthand accounts of how they experienced creative and expressive arts programming; whereas, the YADC Staff interviews and field notes collected from the research team are secondary or supporting sources of data to understand how young adult participants experienced creative and expressive arts programming. In reference to answering the second research question, YADC Staff interviews and field notes are secondary sources of data based on observations of the young adult participants. To address the third research question, which is concerned with the perceived benefits of creative and expressive arts for young adults in a problem-solving court program, I consider all sources of data as primary.

The first step in answering each research question involved data organization. The
existing data was organized and prepared for data analysis by uploading interview transcripts, field notes, and written artifacts into NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program. I ensured that each participant and YADC staff member that consented to be interviewed in the original study was given a pseudonym. I performed an additional check to verify that all sources of data were de-identified and that any information which may reveal a participant’s identity was removed and replaced with general information.

I utilized NVivo, a qualitative software program, to reduce the time needed to sort and organize data. As a software tool, NVivo allowed me to handle increased amounts of data, which allowed for a comprehensive analysis of data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Vander Putten and Nolen (2010) found that for larger data sets, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software produced better results when compared to the “paper and pencil approach” as the human mind could only hold so much information at once. Vander Putten and Nolen (2010) explained that the software allowed for a more in-depth level of analysis that would be too labor intensive for an individual researcher. Given the three different sources of data and the number of participants in the study, I used computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to aid in my analysis and research process.

**Analyses for Research Question 1**

The first research question asks how the creative and expressive arts were integrated into a problem-solving court to promote prosocial behavior of young adults. To explore this question I used all three sources of data which included field notes, interviews, and written artifacts. To answer the first research question I used the YADC Staff interviews as the primary data source as this source of data best described how the creative and expressive arts were integrated into the problem-solving court program. I used field notes as a secondary source of data to contextualize
specific program processes. Interviews with the young adult participants and other written artifacts were tertiary sources of data in answering the first question. The rationale for using the young adult participant interviews and other written artifacts as a tertiary source in answering the first research question is that the sources of data are likely to be less useful in understanding how the creative arts were integrated into the program and more helpful in understanding how the creative arts were experienced.

To examine research question number one, I conducted multiple cycles of coding. Each cycle of coding contained additional iterations of coding or re-reading the data. In general, codes are labels used to assign meaning to each source of data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Codes can be descriptive and assign labels to data by summarizing the text into a short word, codes can originate from the participant’s language, and codes may also describe conceptual action often indicated by words ending in “ing” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). In the first cycle coding, I summarized and grouped the initial segments of data. Then in the second cycle of coding, I grouped those summaries into a smaller number of categories. Together, first and second cycle coding represented a way to organize data, reduce data, and create an emerging map of what was happening and why (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). I created analytic memos, which are reflective notes about the data as a means to synthesize my thinking about the data into higher level analytic meanings. In a sense, analytic memos are a way to link, cluster, and organize data into higher order concepts that may describe relationships and emergent patterns.

In the first step of first cycle coding, I focused on a limited number of the YADC Staff interview questions 6-10 and question 14 (see Appendix A) to code segments of data concerned with how the YADC Staff utilized creative and express arts to promote prosocial behavior of
young adult participants. From identifying coded data on specific YADC Staff interview questions 6-10 and question 14 I developed an emergent coding scheme that was applied to the field notes, the broad program interviews, the creative and expressive arts interviews of young adult participants, and the written artifacts. In the second step of first cycle coding, I read through each entire YADC Staff interview transcript to identify codes.

During the second cycle of coding, I organized the multiple codes that were created during first cycle coding into major categories, subcategories, and themes. In the second cycle of coding, I looked for similarities between codes, relationships between codes, and core themes that characterized the integration of creative and expressive arts. When appropriate, I “drilled down” into each theme to find the unique properties and dimensions of a particular theme. Drilling down provided a process to identify variations of themes, which lead to the creation of subthemes. Essentially, each iteration of coding moved from specific experiences toward a general understanding of how the creative and expressive arts were integrated into the YADC.

After first and second cycle coding, I developed a collection of themes to describe the complex nature of integrating the creative and expressive arts into the problem-solving court diversion program. I charted or mapped how the themes fit together. In a sense, I reduced the data by further boiling it down to the essential features and presented the narrative passages that best captured how the creative and expressive arts were integrated into a problem-solving court setting.

Analyses for Research Question 2

The second research question asks how young adults enrolled in a problem-solving court experience creative and expressive arts programming. To answer this question I used three sources of data, which include field notes, interviews, and written artifacts. I used the broad
interviews of young adult participants, expressive arts interviews of young adult participants, and written artifacts as primary data sources to understand how young adult participants experienced the creative and expressive arts. I used the field notes and YADC Staff interviews as secondary sources of data to contextualize specific program process. To answer the second research question, multiple rounds of coding were conducted with 2 cycles of coding in each round. A round of coding encompassed first and second cycle coding. Recall that first cycle coding is the initial process of coding chunks of data and second cycle coding is where the chunked data was organized into themes.

First Round of Coding

In the first round of coding for research question two, I coded across each source of data to understand how young adult participants experienced creative and expressive arts programming. The first round of coding consisted of two cycles of coding. I conducted two cycles of coding and also created analytic memos in the first round of coding.

First cycle of coding for the first round of coding. In the first cycle of round one coding, I read through each young adult participants expressive arts interview transcript, broad interview transcript, and written artifacts to code for what was relevant to the research question. I read through the field notes and the YADC Staff interviews to identify initial codes. While reading each source of data I created analytic memos. As discussed earlier, analytic memos are reflective notes about the data that may synthesize my thinking about the data into higher level analytic meanings. After I read through all sources of data at least once, I began the second cycle of coding.

Second cycle of coding for the first round of coding. During the second cycle of coding for round one, I organized the codes generated during the first cycle of coding by looking for
similarities between codes, relationships between codes, and core themes that characterize how the young adult participants experienced creative and expressive arts. I also drilled down into themes when appropriate, to find the unique properties and dimensions of a particular theme, which lead to the creation of subthemes. The products generated from coded data in the first and second cycle of round resulted in themes that informed data coded in round two.

**Second Round of Coding**

In the second round of coding, I coded for narrative sequences and structures. Before coding, I organized and grouped the young adult participants’ broad interview transcript, expressive arts interview transcript, and written artifacts into cases. This means that I had 27 cases of young adult participant data to code. Note, that some young adults had more written artifacts than others and individuals close to graduation completed letters to the court. After I organized and grouped the young adult participant data, I began the first cycle of coding for narrative sequences.

**First cycle of coding for the second round of coding.** In the first cycle of round two, I coded for narrative sequences of interest within each case. Narrative sequences are narrative devices used to identify patterns (McAdams & Bowman, 2001). Specifically, I re-read each broad interview transcript, expressive arts interview transcript, and written artifacts within each young adult participant’s case to code for that participant’s narrative sequences. I employed a temporal coding scheme as a narrative device to organize each young adult participant’s narrative into a plot with a beginning, middle, and end. This means that the narratives of the young adult participants will be coded for narrative elements such as time, place, plot, and scene (Creswell, 2007, p. 56).
Temporal coding is useful as participants may not linearly tell stories or may digress from a particular story to make general comments (Kim, 2016). Furthermore, because there are multiple sources of data for each young adult participant, temporal coding will aid in organizing information from the broad interview transcript, expressive arts interview transcript, and written artifacts. I coded each broad interview transcript, expressive arts interview transcript, and written artifacts of young adult participants for a plot which consists of a beginning, middle, and end. Specifically, I coded for the (a) introduction of the story, (b) description of the setting and people, (c) discussion of what happened, (d) resolution of the story, and (e) significance of the story. This coding scheme provided organization of the relevant data into a conceptual order that represented how the young adult participants experienced the creative and expressive arts program.

Second cycle of coding for the second round. The themes identified during round one and the narrative sequences and structures identified during round two were organized into major categories, subcategories, and themes in the second cycle of coding. I organized the codes generated during the first cycle of coding by looking for similarities between codes, relationships between codes, and core themes that characterized how the young adult participants experienced creative and expressive arts. When appropriate, I drilled down into themes to find the unique properties and dimensions of a particular theme, which lead to the creation of subthemes. After
completing round one and two of coding, I charted or mapped how the themes fit together. This involved identifying common themes shared by young adult participants as well as identifying unique themes that distinguished their experience of creative and expressive arts. In the next chapter, I will present the narrative passages that best capture the essence of creative expression in a problem-solving court setting by providing narrative quotes that illustrate the salient themes.

**Analyses for Research Question 3**

The third research question asks what the perceived benefits of creative and expressive arts are for young adults in a problem-solving court program. To be clear, what I mean by perceived benefits refers to the young adult participants, YADC Staff, and the research team perceptions of the positive results of the young adult's participation in creative and expressive arts programming. The goal of the third research question is to understand the value of the creative and expressive arts programming provided to young adult participants enrolled in a problem-solving court program. The analysis for the third research question builds on the prior analyses conducted to answer the first and second research questions. To answer the third research question I used evaluation coding. Evaluation coding is useful for understanding and evaluating organizational studies. An example of evaluation coding is provided below. Note, that the third research question asks what the perceived benefits of creative and expressive arts are for young adults in a problem-solving court program; however, I coded for negative perceptions as well.

Table 4

*Evaluation Coding and Explanation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding Label</th>
<th>Explanation of Code</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td>Positive evaluation</td>
<td>+ Sharing poems: “felt better”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Negative evaluation</td>
<td>- “Writing sucks”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation coding is done by focusing on outcomes, and adding a plus symbol (+) to a code to designate it as a positive evaluation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The example in the figure above (+ sharing poems: “felt better”) is a code that would indicate that sharing poems in a group setting was a beneficial activity. I may also add a negative symbol (−) to new or existing codes to designate negative evaluations of the problem-solving court program. For example, a participant may indicate that writing sucks and assert that they were not engaged in the creative and expressive arts. A code such as “writing sucks” could signify a negative evaluation, meaning that the young adult participant was not invested in the writing activities and the program did not engage them. In contrast, the code “writing sucks” could indicate that while creative writing was an unfavorable activity for a particular young adult participant, in the end, creative writing helped them to expresses themselves. In the latter example the code “writing sucks” would not necessarily result in a negative evaluation. This example demonstrates the nuanced process of evaluation coding.

For my specific analysis of the third research question, I re-read all sources of data (interview transcripts, field notes, and written artifacts) and the codes and themes compiled in answering the first and second research questions to assign a value to those codes. I added a + or - symbol to a code to signify a positive or negative evaluation. I allowed for the possibility that new codes would emerge. After I completed evaluative coding and no new codes emerged, I identified potential patterns related to categories. In the next chapter, I present the narrative passages of YADC Staff and young adult participants that best describe the perceived benefits of creative and expressive arts programming provided to young adult participants in a problem-solving court diversion program.
Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the qualitative framework and method of analysis for a dissertation exploring the integration of creative and expressive arts in a young adult problem-solving court program designed to promote prosocial outcomes for participants. I used an interpretive interactionism framework informed by narrative methods to describe and interpret the lived experience that individuals ascribe to social interactions and to understand how young adults perceived their experiences through culturally-influenced story form (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Denzin, 1989; Denzin, 2001; McAdams, 1993). I identified and collected the best sources of qualitative data relevant to the research questions, building a rich dataset of program activity and participant experience. In the analysis, I conducted multiple cycles of coding. Each cycle of coding contained additional iterations of coding or re-reading the data. In the first cycle coding, I summarized and grouped the initial segments of data. Then in the second cycle of coding, I grouped those summaries into a smaller number of categories.

Together, first and second cycle coding represented a way to organize data, reduce data, and create an emerging map of what was happening and why (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014). I created analytic memos to link, cluster, and organize data into higher order concepts, which helped to describe relationships and emergent patterns. I also coded for narrative sequences and structures. I organized and grouped the young adult participant’s broad interview transcript, expressive arts interview transcript, and written artifacts into cases. I grouped the 27 cases of young adult participant data and began coding for narrative sequences. To understand the perceived benefits of creative and expressive arts I used evaluation coding, which required re-reading all sources of data and the codes and themes compiled in answering the first and second research questions to assign a value to those codes. Overall, this methodology allows for
a rigorous and systematic study of participant experience in the context of an innovative program in the criminal justice system. The results are presented in the next chapter.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The results presented in Chapter IV explore how the Young Adult Diversion Court (YADC) integrated creative and expressive arts, and the experience and perceived benefits of program participation. This study contributes to and extends existing literature through the empirical study of young adult participants and their lived experience in a problem-solving court setting. I chose a narrative framework to tell the story of how the YADC was created and to elucidate the experience of young adult participants enrolled in the YADC. The narrative framework is used to understand the interactional situation of young adults’ involvement in the justice system and their experience of an intervention designed to help them. Through an examination of the act of allegedly committing a crime, being arrested, and mandated to participate in a court diversion program, the young adults’ private and often untold thoughts, feelings, and beliefs became public. This study will present the perceived benefits derived from their involvement in the YADC and the specific use of the creative and expressive arts to bolster confidence, improve self-esteem, and help young adults learn to regulate difficult emotions while making sense of traumatic events.

To address the research question of how and why the creative and expressive arts were integrated into the YADC, it is vital first to understand how and why the YADC was created. The YADC is a problem-solving court created to address the local issue of individuals 17 to 20 years of age that failed to meet requirements of probation and were in jeopardy of losing their opportunity to earn a diversion and keep charges off their public record. Problem-solving courts aim to address local community issues in a manner that may reduce an individual's future offense related behavior (Mackinem & Higgins, 2009b). The overall goal of any problem-solving courts
is to reduce recidivism, which is an individual’s propensity to commit future crimes following initial contact with the justice system. It is hoped that recidivism will be reduced by providing an intervention or a particular treatment approach to target to the underlying behavior. Problem-solving courts often use innovative strategies to address the underlying issues that drive the offense related behavior of the populations they serve (Berman, 2009; Boldt, 2009; Miller & Johnson, 2009; Winick, 2013). The results provided in this chapter examine the strategies used by the YADC to influence prosocial outcomes with the ultimate goal of reducing the likelihood that young adult participants will engage in offense-related behavior in the future.

Problem-solving courts are dependent on a judge’s willingness to adjudicate from an approach, which treats the whole person. Typically, a problem-solving court judge will adopt a restorative justice, therapeutic jurisprudence, or pragmatic approach rooted in practice, expertise, and observation about how to address the underlying issues driving criminal behavior. The major differences between traditional criminal court judges and problem-solving court judges are that problem-solving court judges attempt to motivate participants to take advantage of the services available for remediation and they collaborate with attorneys and service providers to create an interdisciplinary team to serve the interests of the participants (Wiener & Georges, 2013).

Problem-solving courts have the potential to play a pivotal role in criminal justice reform. Scholars have been critical of the criminal justice system and its many failures (Alexander, 2012; Hughes & Wilson, 2010; Shelden, 2010). The failures of the criminal justice system have led to campaigns by local and national organizations to focus on smart justice or criminal justice reform (American Civil Liberties Union, 2017; The National Association of Counties, 2017). The smart justice paradigm is a socio-political movement rooted in broad
criminal justice reform that aims for a reduction in incarceration rates, fiscal responsibility, a focus on solving local community issues, provision of treatment options rather than a sole focus on punishment, and recognition of the unique contributions that evidenced-based practice and practice-based evidence can make to reform efforts. While there is an increasing body of literature that has outlined a philosophy of problem-solving courts, there is a lack of studies which detail how the courts influence participants (Wiener & Georges, 2013). This study fills these gaps through the systematic study of how the creative and expressive arts were integrated into the YADC and through exploration of how young adult participants experienced the integration of creative and expressive arts.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how a young adult problem-solving court diversion program integrated creative and expressive arts to promote positive young adult development. The following framing questions guide this study:

1. How and why were the creative and expressive arts integrated into a problem-solving court to promote prosocial outcomes of young adults?
2. How do young adult participants experience creative and expressive arts programming?
3. What are the perceived benefits of creative and expressive arts for young adults in a problem-solving court program?

The first two sections will present results to answer the first research question, which asked how and why the creative and expressive arts were integrated into the YADC. The first section will describe how the Young Adult Diversion Court (YADC) was created and is informed by the YADC team. The second section will describe the core structure of the YADC. After describing how the YADC was created, I turn to a narrative framework to answer the second and third research question of how the young adult participants experienced the creative and
expressive arts and what were the perceived benefits of their participation in the YADC. The third section provides a retrospective account that explores the socioecological themes that emerged when young adult participants were merely asked to tell their story before contact with the YADC. The fourth section will examine the story of young adults during enrollment in the YADC. The fifth section will focus specifically on the young adult participants’ experience of the creative and expressive arts. The sixth section will examine the perceived benefits of the creative and expressive arts as a specific aspect of the YADC. The seventh section will discuss the imagined future and considers the young adult participants’ hopes, dreams, and future aspirations after participation in the YADC. The results presented in this chapter will answer the research question of how and why the creative and expressive arts were integrated into the YADC. Findings will further demonstrate how young adult participants experienced the creative and expressive arts as well as illuminate the perceived benefits of their participation in the YADC.

The Creation and Story of the YADC

The creation of the YADC began with the judge's observations about the local community needs. The critical local issue as identified by the judge was the increasing number of young adults entering the justice system after being eligible to receive a diversion for their charges:

Typically what was happening with young adults on misdemeanor charges is they go before the court to enter a plea. If it is a first-time offense, they qualify for diversion, and they are placed on diversion. That means that they are on probation and certain requirements must be completed. If they successfully do that, then the diversion allows them to keep it off their public record, and they move on their way. It is designed so that you do not have this criminal strike against you. (Judge)

Sam, a YADC staff member, reiterated the importance of the diversion program:

The diversion process has been put there because they have a life that is salvageable…these crimes should not blemish their future. (Sam, YADC Staff)
Thus, the local issue is young adults had an opportunity to have their initial charges dismissed and made non-public on the criminal record upon successful completion of probation; however, young adults were often unsuccessful in completing the requirements of the court leading many to receive a criminal record. The next subsection explores the developmental considerations that the YADC took in fashioning what would become the YADC. Table 5 is provided to aid the reader in tracking each of the YADC staff members’ roles as well as provide their pseudonyms.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Judge</td>
<td>Judge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Program Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>Probation and Grants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>Probation Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>Facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manny</td>
<td>Facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>Crises Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lance</td>
<td>Crises Interventionist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Developmental Considerations

During the planning phases of the YADC, multiple partners made contributions to determine how to help young adults. The judge invited youth-serving organizations, local community leaders, and scholars from a local university to brainstorm and develop methods to redress recidivism for individuals aged 17 to 20. Both the judge and Linda explained that developmental and neuroscience research informed their practice decisions:

I became acutely aware of the age group from about 17 mostly through the mid-twenties where it was more difficult for them to follow along with program protocol, directions, and making appointments, things they need to do for their sobriety, not really understanding the connection of how current actions can affect them long term. All that came back to having to do with being a youth in a lot of
ways and brain development, risk-taking all those natural things that are happening in the brain. (Judge)

It sort of started from the research that was coming out at that time or had come out at that time about. As we joke about it, the brain’s not fully formed, and we have scientific proof of that...And [the judge] had verbalized that we really need to do some kind of a youth court for this group as they’re just not getting it, and there’s now scientific research that proves why they’re not getting it. (Linda, YADC Staff)

The YADC was created to help young adults maintain their diversion status by completing the requirements of probation. To meet the goal of helping young adults maintain diversion status the YADC was created to account for developmental realities facing adolescents and young adults. For instance, one reason that some young adults found themselves under the auspices of the court was due to poor choices and risky decisions.

Traditional courts systems were not necessarily set up to influence young adult’s behavior by accounting for developmental limitations; yet, advances in cognitive neuroscience research explain changes in the prefrontal cortex continue into adolescence and early adulthood. Discoveries in cognitive neuroscience may explain why young adults experience impairment in resisting peer influence, controlling impulses, and regulating emotions as the prefrontal cortex is associated with decision making (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006; Farrington, Loeber, & Howell, 2012). Essentially, young adults’ brains are not fully developed, and the cognitive skills related to decision making and self-regulation are compromised. Expecting young adults to decrease risky behavior based solely on punishment may not be enough; instead, approaches that account for developmental limitations while also teaching strategies for self-regulation may, in fact, be more suitable for reducing recidivism and helping youth maintain their diversion status.

Rather than repeating and repeating the same process of, they get on probation, they do not do well; then they lose their diversion...I said well what do we need to do with the population? What can we do if possible? So that is really the root of how it started, and I started with diversions simply because I had to have a group
of somebody and a pilot program. (Judge)

Given the innovative and non-traditional nature of the YADC, the planning team had to procure funds outside of the court system. The next subsection details how the YADC team tapped into the local community to find funds and support for the emerging program.

**Community-Based Support and Funding**

The planning team relied on support and funding from the local community to create the YADC. During the initial planning stages, several community partners were invited to brainstorm ways to address the recidivism of young adults in the local community. Meetings included multiple community members, educators, public service agencies, and non-profit entities that considered ways in which the court system could collaborate with existing structures in the community to addresses the local needs of reducing young adult’s offense behavior.

We have tried to look inside and not just outside for support, and I think the [community foundation] was instrumental. [A community foundation] set up a matching grant as we were not going to have funds available from the county for the YADC…we had to fund in-kind being our time and commitment I think that was a good way for us to really flesh out how committed would we be to this long-term and how could we go about it, and that is how we ended up working with [local health organization] and [local community agency]. (Judge)

To addresses the local needs and get the initial funding for the YADC the judge had to find additional funding outside of the court system as there were not enough available funds to run a program like the YADC:

I knew that it was going to require resources outside of what the court could provide and the way of figuring out what are the needs of these individuals and how do you address them. Figuring out what their needs are is all well and good, but if you do not have anything in place to address those needs, then you’re no further along. I recognized that we were going to need financial support from outside and we were going to need community support. (Judge)

The YADC team obtained grants from community foundations. The YADC planning team was also creative with funding and were able to partially fund the time of the judge,
probation officer, and administrative staff as in-kind donations. When asked if the YADC had the necessary resources, a member of the YADC staff explained:

“Right now we do, but money is always a huge thing. The YADC is totally grant funded. The Judge’s time, and my time, and probation officers time, is all in-kind. So grant funding is needed for the programming, creative arts facilitators, program assistant, the part-time program assistant, and the food and supplies. So that’s huge we need constant searching for money.” (Linda, YADC Staff)

Since the YADC was not a program funded through county funds, there was ongoing concern about sustainability. After getting the necessary funding and commitments from community partners the structure of the YADC was in place, and the programming curriculum was ready to proceed.

**Programming as Envisioned**

Programming was initially envisioned as having three components, which included a community service organization, a local spoken word organization, and the County Health Services. The community service organization was designed to help students learn civic responsibility, leadership skills, and fulfill their service requirements. A local spoken word organization was the second part of the curriculum designed to engage the young adult participants through spoken word performance while also influencing their socio-emotional development through curricular and experiential activities. The third component was County Health Services, which provided a psycho-education curriculum, counseling services, and a block grant. Participants were provided materials about broad health issues to include sexual wellness and dating, and help to enroll in the healthcare marketplace. The block grant allowed income-eligible participants to access funds for basic needs, to procure clothing for job interviews, or even to pay an electric bill.
Unexpected Changes

During the initial months of the YADC, unexpected changes occurred as the community service organization dropped out due to funding changes. The decrease in funding required the YADC team to adapt and come up with creative ways to serve the young adults in the program. Two YADC staff members explained the unexpected changes and how the YADC was able to adapt:

In every way we’ve changed from day one from how we developed our strategy for programming, that has changed, and that has evolved from our scheduling, that has changed, that has evolved. Every person in the program’s role has just about changed from what it was originally. (Sam, YADC Staff)

It’s changed a lot from the beginning, I mean, we’ve had a lot of pitfalls…When we started we were partnered with a local organization, and the local organization lost a ton of their grant funding through a local foundation, and then we couldn’t use their facility. I mean we were on the verge of starting and all of a sudden we didn’t have a place for programming. So we had to scramble, and then a YADC staff member was able to locate and secure a spot. (Linda, YADC Staff)

The YADC team was able to adapt to unexpected changes by leveraging individuals and resources in the local community. George explained how he came to be involved with YADC:

I came late into the process the meetings had taken place a good year before I came in. At that point, they were struggling with funding. Then they got a community grant and needed to show matching funds from the government. So we figured out that they would take matching funds from us and in kind. So by adding in my time, Lance’s time, and then figuring out what our rent would be for our building we helped them meet the funding goal…I was also intrigued by the idea; I liked the idea of a specialty court that wasn't dependent on diagnosis or charge. (George, YADC staff)

George and Lance brought expertise from Community Mental Health Services. They both became a part of the YADC staff and provided a mental health perspective for the YADC during team meetings and crises intervention support for participants during programming.

When I began attending the YADC on a regular basis the core structure of the YADC was
beginning to emerge. The core structure of the YADC consisted of court review and proceedings, probation, service learning and community service, and the weekly programming sessions. The weekly programming session included the healthy choice curriculum, spoken word curriculum, and various guest speakers. George and Lance also proved mental health expertise and crises intervention support during programming. The next section details the core structure of the YADC.

The Core Structure of YADC

This section reviews the core structures of the YADC and details how the creative and expressive arts were integrated into the YADC. In this section, I used field notes, and interview data from the YADC staff and young adult participants to illustrate the key components of the YADC. The first subsection will describe the court process which required the young adult participants to check in with the judge bi-weekly at the courthouse. The second subsection will discuss probation, which required the youth to meet with the probation officer weekly. The third subsection will discuss programming and captures the activities and complex processes happening between the young adult participants and the YADC staff.

As stated in Chapter III, the YADC program was created by an 8th District Court Judge to address the increasing numbers of young adults entering the justice system who received diversions for their charges, but often failed to obtain their diversion status. Young adults obtain their diversion status by completing the requirements of the court. Young adults who complete their probationary period have the initial charge dismissed and made non-public on the criminal record.

Each YADC staff member and young adult participant that consented to be included in the study was given a pseudonym. Recall, that Table 5 was provided above to track each of the
YADC staff members’ roles. Similarly, Table 6 is provided here to aid the reader in identifying characteristics of each young adult participant included in the study. Also, the percentages of participants that were terminated, successful, or still enrolled at data completion are provided and discussed in Chapter V.

Table 6

*Young Adult Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Type of Diversion</th>
<th>Type of Discharge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ray</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>MIP</td>
<td>Terminated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alonzo</td>
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<td>African American</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>First Time Drug</td>
<td>Terminated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tiana</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>First Time Drug</td>
<td>Terminated</td>
</tr>
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<td>MIP</td>
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<tr>
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<td>First Time Drug</td>
<td>Terminated</td>
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Court Review

The primary function of the court is to address criminal charges. The YADC team met bi-weekly in the judge’s chambers before participating in court review with the young adult participants. During the YADC team meetings, Brenda provided updates about how each young adult was performing in the YADC. Then each YADC team member in attendance provided insights and opinions about how to work with a particular individual.

During a typical team meeting, Brenda would take the lead and review a checklist detailing how the participants were doing in the YADC. For instance, Lamar’s progress in the YADC was discussed during a YADC team meeting:

Brenda explained that Lamar was not meeting all the YADC requirements after being in the program for about a year; although, Brenda acknowledged that Lamar
had a lot on his plate. Manny then suggested that Lamar had been disconnected from the group during programming.

Brenda continued to explain that Lamar had issues with his clothes and his housing in the past, as Lamar struggled with hygiene and basic self-care needs. The group continued to discuss his case and wondered if Lamar had reached a point where he was just going through the motions. Brenda stated, “I am pretty sure that he had a shit life, but he needs to take the next step forward.” (Field note excerpt)

This conversation was one example of the tension involved in negotiating treatment and punishment. George stated, “I have not appreciated [Lamar’s] demeanor during programming” and Lance chimed in, “[Lamar] is walking the line…he is leaning more toward the negative than he is leaning toward the positive…I was there; I lived that life. I was there. I have been to prison before; he is going to have to make a choice.” Lance made an important contribution to the YADC staff given his past involvement with the justice system and current role as a YADC staff member. Lance wondered out loud if Lamar used his personal experience as a sob story to gain sympathy, as Lance believed that Lamar could be successful if he wanted to be. After listening to the YADC staff, the judge recommended giving Lamar a probation violation for not following through on any of his consequences such as community service.

The team meetings provided a way to contextualize each participant’s experience in YADC and provide an informed and measured consequence. For instance, during a team meeting, the YADC staff discussed Tamara’s case.

Brenda explained that Tamara forgot to come to programming last week and that she was very apologetic when they met. Brenda also explained that Tamara got a new job at fast food restaurant and she was off to a good start as the manager gave her a compliment for her hard work. The YADC team discussed her overall progress in the program, and it was recommended that she receive a consequence of writing a paper or getting 2 hours of community service. (Field note excerpt)

Brenda presented Tamara’s case in a way that highlighted the positive progress she was making in her overall life. The examples of both Lamar and Tamara highlight how the YADC team
reviewed each case and utilized an individualized approach when considering consequences. After discussing each young adult’s progress during the YADC team meetings, the YADC team and young adult participants met in court for the mandatory bi-weekly court sessions with the judge.

**Court Sessions**

The YADC team meetings provided a way for the YADC staff to communicate information to the judge to inform her decisions with each youth that were discussed in open court. When Lamar was called to the podium during court following the team meeting described above, he was directly asked if he had followed up on the court requirements. Lamar shrugged his shoulders and then replied “naw” in a nonchalant manner. He received a probation violation.

Court sessions lasted about an hour. Typically the young adults, the judge, probation officer, and members of the YADC staff were in attendance. An excerpt from the field notes described a typical day in court:

> There are some participants sitting in the court already, all looking as if this is the last place they want to be on a Tuesday evening. Some are texting, others talking to each other, and making jokes. There are clear signs of bonding between interactions. Each participant is called to the podium to address the Judge when their case is read, issues discussed during court review are brought to the attention of each participant as they address the judge. Individuals receive incentives such as gift cards for coming to court regularly, dropping clean on drug tests, and attending and participating in programming regularly.

In the court sessions, young adults stood before the court to discuss how they were meeting the stated goals of their diversion. Common goals involved abstaining from substance use, finding a job, finishing education requirements, and for some, getting access to counseling services. The judge praised young adults who were doing well. For example, the judge called Jackson to the podium and praised him for having good attendance, and he received a $10 grocery store gift card. Jackson explained that he was maintaining his job and enrolled in the online program to
complete his high school requirements. However, Jackson tested positive for marijuana. The judge explained that he is to serve jail time if he does not turn in his community service hours. She stated, “You are doing a great job in programming I just need to see you putting it all together.” The Judge often used constructive criticism, sanctions, and sometimes dismissal from the YADC for young adults who were failing to meet the requirements of their probation.

When young adults followed through on requirements of the YADC, they often received praise. Subsequent interactions between the Judge and Jackson illustrated how praise influenced his behavior. Jackson was called to the podium and was asked:

Judge: How is your job going?
Jackson: Good. I’m going to participate in a walk for the homeless at the Boys and Girls Club to finish my community service.
Judge: I could not ask for anything more from you right now other than when you get tested to have a clean test and keep doing what you are doing…I got to tell you when I had a chance to sit in with you at programming the other night I was really impressed with everyone who was there. You have great leadership skills it was really good to see you using those leadership skills. Keep up the good work!

The praise illustrated in Jackson’s story is one example of emotional support. Emotional support consists of program actors and program participants celebrating victories, providing encouragement during times of struggle, and helping to bolster participants’ self-confidence (Miller & Johnson, 2009). It was notable that Jackson’s self-presentation also changed in court and field notes highlight this change.

Jackson brought his girlfriend to court today. He has continued to dress nicely for court. He was dressed in a pair of tan slacks with a nice button-down shirt and a pair of dress shoes. Jackson was called first as the court has decided to recognize individuals who are doing well in the program. The judge asked him how he is doing and Jackson explained that he has moved into his new apartment. Some members of the YADC team drove Jackson to pick up furniture. The YADC team member was able to use Facebook postings and text messaging to procure furniture for Jackson and was able to furnish his apartment fully. Overall Jackson is still maintaining his job, continuing to test clean, and he received a gift card for attendance. He has not completed his GED requirements and still has to complete his service-learning requirement. (Field note excerpt)
Jackson also benefited from tangible support, which included helping participants find jobs, obtain housing, and procure resources such as access to health care (Miller & Johnson, 2009). It is noteworthy that the YADC team helped Jackson furnish his first apartment, as he did not have the family support to set up his first apartment.

In contrast, young adult participants’ who failed to follow through on court requirements received punitive sanctions to influence their behavior. An example of this is represented by a change in Alonzo’s behavior as he started coming late to court. The YADC team was aware that Alonzo had recently lost a family member who was shot. He was allowed to miss court and programming to attend the funeral. However, he was required to schedule make-up time for the days he would miss. Alonzo failed to make up the missed time. Field notes illustrate the tension between punishment and treatment:

When Alonzo approached the podium, there were two uniformed police officers in the courtroom, sitting on opposite sides of the room. The courtroom was tense. I wondered why there were armed officers in the room. During the court session, Alonzo was asked why he failed to show up or get in contact with the court as required. Alonzo responded, “I was grieving last week and had too much going on.” The judge held Alonzo in contempt for not showing up in court. Alonzo had to go to jail for the five days that he failed to appear in court. The judge explained to Alonzo what would happen to him as the officers walked closer and then put handcuffs on him. Alonzo was stoic. The whole YADC team was watching as well as his peers sitting in the back of the courtroom. This was the second time I had seen a young Black male taken away in handcuffs in the YADC. It was hard to watch. I looked over at another YADC staff member, and he also seemed affected by Alonzo’s arrest. I had a strong reaction to the officers putting Alonzo in handcuffs; despite, understanding the reason he was taken away, it was still hard to see. Knowing that Alonzo was trying to turn around his life but then had to deal with the unexpected death of his loved ones and then had to sit in jail was a tough situation to digest. (Field note excerpt)

Alonzo’s story again highlights the tension between treatment and punishment evident in problem-solving courts (Miller & Johnson, 2009). Furthermore, Alonzo’s story emphasizes the interaction of public and private life. Specifically how personal issues influenced his ability to
meet court requirements. Weeks later, unfortunately, Alonzo lost more loved ones, and he again had to address the court. Alonzo stood at the podium with the whole YADC team watching and the other young adult participants’ sitting in the background. Alonzo explained:

I’ve been trying to keep my mind on positive things. One of my friends killed himself over the weekend. Then my stepsister died in an accident. I know how to deal with stuff better than I did last time. I can say that after that meeting with you for the week. (Alonzo, African American Male, age 17)

The Judge asked Alonzo how he was going to deal with the loss of loved ones differently as he disappeared for five days last time. Alonzo explained that in addition to jail time he had to spend a week with the judge attending family court, which helped him to see that people have it tougher than him. Alonzo explained how a week of attending family court and watching women struggle while they had to deal with the court and also take care of children was influential in him wanting to make better choices.

**Probation**

The young adult participants were required to meet weekly with the probation officer assigned to work the YADC caseload. The probation officer’s primary responsibility was to ensure that the young adult participants followed the judge’s orders. The probation officer’s role in YADC functioned similarly to traditional probation officers. For instance, young adults participating in the YADC still had to drop which meant that they had to provide a urine sample to be tested for illicit substances. Brenda described her role:

Being the probation officer involves many roles. I supervise them to make sure they’re doing all of the orders that any judge wants them to do. I still stay as a normal probation officer. They have to drop, and I have to supervise. I also play the role of trying to motivate them to keep going. I make more phone calls to them than I do a regular caseload. I make sure that they are following through with the program requirements, which involve: showing up for programming, completing community service, and their service-learning project.

Brenda worked to motivate young adult participants by providing care, support, and
encouragement. Brenda’s role as a probation officer in the YADC meant that she was an extension of the court and larger justice system; however, the young adults often acknowledged feeling cared for by Brenda.

Brenda and them get livid on you, they get on you. But they have a reason to be hard on you so they can get people out of here. (Jamal, African American male, 20)

Young adult participants indicated feeling safe talking to Brenda, and many felt that she was a motivating force for them.

Brenda is a cool ass probation officer; I love her she is awesome, super cool, super nice. They are really by the book over there, and this program is not. It is definitely a little unorthodox as hell, but over here they are a bunch of cool ass supporting people trying to get you together. (Ray, European American Male, age 18)

I know that Brenda really cares about us…My brother is on the run right now, and his probation officer is a straight asshole. They are trying to give him prison time right now. So he went on the run because he couldn’t quit using heroin. His probation officer is a dick. I’m just thankful for Brenda and everything she’s done for us. (Colby, European American Male, age 18)

When participants were asked about whom they went to for support, they often responded Brenda.

Brenda, she likes me to write different things on my days. Because I do have a lot of emotional days where I’m just everywhere, and Brenda taught me to write. It does help me a lot. (Aliyah, Biracial Female, Age 18)

Similarly, Tiana responded, “My mom and Brenda. Brenda worked with me, a lot. I came a long way; I have a real bad attitude.” When Brenda was asked why she wanted to be a part of the YADC she responded:

I really like to keep myself going in a job…also it did tug at the heartstrings of relating to this population. I was in a situation where I too could have gone one way or another. So I can definitely relate to the young individuals coming through and messing up…you get so frustrated with them. It was more if I can do something to help them out more, then, of course, I would more than just regular probation. (Brenda, Probation Officer)
Probation is a component of the YADC that required the young adults to meet weekly with the probation officer to ensure that they are following the mandates of the court. The probation officer was tasked with testing the youth for illicit substances, confirming that the young adults were completing their community service, and tracking their behavior through the program. Within the parameters of her role as a probation officer, Brenda was able to express care, support, and encouragement. Further, many of the young adult participants expressed respect for her even when she was hard on them.

**Service-Learning and Community Service**

The YADC required participants to perform service learning and community service. The service-learning requirement was designed to connect young adult participants with organizations and potential mentors in the community, while community service was often assigned as a punishment. Another difference was the writing prompts that required participants to reflect on service learning activity. Community service and similar activities can provide the opportunity for participants to express themselves and revise their identities (Jones, Warnaar, Bench, & Stroup, 2014). Both service learning and community service were essential components of the YADC.

**Service-learning.** Service learning was often designed around the specific interests of the young adult. Participants were matched with high school athletics, a radio DJ, professional mentors, community service organizations, and childcare services. A key objective of the service-learning requirement was to equip young adult participants with a local network of support that fostered successful attainment of their diversion and provided tangible skills to use long after participation in the YADC. When young adults entered the YADC, a staff member would work with them to develop a service-learning project in an area that was meaningful to
them. Brenda explained how she worked to develop goals with the young adults:

Some of them have never volunteered, some of them have never even thought about signing up for something they’re interested in. Say someone likes coaching or basketball. Well, we have an individual that did that. So a part of the service-learning project is to connect them with the community. We connected a young adult with a coach at a local high school, and he went to games and practices, and this was an opportunity to see if this is what he wanted to do. Ultimately those are the types of connections that we are trying to make for them. So before they leave, we are trying to get them to do something outside of what they would normally do. (Brenda, Probation Officer)

One poignant example of how the service-learning requirement influenced a young adult participant was captured in the field notes when one of the young adults read a letter to the court explaining how the YADC had helped:

During the last three months of the program, I began doing my volunteer work at the childcare center. I really like the idea of the childcare center because it offers free childcare to low-income families. I thought that would be the perfect place to volunteer because I know how hard it can be for parents to work and take care of their children…I realized that most of the children were coming from tough homes where they were too young to understand the things that their parents had to deal with…Watching the kids play and have fun brought back memories of my childhood and all the fun I used to have when I was their age seeing how the kids can love easily, forgive easily, and trust easily made me realize how things change, as we grow older. As we grow up, we are faced with many difficult decisions that for most people completely change us from who we were as kids.

Many of us have experienced things that will stay with us for the rest of our lives both good and bad. A lot of us had to grow up too quickly and had to deal with things that no child should have to face. But as depressing as that sounds it also helps us to grow as a person and become mentally stronger. It helps us get through the difficult times during our lives knowing that we will learn from our mistakes and become a stronger person because of it. (Letter to the court, unidentified female participant.)

The service-learning requirement often connected young adult participants with organizations and potential mentors in the community in which they lived. Through building relationships with local non-profit organizations and learning about local community needs the YADC participants had the opportunity to develop communication skills further.
Community service. In addition to creating individualized service learning experiences based on each participant’s interests, the YADC would also engage in community-based service as a group which also met the court-mandated requirement to obtain a particular amount of community service hours. One distinction regarding community service is that young adults did complete court-mandated hours where they performed community service individually (e.g., menial labor); however, these examples of community service were not discussed by them; instead, they often described group based community service as particularly meaningful. Typically, group-based community service was planned on a programming night. For instance, feeding the homeless at a local park was one experience that multiple young adults described as transformative:

We had something called the service project, and I liked that because it puts me in my community. We would set up tables and feed the homeless at the local park. It put me in my community doing something, productive to the people who don’t have anything, and that inspires me a little bit…I never really seen myself serving them food or something good. I liked that project. It felt like a weight was lifted off of my shoulders I felt like I have always been doing the homeless wrong. I felt good on the inside. (Alonzo, African American Male, age 17)

Going to feed the homeless. We did that as a group, a service learning project. It was crazy because a girl started tripping on me for no reason. She thought I was in line; I was there trying to feed them. I got pretty pissed. But it shows how lucky I am compared to some of the people. It gave me another outlook on my life. That I have people that actually care about me. (Colby, European American Male, age 18).

Participants may have increased their self-awareness through reflecting about their participation in community services activities. Feeding the homeless was one example that provided the YADC participants with a chance to experience how they could make a positive contribution to the local community. Community service activities led some young adult participants to reflect on their own lives and choices:

Yeah, the one at the mission. It makes you think. Like, I mean, a lot of people are
homeless and don’t have food, but you got places in the community that help, and they’re actually there for them. And it makes you think, what are you doing with your life? There are people out there that have nothing, but they’re still doing something. (Mason, European American Male, Age 18)

When we went downtown and fed the homeless, it really opened my eyes because one lady was my mom’s age. Literally, my mom is 42, and she was like “do what Y'all need to do so you won't be down here when you're 40.” I was like wow, damn, she is my mom age. I was looking at how my mom is and see where she is and I was like no I'm not trying to be like that. (Tiana, African American Female, Age 19)

Both service learning and community service provided ample opportunity for participants to take away critical lessons. Group-based community service provided participants the opportunity to make a positive contribution to their community and reflect on their experiences through engagement in expressive writing activities. While the service learning requirement was designed to equip young adult participants with a local network of support that fostered successful attainment of their diversion and provided tangible skills to use long after participation in the YADC. Interactions with service experiences through the YADC led young adults to reconsider their identities about societal exceptions, consistent with findings from research in this area (Jones, Warnaar, Bench, & Stroup, 2014). Performing service allowed young adult participants to envision ways that they could contribute to the local community.

Healthy Choices and the Block Grant

The healthy choices curriculum was provided by County Health Services in a psycho-education curriculum. Materials were provided to participants about broad health issues, and guest speakers came to programming to discuss important issues with participants. A block grant allowed income-eligible participants to access funds for essential necessities. Young adult participants were able to use the block grant to obtain food and diapers for their children, hygiene needs, and clothing for job interviews.

During a meeting the YADC staff discussed the logistics of incorporating the block grant
into YADC:

Brenda discussed the block grant and the requirements for the YADC participants to get the funding. The funding will cover GED testing. Funding decisions may be determined if participants show up or not. Manny suggests an idea of making the funding contingent upon the participant’s actual attendance in programming. (Field Note excerpt)

The block grant was a useful resource to the YADC as it provided additional resources for participants. For instance, field notes taken during a YADC team meeting discussed Cameron’s pending graduation from the program:

Brenda: By next month Cameron should be able to graduate. I connected him with a mentor who is a lawyer, and he is very excited about it. 
Judge: I am hopeful that this will be an explosive match between Cameron and the attorney. 
Brenda: Cameron does not have any professional interview clothes. I hope that we can get him a grant for some funds for clothes.

This interchange illustrates how the block grant was a helpful resource to the YADC.

Participants were asked to dress nice for interviews and community service appointments, but not all participants had the money to afford nice clothes. George reiterates the importance of having access to professional clothing:

If they get funds for clothes, they might feel better about getting clothes elsewhere besides the Salvation Army if you feel better, it makes a difference. (George, YADC Staff)

The block grants also provided funds for youth to help with various needs such as clothing, car repair, and even dental needs. For some other young adult participants, the block grant helped to shore up basic needs that were not being met. Field notes capture how the block grant helped Jackson:

Jackson was excited about receiving the security deposit and first-month rent through the block grant program. Apparently, he had been kicked out of his house after an argument with his father. Jackson described getting this money as a miracle and that no one had ever done anything so nice for him. Jackson continues to hold his job at a fast-food restaurant job however only makes $7.40
an hour. I wonder how long it would have taken him to save up the money to move out of his parents’ house. (Field note excerpt)

The block grant provided through the County Health Services was beneficial as it provided access to funds that were otherwise unavailable to some young adult participants. The county health services representative also helped the young adult participants sign up for medical coverage as some participants were eligible for health insurance and did not know it. Overall, healthy choices was a component of the YADC that provided young adult participants with access to information, education, and resources.

**Programming**

Young adults were expected to attend programming one evening each week. Programming provided an opportunity for young adults to work toward establishing their identity and self-worth while also learning to assume personal and community responsibility.

Programming was structured to provide participants with individual support, a warm meal, and encouragement of personal development and accountability to themselves. A primary component of programming was a curriculum informed by creative and expressive arts. A typical programming night involved the facilitators engaging participants in a group discussion through the introduction of a topic or model poem. Following group discussion, young adults participated in writing assignments, which allowed them to reflect on the chosen topic. They then had the option to share insights with the group.

**A typical programming night.** On a typical programming night, young adults sat around the table to discuss their highs and lows. As each young person shared an anecdote about their week, the facilitator hurled Starburst or other candies in their direction. Starburst seemed to have the best trajectory as they bounced off tables and sometimes ricocheted off walls before reaching the youth for sharing their highs and lows. Mason described how dodging candy affected him,
“That is not even right, duck and cover. Other than that it is like, I do not know, it kind of cheers me up. If I’m having a bad day, you know…it is just the way they are, the way they talk.” Often Brian and Manny chucked candies at young adult participants as they sat around the table. Throwing candies during the highs and lows activity was one way that the facilitators engaged and rewarded the young adults for participation. The highs and lows activity also set the tone for programming as it provided the facilitators with a way to assess how each young person might be feeling that night in particular. After about 15 minutes of the highs and lows activity, the group was dismissed to eat dinner, which was usually pizza. After the young adult participants ate, the primary activity began.

On most nights Brian and Manny facilitated the nightly activity. However, representatives from County Health Services would attend programming and discuss important health issues with the young adult participants and even help them sign up for health insurance during programming. Other nights, guest speakers came to programming to provide a fresh perspective for young adult participants. Programming was complex and dynamic. Program facilitators varied the activities. Field notes captured the weekly process that occurred in programming:

The activity was to get into pairs and develop a list of 10-20 steps to follow "to get your ass off of probation/out of the system." The atmosphere is so relaxed; they allow them to curse and speak in their regular manners. There is a lot of laughter and fun while teaching them social skills to talk in front of others. The participants conform to the authority of the programmers and keep hostility at a pretty low level. The incentive of the activity is cash visa cards, that can be spent anywhere. With attainable rewards, the participants are much more likely to do better and try a little bit harder at the activity.

Nightly programming topics also focused on topics central to young adult development:

The activity theme was perceptions, using notecard participants were to describe 5 appearance characteristics, and 5 internal characteristics or something people would not typically know about you. There is substantial encouragement from the
program leaders to the participants. Some of the participants seem unsure of themselves, and sometimes showing self-esteem issues. This program accepts them for who they are, and only want to encourage them to be the best they can. Most participants are overwhelmed with responsibilities and burdened with pain, anger, and hurt.

Programming often invited the youth to discuss real-life situations and how the young adult participants could respond in meaningful ways. On one night, in particular, the discussion focused on how different situations are perceived as minor and major and how the young adults would respond on a scale from 1 to 10. Examples were written on the whiteboard.

- Screwing up my meal
- Someone staring at you
- Bad parenting
- Laces come untied
- White lie
- Sibling wearing your clothes
- Leaving doors open
- Being delayed by others
- Cheated on
- Domestic violence

The responses could range from: 1-3 ignore it. “Not trip about it.” Let it go; 4-6 Talk shit, shrug it off; 7-9 Have words, stomp feet, throw things, and slam doors; 10 Fight, kill someone, yell.

The exercise was engaging and the young adults discussed how they would respond in various situations. A goal of the exercise was to have the participants think about their behavior and typical real-life responses. Brian asked the youth, “What happens to your behavior as you get angrier?” One question that was raised by the group was how do you separate anger from violence? The topic focused on how anger may inhibit one from moving forward in life. After the initial prompt, Brian asked the young adults to share an example of a violent experience. Brian explained that the example could involve the participants committing a violent act, witnessing a violent act, or being on the receiving end of violent activity. A group discussion ensued, and young adult participants were instructed to reflect on how anger and peer conflict could be handled differently.
Guest speakers were invited to programming to discuss specialty areas. One guest speaker was a marine who personally disclosed how violence had impacted his life. This topic was timely as there had been a lot of violence in the local community. The Marine explained that he was a sniper in the Marine Corps and was deployed to Afghanistan. His primary assignment as a sniper was to conduct recon and surveillance with the goal of locating high-value targets. The marine explained how he accidentally shot a 13-year-old in Afghanistan:

Two people came up to dig up an IED or so we thought. We saw them with shovels digging...I counted down 3,2,1 I took the guy on the left they took the guy on the right and pulled the trigger, and they both dropped immediately. Then we had to do a Battle Damage Assessment. If the enemy is wounded, you have to help them get medical attention. The uncles and nephews came out they were rolling and screaming crying on the ground. They could not walk. We had to escort them back to where the rest of the company was. When we went up to see what they were doing...I mean they dug a big hole, but all they had on them was a bag bread. So was I in the right? I do not know. I mean much of the time they will dig a big hole, and someone else will come and plant the bomb. But that is something I have to live with every day.

The marine then asked if the young adults had ever seen anybody shot before, a few young adults raised their hands. Alonzo commented, “Seeing violence is not a good sight, people are screaming and throwing up.” The Marine explained that this is first time talking about his experience in a group setting and that it is hard to live a normal life. The Marine stated, "I have nightmares, I still see the kid’s face…people are thinking that you have to be hard all the time…but people do not realize that you have to live with that". The young adults were engaged in the presentation and asked the Marine questions about his experience. When the Marine concluded his portion of the discussion, Brian resumed the role as facilitator and asked the young adults to think about what they are doing to contribute to violence. Brian asked, "How many of you have been touched by the recent local shooting?" Four youth raised their hands.

The young adults were then instructed to write a letter to the Marine by responding to what he
The Creative and Expressive Arts

Activities relating to and inspired by; the creative and expressive arts were conducted during programming. The YADC utilized two creative arts experts Brian and Manny from the community to facilitate programming. Brian and Manny were from a non-profit spoken-word organization whose mission is to uplift youth and adults who have been silenced by helping them find and powerfully express their voice. Brian and Manny emerged as the primary component of programming and key facilitators during the weekly programming. George a YADC staff member explained how he saw programming and creative arts in particular as contributing to the experience of the young adults:

I think [programming], has become more focused on participants talking about their lives and its structural programming is more ritualized in a positive way…I think now that the strengths of the program are based on allowing these participants to tell their stories…I think the court is evolving into just getting these participants to talk about their lives in a hopeful and matter of fact way and to explore their social and personal histories in a public manner. (George, YADC Staff)

Writing activities. The young adult participants were prompted to do a variety of writing activities during programming. One example is when they were prompted to write to the court regarding their behavior. The prompt stated:

Dear court, when you look at me you see me as…but what you do not know is actually…now that you know this, I hope you can…

During this particular night, the youth quietly reflected on the prompt for about 15 minutes. Most wrote 1-2 pages, and several needed extra paper and wrote 3-4 pages. After the writing session, the facilitator pulled a podium into the room and had each one of them read (or paraphrase) their letters. Young adults worried about how society viewed them. They expressed not wanting to be labeled as a criminal. Participants were forthcoming about substance use and asserted that
marijuana and alcohol provided a means to address past trauma.

Dear court…When you see my name in the system or see me as a person in society, you see me as a failure or as someone who is a druggie for the simple fact that I am on probation for marijuana…On the other hand what you wouldn’t know about me is that I have no other prior convictions and never had anything more than a parking ticket. I never got pulled over for being under any type of influence or anything except one incident of being with the wrong people at the wrong time. What the court system doesn’t know, or pretends not to know, is everybody makes mistakes, and in my situation, my mistake is getting caught with marijuana. Everybody has their reasons for everything that they do. In my case, smoking marijuana is my gateway or escape from the reality of things that bother me from my past…what you actually don’t know is that I’m a big sister…I see myself as a role model. Things that I’ve done I wouldn’t dare let them do…What the court doesn’t know is that I have goals for myself and I know I want to be successful in life. I’m in college…What the court does not know is that I'm really a dedicated person to things that I love. One negative thing that the courts don’t know is that it is hard staying sober, if not weed, maybe liquor, or ecstasy. It is personal things in life that make me not want to be sober. But what the courts don’t know is that since I’ve been on probation, it has been an eye-opener for myself. Now that I’ve shared a piece of myself I hope you can see the real me and the future successful woman that I can be and not as a petty criminal that made a few dumb mistakes. (Tiana, African American Female, Age 19)

Each participant shared powerful stories. The stories contained instances of abuse, trauma, and rape. The stories also voiced hope and a desire for a prosperous future. This particular writing exercise provided a platform to empower participants and provide them space to develop their voice. During each programming night, participants were instructed to write about their experience on a chosen topic. The young adults’ weekly writing was collected and later fashioned into a letter to the court to be read during their graduation from the YADC.

**Letter to the court.** The letter to the court represents a composite of written reflections completed over the duration of the young adult participants’ time in the YADC. As young adult’s neared graduation from the YADC, time was set aside for them to work one on one with a program facilitator to refine their letter to the court. Once the letter to the court was drafted, the young adult participant would then practice delivering the final piece. The letter to the court was read in court during graduation. An excerpt from a letter to the court is provided below:
I have learned a lot from my experience with the YADC Program... One of the most helpful things was that the YADC staff was able to relate to us because they had all been through similar struggles... This made me realize that even though I made some major mistakes in my life if I stayed in the program, I would learn how to overcome the difficult things in my life and be able to move past it just like they have... There are so many things that I want to accomplish in my life and having a record is going to prevent me from doing some of the things that I want to do. I am truly grateful that I was chosen to be a part of the program... Without this program, I know I would have just seen myself as a failure, as someone who would end up going nowhere in life, but the YADC program made me realize that I am only human and it is okay to make mistakes as long as you learn from them. I know I have learned a great deal from the mistakes I have made, and it is all because I was a part of the YADC program. I am really grateful for the guidance that was provided for us because it helped me forgive myself for what I did but also taught me never to forget because getting through it has really made me a stronger person.

This final reflective piece detailed how young adult participants learned to take responsibility for their past behavior, progressed through the program, and also stated their hopes for the future.

When this young adult finished reading this particular letter to the court, there was a round of applause in the courtroom followed by hugs and well wishes. An excerpt from the field notes captured the moment:

The judge seemed impressed and touched by the young adult participant. The judge encouraged her not to give up on her education and stated that the world needs people like her to work with young people. The judge then asks if anyone wants to say anything to her. Alonzo blurts out that the young adults had all written a letter for her. Manny responds to Alonzo, “she does not know that” as the letters were supposed to be a surprise for the YADC graduate. The judge then lets her leave court early. The YADC graduate seems touched by the response of the judge, the YADC staff, and all of the young adults in attendance. Everyone again applauds as she leaves the courtroom. The door shuts behind her and the touching moment is gone; the momentary reprieve over, and the reality of being in court set in. (Field note excerpt)

Section Summary

The YADC was created to give young adults a second chance by removing charges from their public record and reducing the possibility of future offense related behavior. To meet these
goals, the YADC created a court program to address the underlying behavior and needs of the participants. The core structure of the YADC consisted of court, probation, service learning and community service, healthy choices, the block grant, and weekly programming sessions. The multiple facets of the YADC were intended to influence the participants’ behavior by creating an environment that fostered competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring (Deutsch, 2008), and by intervening in the lives of young adults in helpful, meaningful ways. The creative and expressive arts were explicitly integrated into the YADC to provide young adult participants the opportunity to reflect on the choices that brought them under the auspices of the court, to heal from past trauma, and to find their voice through spoken word. The next section employs a narrative framework to examine the second research question of how the young adult participants experienced the creative and expressive arts. I began with the social-ecological themes that organically emerged when youth were merely asked to tell their stories of how they came to be involved with the YADC.

A Retrospective Account of Participants Stories Before the YADC

This section will highlight themes related to the young adult participants’ backgrounds and initial contact and involvement with the justice system. The origins of participants’ narratives provide a baseline of comparison as it is important to understand the roots of participants’ stories and how interaction with the YADC may have influenced their identity and behavior over time. Furthermore, the participants’ narratives provide rich detail of complex lives, complicated by interaction with the justice system. This section is intended to contextualize the young adult participants’ experience in the YADC through detailing the complex ways that families, peers, neighborhoods, and schools interact to influence behavior. During interviews with young adult participants, they often told stories about families, friends, neighborhoods, and
schools. These themes emerged organically in the analysis, and an ecological framework was used to consider the themes presented in this section. Ecological theorists suggest multiple environmental systems influence human development and development is negotiated and constructed through interpersonal relationships and interactions with others that continuously evolve over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1992; Damon, 2004; Deutsch, 2008; Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000; Kurtines et al., 2008b).

**Family Influence**

When asked about their stories over half described their family as influential in their choices and behaviors. The young adults often told stories of how they came to be involved in YADC, and many described their family as a context, which influenced these choices and behaviors. Some of the stories told by young adult participants demonstrated how members of their family enacted direct influence on their behavior, whereas others told stories where family influence was indirect. Consistent with ecological thinking that considers the influence of micro and macro systems it is important to note that the influence a particular family had on behavior is complicated and discussing this theme as direct and indirect influence is not clear cut but provided to aid the reader in understating how family dynamics affected young adult participants in YADC. Participants in this study described experiences in the family that had direct and indirect influences on their ability to make prosocial choices.

**Direct family influence.** Direct family influences are proximal and affect the young adults’ actions both within and beyond the family environment. For example, Aliyah described a conflict between the values established in her family and the local law, which prohibited consumption of marijuana:

I started in 6th grade. My whole family smokes weed, and I was introduced to it...Ever since then I’ve been smoking. I have a lot of issues in my personal life.
Family issues, relationship issues. My mom has 10 kids. 7 live at home, plus grandkids, so it's like 12 people in the house. It's crazy; it's overwhelming. I don't know why the older ones still live there, a 25-year-old and a 19-year-old… I'm basically like another mom in that house. So all the stress is on me. They all party— it's getting old, all the drinking and stuff. I need a job, need some motivation because I can’t be stuck here the rest of my life. (Aliyah, Biracial Female, Age 18)

Aliyah demonstrated how the family is a socializing force while highlighting how values established in the family system conflict with what is legal and accepted in larger society. Furthermore, Aliyah’s sees her role as another mother in the family and strives to parent siblings while also parenting herself. Scholars assert that economic constraints may require children to assume adult roles within the family structure possibly leading to adultification, which involves acquiring precocious knowledge and initiating adult behavior and responsibilities (Burton, 2007; Roy, Messina, Smith, & Waters, 2014). Adultification leads to the generation of both assets and liabilities. When seen in the context of life-course development, “Adolescents and children who bear heavy responsibilities may also have a strong sense that they matter in their families and feel needed and appreciated by their parents, but simultaneously suffer from anxiety, depression, and "hyper" levels of worry as a consequence of their family roles. Thus, adultification is both a matter of accumulating assets and liabilities, and the long-term consequences may not be fully apparent until these children reach adulthood” (Burton, 2007, p. 341). As a construct, adultification may have important implications for individuals who face economic constrictions in the age of emerging adulthood where it is appropriate to stave off adult responsibilities and invest in one’s identity and potential.

For many of the youth, their family environments played a role in their pathway to the YADC. For instance, when Tamara was asked about how she came to be involved in YADC she discussed the direct influence of her aunt on her behavior:
Q: What led you here?  
Stealing with my aunt...White people stuff. Q: What were you stealing?  
Everything.  
Q: Where did you get caught?  
A grocery store and Walmart. (Tamara, African American Female, Age 17).

Direct family influences were expressed in multiple ways. Tamara’s narrative highlights how a family member may enact direct influence on a young person’s behavior. Another example of direct family influences was illustrated in the narrative of Aliyah. While enrolled in the YADC she was exposed to positive social norms that would likely help her get off probation; however, her family environment and norms established within the family conflicted with local laws. Young adult participants often described the importance of getting off probation and establishing clean drug test but at the same time acknowledged the difficulty in establishing clean tests while living in a family environment where substance use was accepted if not modeled.

**Indirect family influence.** Indirect family influences are distal factors represented in the layered choices made by guardians and important adults tasked with the responsibility of providing stability to young adults in this study. Participants’ stories were complex as they described absent parents, incarcerated parents, and parents who died at an early age. A common thread across their stories was a sense of pain, loss, and resignation. Emma explained how her biological father supported another woman’s daughters. While describing her frustration for his absence, she also recognized the vital role that fathers play:

> It is crazy. He always treated his non-daughters like more of his daughters than his real ones. Does that make sense? So I never got along with him. But you know, they need someone because their dads ain’t there. I guess it ain't a big deal.  
(Emma, European American Female, Age 19)

Emma realized the importance of having supportive parents but minimized the need for a father in her own life. Nora also discussed how the absence of her father and choices made by her mother had an indirect influence on her decision to steal. Additionally, the absence of her father...
and the lack of consistent and stable living environment meant that Nora would spend time homeless.

Um, well I’m 17, and I live with my little brother and my mom—she’s a single mom. I’ve never known my dad my whole life. And my mom’s always had tons of boyfriends, different boyfriends, so I’ve never really had a stable, stable-like family, normal family kind of stuff. And it’s always been my mom struggling for money and all that, so then I got into this program for retail fraud because I don’t like to ask my mom for money because she struggles. That’s how I was getting stuff that I not necessarily needed, but wanted. I needed to feel like other people, would like me. I have an older brother who’s also on probation for drug use and retail fraud too, but, and then I have another older brother that got hit and killed by a train… after my brother died, we moved with one of my mom’s boyfriends, and then they broke up, and then we moved back up here two years ago. Then I was homeless for a few months, and then my mom got into apartments… (Nora, European American Female, Age 17).

Nora’s story highlighted how young people desire to fit in with their peers and feel accepted. It seems that for Nora obtaining “stuff” was one way to fit in and she was compelled to meet this need. The inability of Nora’s parents to provide consistently likely had an indirect influence on Nora’s decision to steal.

Young adult participants often detailed homelessness and unstable living situations. Unstable situations were caused by choices parents made which ultimately constrained the available choices and options of young adult participants in YADC. Lamar explained how he was adopted at a young age by his aunt as his biological mother was barely involved in his life:

My auntie adopted me, so I’m still in the family. My mom was in and out of jail when I was younger. My real mom has hardly been in my life. My mom that adopted me and been there since I was two—so I call her mom since I love them both. I tried to stay in school, but my mom, she’s 73, and she couldn’t have 2 teenagers. Cause I have a brother that was adopted with me, my blood brother. And she said that she couldn’t maintain both of us, so we had to find a place to stay so we did that. That’s when I ended up staying with my friend, and I moved up here, and they called my case house invasion. My baby mama called the police on me because I stepped foot in her house and I didn’t ask. I did take a game system and took it because she owed me $100 and I never got it. She called the police, and I got the home invasion and larceny. Then I messed up smoking
marijuana on probation. So I'm in this program to keep the felony stuff off my record (Lamar, African American Male, Age 18).

The choices made by Lamar’s guardians contributed to a loss of stable housing which led him to live with friends. This is one example of indirect family influence, as Lamar’s grandma did not directly influence him to steal. Instead, Lamar's choice to steal was motivated by economic constraints. Furthermore, the absence of Lamar’s parents and unstable living environments had an indirect influence on his decision-making. Most glaring is the lack of resources missing in the lives of the young adults but just as significant is the loss of guidance and support. Cameron recalled how the passing of his mother influenced his life and subsequent decisions:

I lost my mother at a very young age, and she was the one that was always there, she is my mother so, she is going to help me with anything and help me become something. I lost my mom when I was five years old, after that I lost my grandmother when I was nine years old, which was the next closest person like a mother to me. So it’s like I never really had a mother in my life, neither a father because my father went to prison when I was five too. He went to prison for eight years, so he was gone for a mighty long time, so I never had a lady or a man in my life. I have been tossed around to family members, tossed around the system; I have just been getting tossed around. (Cameron, African American Male, Age 18).

While several respondents described a sense of loss, Cameron’s story illustrates this loss and at the same time captures yearning for guidance, support, and love. Cameron lost both his mother and grandmother and also lost his father who was incarcerated. Cameron described being “tossed around” by family members and the foster care system and missing out on direction and guidance.

The stories detailed in the above section highlight the role that families play in socializing youth. When families are unable to provide resources so that young people can obtain their wants and desires, the young adult participants found another way to meet their needs. This section demonstrated the importance of family as context and in influencing young adult participants. For instance, illicit substance use was permissible in some families, which is a direct
contradiction to local laws. The direct influence that families can have on participant behavior is apparent. For instance, when a participant describes a family member taking them to the store to steal that is a direct influence on the young adult’s behavior. As I stated earlier, indirect family influence is less evident. When one thinks of a typical family, specific behaviors come to mind, such as providing, protecting, and nurturing. When listening to some of the young adult participants’ stories it seems that their families did not always provide, protect, and nurture. The absence of family supports may have had an indirect influence on their behavior and decision to commit a crime.

Peer Influence

More than half of the young adult participants also described being influenced by their peers when discussing their stories and pathways into the YADC. The theme peer influence described how the young adult participants’ attitudes and behaviors were influenced by their friends and peers (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011). For instance, when Colby was asked about the first time he smoked he stated:

Yeah, like 6th grade. Just hanging around with my friends to tell you the truth, I was just trying to be cool at first. And then, I started doing it a lot whenever I would get mad…I would just smoke. (Colby, European American Male, Age 18)

Often, young adult participants described attempts to resist being influenced by their peers to use illicit substances, but admittedly, curiosity and a desire to be accepted led them to experiment with marijuana. For Colby, smoking marijuana with friends became a bonding activity where he described feeling accepted his peers. Existing research suggests that youth are not necessarily pressured to use illicit substances; instead, they may engage in the use of illicit substances to maintain bonds with their friend group (Kobus, 2003). Colby discovered that marijuana could be used to regulate his mood, which may have led him to use marijuana when feeling down instead
of utilizing socially accepted methods to regulate his mood.

“Running in the streets” or “hanging in the streets” is a subtheme of peer influence. The young adults often described running in the streets and hanging in the streets in ways that were actual and symbolic. In a sense, “the streets” represented both a location and lifestyle where the young adults were able to socialize with peers, escape issues at home, and experiment with new behaviors. The streets represented opportunities for fun, excitement, and exploration. The streets were also a place to avoid as the streets contained known and unknown dangers, and for some young adults, temptations that if they were to be successful in YADC, they would learn to avoid.

Hanging in the streets then represented an additional way that young adult participants described peer influence. Hanging in the streets, for many, was a pathway to substance use and subsequent involvement with the justice system. For instance, Kiara stated, “I used to get good grades until I started hanging in the streets.” Hanging in the streets represented at least one component in her departure from prosocial behavior. It seems that youth initially tried to resist the use of illicit substances, but the decision to smoke meant being cool and brought acceptance from peers. Stories of peer influence to use illicit substances were reported across gender, race, and ethnicity. For instance, when Jackson was asked when he started smoking he explained:

Hmm. My first day was my 9th-grade year, last trimester, during the exams. And I don't know. I was just like. At first, I was like I can’t smoke. I’m an athlete…I just got curious. I thought like, “What would it be like?” How would it actually feel? So, one day I just told my boy. He was happy because he wanted me to. (Jackson, African American Male, Age 18).

When Miguel was asked about his story before YADC he explained:

I had a group of friends in high school that liked to blaze and get stoned…We’d always smoke before whatever we did. That was the usual. I first started in Eighth grade and the summer going into high school. That’s when it was introduced and then started smoking more and more. (Miguel, Hispanic Male, Age 18)

Jackson and Miguel used marijuana to maintain bonds with their friends. Substance use among
adolescents has been attributed to peer influence, and peer selection as adolescents’ behaviors and attitudes are remarkably similar to the behaviors and attitudes of their friends (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Kirke, 2004). Simons-Morton and Chen (2006) assert that friendships with substance-using peers increased the likelihood of adolescent substance use (Simons-Morton & Chen, 2006). Further, peers play a critical role in development and can exact powerful influence on adolescent risk-taking behaviors (Deutsch, Steinley, & Slutske, 2014).

The young adult participants in this study were able to recognize the tension between making prosocial choices and continuing to hang in the streets. Kiara noted, “From being in this program I’m realizing [school] is where I need to be. Instead of being on the streets getting in trouble, because the streets are not worth it, especially with a baby.” For some of the youth, the pull of the streets was strong and attempts to resist the pull of the streets required complete avoidance of the streets. For instance, Malik explained his strategy to avoid smoking marijuana as he stated, “To stop smoking I have been staying at home and not being around so much smoke.” Young adults detailed their attempts to avoid peer influence by way of the streets:

Um, pretty much just I watch the people that I’m around now because basically like I can get influenced like quick so. Like I just put myself over here, and I don’t really hang with people that I used to hang with like on a daily basis. Like while I’m on [probation] it’s not anything personal to them it’s just I’m just tryna make it through this (Omar, African American Male, Age 20).

Yeah, you wouldn’t have a problem, unless you jumped yourself into a problem. If you stay to yourself, you’ll do good. But when you got friends, and they smoke and drink and peer pressure you, it will make you feel good. Sometimes you might pick it up, sometimes naw, that ain’t for me...I'm trying to make things go better in life like go back to school (Lamar, African Male, Age 18).

The stories of young adult participants in this subsection highlighted the tension between making prosocial choices such as attending school and socializing with friends who use illicit substances. Young adult participants were able to acknowledge the importance of obtaining sobriety mainly
to get off of probation and to graduate from the YADC successfully. Obtaining sobriety would mean avoiding friends, and for some young adults, it would mean avoiding family.

Throughout the study young adult participants described marijuana use as an issue in establishing clean drug tests to meet requirements of their probation and many detailed how they had begun smoking as early as 6th grade. Existing literature suggests that middle school years represent a peak for substance use initiation as adolescents who perceived their peers using illicit substances were likely to engage in substance use themselves (D’Amico & McCarthy, 2006). For instance, Alonzo stated, “I can say I have been smoking for like 7 or 8 years strong nonstop every day. That is why I told the judge it is hard for me to stop smoking.” What is most striking about the narratives detailing marijuana use is that some of the young adult participants had been smoking since middle school; which for young adult participants in this study would mean approaching almost a decade of marijuana consumption.

**Neighborhood Influence**

The theme of neighborhood influence parallels the theme of peer influence, but it goes a step further in describing the multiple influences and absence of social supports to influence prosocial behavior. One of the program coordinators explained his understanding of the neighborhoods that some of the young adult participants grew up in and the subsequent influence on their choices and behaviors:

The main things these kids face right now are drug use. They face abuse of delinquent parents, abuse of delinquent friends, and dangerous neighborhoods. A hazardous environment with drug peddlers and alcohol peddlers…they face so many different dynamics. They face manipulators and people who are just going to try to get whatever they can out of them. They face peer pressure - the peer pressure to get out and, “Come on, man, you know, it’s not going to take but a minute to steal this car- come on man, it is gonna take us nothing but a minute to go over here and roll on these fools - you know they're disrespecting our hood - they're disrespecting our street.” You know, to me it's silly because, we got young
kids willing to, put their life on the line for a street that's not theirs, they don't own it! They don't own the house on that street, they don't own the street, they don’t own the concrete, they don’t own the pavement, but it’s they block (Lance, YADC Staff).

There seems to be a link between the neighborhood that some of the young adults grew up in and their access to the streets. Furthermore, it seems as if the tension between making prosocial choices such as attending school and adhering to the terms of probation are in conflict with socializing with friends who use illicit substances. When asked to describe the hood, Alonzo explained:

> It is not a nice place. Everywhere you look around; everything is abandoned, boarded down, the sidewalks unveled, it is poor. Dope fiends; people who do drugs badly and floating everywhere, and it’s the young black males selling it to them. It is not a nice place to grow up in, but that is where you grow up and when you get to that age it is just what you will do. Then when you get caught, and you dip you have a record, which makes looking for a job hard, most felons don't get hired. In the hood, the ratio is to be dead or in jail (Alonzo, African American Male, age 17).

The neighborhood environment seems to amplify vulnerability and increase susceptibility to making poor choices despite expressed desire to desist from engaging in harmful and unhelpful behaviors:

> I know what I have to do, I just need to do it more frequently. And be dedicated. I know I can go far, I know I can. But I can jump back into the negativity—the court or the people in it, I tell them what they want to hear, but I’m trying to stay positive and around positive people. Sometimes it’s kind of hard because I live in the neighborhood of negativity (Lamar, African American Male, age 18).

Not all YADC participants lived in what Lamar called a neighborhood of negativity, but for those who did it was hard to differentiate “the streets” from the actual negative neighborhood. It seems that for some young adults “the streets” were a temporary location that they found through hanging out with peers. However when it was time to leave “the streets” these temporary visitors were able to do so, but for those young adults whose actual physical neighborhood
represented the symbolic streets - leaving was much harder.

**School Influence**

More than half of the young adult participants detailed an aspect of school that influenced their behavior. Schools are an additional location where young adult participants struggled to negotiate conflict with peers. When asked to describe themselves and their experiences in school young adults often described a tension between pursuing education and spending time in the streets:

Right now I’m basically stuck between two places, trying to be in the education world, but then I have people around me who are in the streets, so you know, and everybody be like “dang you hang with them type of people, you don't seem like the type of person to hang with that crowd, you should be in school.” So it’s like I’m like in between the two right now (Tiana, Black Female, Age 19).

For participants in this study, school represented an additional environment where they were placed in vulnerable situations. For instance, Jackson detailed how he was threatened by peers and made a poor choice, which led to his involvement with the justice system. Jackson explained, “I had a knife on me at school. It was only because I was threatened to get killed and robbed.”

Young adult participants detailed the difficulty in negotiating conflicts with their peers. When asked about their experience in school young adults described difficulty negotiating peer conflicts, which often led to fights and subsequent suspension. Aliyah described how her environment and behavior changed once she enrolled in public high school.

I was good until middle school, then high school came, and high school was friends fun, everything. I started slacking…The high school is chaos; it’s crazy. For me myself, I wasn’t getting the right kind of teaching that I need. I’m the type of person that I need you right there telling me something. They were like, I’m only gonna tell you once, and I got a smart mouth. I was in and out of school suspension. Friends, skipping class, oh well, I’ll go the next day. I got expelled from school, my sister and I fought a girl. After that, it was over. I couldn’t go back to school that year, so I went to an alternative school and the same person
Young adult participant’s explained how conflicts with peers led to suspensions and expulsions from school:

5th grade I had perfect attendance. 6th grade it was horrible, I never went. I would go to school, get in a fight, get suspended, go back to school, and get in a fight. 7th and 8th grade the same thing. 9th grade came around, and I was out. I went like once a month just to see what was going on with everybody. I was just like forget it…kids just always messing…I showed them I wasn’t somebody to be messed with and was fighting basically every time I went to school (Colby, European American Male, age 18).

[A fight] got me kicked out of school. I got suspended a couple of times. But my grades went down. I brought most of them back up. So it's not that bad. I get B's, and I’m graduating. The first time I got jumped, I got suspended for three days. They didn’t even put that on my attendance sheet. Then a week later when I fought, I got 10 days, but it only said six, so I don’t know (Serena, African American Female, age 17).

Young adult participants described how the education system did not work for them as they struggled to solve conflicts with peers in ways that did not lead to their dismissal from school. In addition to fighting young adults described general boredom and disengagement. Nora explained, "I didn't drop out but I stopped going for the last like two months, but I'll start back up again in summer school for the next year." Similarly, Mason described how he gave up on school. He stated, "Na, I gave up on that. I can't do that. It doesn't work for me. Like, sit there just trying to learn. It's boring. I don't learn anything. I barely passed like 3 classes."

School completion was a challenge for many of the YADC participants, and there were varied reasons that young adults stopped attending school. One reason was boredom. For some young adult participants, they described math as a notable struggle, and it seemed that math became a reason to stop going to high school altogether as they did not see a path to graduation.

When participants were asked about their experience in school they explained:
Since I have been going back to school, I have been lost, because I have been missing. I am actually moving forward, though my only hard subject in school is Math, I know how to count money, but when it comes to all the big equations and stuff like that, I am not good at (Alonzo, African American Male, Age 17).

I always did good in school, the only thing I ever struggled with was math, I never really liked that, but I can count my money! I always did good in the rest of my subjects, like reading, writing papers and stuff, I always been real good at that (Tiana, African American Female, Age 19).

It seems that for some youth their perceived inability to master math led to disengagement in school and for some, it led them to stop going all together:

Math, scared of math. But I know I’m going to get a lot of tutoring for math. That’s what really kept me from staying in school, Cause you’re gonna have to pass math to get a diploma… (Lamar, African American Male, Age 18).

For many of the young adult participants school represented a place where they were not welcome. Some young adults told stories of feeling unsafe at schools. Others told stories of boredom and gradual disengagement. School-pushout is a term used to reference the experiences of youth who have been pressured to leave school due to internal factors of a particular school. These internal factors typically represent an environment where students have received disrespectful treatment from teachers and other school personnel, experienced violence among students, and far too often are most susceptible to enforcement of arbitrary school rules (Tuck, 2011).

The social-ecological themes presented in the above sections shed light on the multiple pathways that led young adults to find themselves involved with the court. Although, some of their behavior can be attributed to the developing brain, poor choices, and risky behavior; there also is an absence of positive social support and resources available in their communities. The lack of support and informal social control across multiple contexts to include school personnel, police officers, and other adults create environments that lead young people to internalize
criminality at a young age (Rios, 2011). Also, over policing in under-resourced neighborhoods populated by ethnic and racial groups as African Americans are consistently overrepresented in the criminal justice system (Alexander, 2012). In a sense, deviance is assumed by adult actors when young adults do not fit a particular mental schema or follow normative pathways (e.g., PSAT, SAT, and college tours, and college enrollment) toward adulthood. Young adults are marked, labeled, and assumed to be bad. Alonzo highlights how the simple act of holding a door open is laden with deviant and racial assumptions:

> Just because someone is from a bad area doesn’t mean that they don’t have a mind. I think people look at us different and believe we won’t be anything when we grow up…one day I was walking into a store, and a White guy was walking out, and I was holding the door for him, and he acted as if he was scared of me. I don’t want people to be scared of me; I am not going to hurt you. I feel like damn, some White people really do think differently about young Black males in a particular area. I am not like that; I wasn’t going to hurt him. I was just being polite. That made me feel like damn…I am not racists!

Q: Did it make you mad? Sad?

Interviewee: Mad, but not the point where I wanted to fight, but like damn because I would never do that. I don’t like that (Alonzo, African American Male, Age 17).

Through informal interactions with adults in the communities in which they reside young adults learn about themselves and what was expected of them by broader society. It is possible that the “White guy” as described by Alonzo was merely in a rush; however, imagine if he responded with thank you and reinforced Alonzo for having manners and being thoughtful. Instead, African American males are imbued with deviance and assumed criminality.

**Section Summary**

The themes presented in this section contextualize participants’ experience prior to and as they came into contact with YADC through detailing the complex ways that families, peers, neighborhoods, and schools interact to influence young adult behavior. Capturing these spheres
of influence are important for situating the young adult participants’ experience in the YADC. When taking the young adult narratives into account, the reader should note the onset of substance use as some young adults described 6th grade as the first time using marijuana. Further, in some families consumption of marijuana was acceptable. This point should highlight the difficulty that a program like the YADC may face in trying to help participants obtain sobriety. This section detailed the young adult participants’ previous experience through exploring the complex ways that families, peers, neighborhoods, and schools interact to influence behavior. The next section explores the influence of the YADC on young adults’ stories and the young adult participants’ experience in the YADC.

The Story of Young Adults During Participation in the YADC

The above section detailed the young adults’ stories prior to involvement and as they came in contact with the YADC. This section will explore the experiences of young adult participants as they were enrolled in the YADC. The first subsection will discuss the participants’ perceptions regarding participation in the YADC. The second subsection will discuss substance use and the struggle to stay clean. The third subsection will discuss decision-making. The fourth subsection will discuss relationships with caring adults. The fifth subsection highlights the young adult participants’ experience of creative and expressive arts. Each subsection represents a theme that emerged when young adult participants were asked about their story in the YADC, and how the YADC had been influential in their lives.

The Good and Bad: General Perceptions of the YADC

When asked how the YADC contributed to their story participants described various challenges and motivations for participating in the YADC. Participants described how enrolling in the YADC was a way to avoid jail time for failing at probation. Jamal explained, “If I wasn't here, I would be doing time right now.” A common concern expressed by participants was the
time requirement. Colby explained, “It’s just time-consuming really—4 hours every Tuesday”.

At the same time, Colby also expressed that, “[the YADC] kept me out of a lot of trouble…and it just opened my eyes to a lot of stuff. Like how I need to change my life and the path I was going down.” As youth expressed concerns they were also able to see the benefits of participating in the YADC:

It’s kind of stressful to me a little bit, it’s kind of helpful, but stressful at the same time, so it’s good and bad. It plays a good and bad role, I guess.

Q: Tell me a couple good things and a couple bad things that would help me understand.

Okay, the good things it helped me get stuff done that stuff I needed to do, like say for instance helped me get an ID, G.E.D classes, stuff like that that you need. They have been helping me with that, but the stress comes from the fact I have to do the things that they need me to do, and I might have something else to do or be somewhere else. It’s all a hassle because I have to do. I can’t miss it because if I miss it, something might happen, and I don’t want anything to happen, no slip-ups I’m trying to get off probation, and I don’t want to be on ever again. (Cameron, African American Male, Age 18)

Young adult participants described the benefits of participating in YADC such as avoiding jail time and getting charges removed from their public record. However, they also noted the time inconvenience which required them to keep weekly and bi-weekly appointments. Another common experience was the struggle to obtain and maintain sobriety.

Substance Use and Staying Clean

Many young adult participants described a struggle to refrain from the use of illicit substances in order to meet the requirements of probation, which included a clean drug test history. Almost two-thirds of the young adults reported that marijuana was a part of their daily lifestyle, and for many was a way of coping with stress. Although substance use persisted, young adults expressed a desire to discontinue use of marijuana. Participants expressed recognizing that they functioned differently when sober and therefore some young adult’s articulated reasons to
maintain sobriety despite the persistent desire to smoke.

In 12 months I have not passed a drug test, most of them are for weed some are for alcohol, the judge is just getting fed up. I can’t stop though, I would feel like physically sick to my stomach or when I deal with my girlfriend. She is so nice and does everything for me, but when I sober up I just think more…I just stayed high to forget that shit. She had my brother deep in her; I cannot get over that. It’s the only thing I think about when I’m sober man, you don’t know how mad I get…It’s fucked up, and she deserves so much better but she fucked my brother, and I can’t forget that, so I stay high. (Ray, White Male, Age 18)

Ray used marijuana to cope with problems in his relationship. The YADC did not help Ray decrease his substance use behavior. Tiana also highlighted her struggle to decrease marijuana intake but was able to recognize the other aspects of the program that were helping her regardless of her continued substance use. When Tiana was asked about her story she explained:

I'm still struggling with smoking weed, I don't think the program is really helping me stop smoking the weed, but its help me think about my future more like schooling, and job, and how this weed case can affect my future. That's basically why I ended up taking probation instead of taking the ticket because I could just take the ticket and go about my business, but I didn't want this on my record because at the time I was trying to do the CNA program. I don't want to do that anyway, but I still don't want this on my record. (Tiana, African American Female, Age 19)

Tiana explained that YADC helped her think about her future and consider how illicit substances may influence her future. Jamal was also conflicted about his substance use and recognized that he needed professional help to stop. When asked what’s been your story since involvement with the YADC, Jamal explained:

I have a passed a few drug tests in this program, but I'm trying to get used to not even smoking, that’s me though. Regardless I will be smoking; I guess I need to go to counseling so they can work something out for me so I can slow down a little. (Jamal, Black Male, Age 20)

It seems that the young adults were trying to follow the local law of not smoking marijuana in order to complete probation successfully, but marijuana had become a part of their daily routines. Jayden’s narrative highlighted this contradiction when he was asked about his story since
participating in YADC Jayden explained:

I don’t know yet. Quitting smoking would do that...I can quit whenever I want, but it’s harder than I just said. Sometimes when I’m sober, I’m like don’t smoke, but then I smoke, and I’m like damn, I shouldn’t have. It doesn’t do much to me; I gotta smoke way more. I like to rap; it opens your mind. They say it makes you slow, but it expands my mind, makes me think. (Jayden, African American Male, Age 19).

Smoking marijuana represented a way to regulate stress and also became a bonding activity with friends. Young adult participants could articulate a real desire to stop smoking marijuana and at the same time demonstrate an attachment to marijuana.

Even when young adult participants obtained sobriety in YADC, many struggled to maintain a consistent pattern of clean drug tests. A third of the youth expressed the desire to establish clean drug test. Enrolling in the YADC helped these participants sober up and decrease substance use. When asked what’s been your story since this program Ray explained:

I'm just a nice guy all about the family life that has a weed addiction; I cannot kick it. All these people keep trying to help, they give me support, but I can’t stop smoking. I haven't smoked in like three days, that's the longest break I've taken in like two years. Three days is crazy; these people did not keep me sober I kept myself sober. (Ray, White Male, Age 18).

Going three days without smoking was an accomplishment for Ray, but in terms of reaching the YADC requirement of establishing a three-month history of clean drug test, Ray still had a way to go. When Diego was asked what’s been your story since YADC he explained how YADC motivated him:

It motivates me to be a better person. I’m staying clean, it helps me stay focused on what to do and what not to do outside of groups. It really motivates me to be a better person in everyday life. (Diego, Hispanic Male, Age 18)

Diego was able to take the lessons learned in YADC and apply them to his life. Miguel also expressed decrease in his substance use and gaining awareness from being involved in the court
Yeah, I’d say. It’s keeping me from smoking as much, as I would be—which is good. I guess it’s made me smarter in a couple of ways. Just going through the court process, and seeing things. It’s triggered my mind—that could be you, don’t be stupid. (Miguel, Hispanic Male, Age 18)

Even as young adult participants were able to establish clean drug tests they sometimes struggled to maintain sobriety. When Aliyah was asked about her story since coming in contact with YADC and how YADC had been influential in her story she explained:

I feel like I’m becoming more mature. Getting my life at the right time, instead of waiting until I’m 20…just motivation really, yeah. I feel like I can function a lot without smoking. I smoked a while ago when I was just up in here. I smoked that one time, and I did not like with my heart was racing—and I told her. (Aliyah Biracial Female, Age 18)

Aliyah’s narrative captures the complexity of establishing clean drug test in YADC, but also the real temptations that exist for young adult participants as they are trying to meet the requirements of probation. It seems many of the young adult participants were entrenched in substance use behavior as some had been using as early as middle school and came from families where it was acceptable to use. Even though many young adult participants struggled to establish a clean drug test history as a requirement of probation, they were influenced in other areas of their life by having contact with YADC.

Rethinking Thoughts and Behaviors

This subsection explores how young adult participants perceived changes to their behavior resultant from enrollment in YADC. Young adults responded to the question how have you changed over time since coming in contact with YADC. Changes were rooted in increased maturity and a desire to maintain diversion status. Tamara stated, “I haven’t put my hands on nobody’s stuff. I ain’t been smoking weed. So I’m doing a couple of positive things.” Hailey also
recognized two positive changes as she explained that she is “more mature” and “not lying anymore.” The young adults were able to decrease the behavior that led to their involvement with YADC and also see themselves developing more mature decision-making skills. Many participants described making better choices since enrolling in YADC:

Since being here, I can say that I have settled down more, I do still go to the ‘hood every now and again, but I’m not eager to wake up and go there, I wake up and go to school and job search. I really wasn’t looking for a job before I got into this I always said I wanted one, but I never got up to do it. I am looking for jobs now, I got a girlfriend now, settled down, progressing. (Alonzo, African American Male, Age 17)

Alonzo expressed looking for a job, decreasing the amount of time spent running the streets, and nurturing a romantic relationship. Aliyah expressed similar changes and also noted that she felt that she was becoming more organized and realizing the importance of completing her education:

I would say more organized. I’ve been focusing on things I need to get done…this helped me motivate me like I want a job. I want to be in school; I need to get it all done…Having them on my back and just knowing something that I need to do. Honestly, I don’t think I would care. I would still be smoking weed. (Aliyah, Biracial Female, Age 18)

Many participants described making better choices since enrolling in the YADC. It seems that young adult participants saw an increase in their awareness and were able to begin focusing on the future. Young adults described making the decision to accomplish critical developmental tasks such getting jobs and completing education requirements:

I mean before the program I really didn’t give two shits I just did whatever then got in here. It just like helped me to be better make myself better in a way. Like I didn’t want to get a job, to begin with, but I was already trying to get one not so much before. But I got one. I was trying to get my GED before, but naw. But I’m working on it. Working full-time, tryna get my GED and just get through it. Keep clean which I’m doing. Just, I don’t know it just pushes me to be better, the program does. (Mason, European American Male, Age 18)
Similarly to Mason, Lamar stated, “I’m smarter, I think wiser now I just know there’s gonna be a good life ahead, got to think positive.” For some young adults, the YADC became a place where they were able to mature, learn to be responsible, and for some develop a sense of hope.

Participants also endorsed changes to their decision-making, which seemed rooted in their desire to avoid future contact with the justice system:

Maturing, facing the real world. The court, basically its nothing to play with, they’re serious. I don't want to be stuck in the system. (Tiana, African American Female, Age 19)

I gotta remember a lot of things. I gotta keep on task and prioritize myself. Just keeping on top really I gotta think before I do stuff now. Before, I would smoke anywhere. But I can get caught; I’m more careful about a lot of stuff. (Jayden, African American Male, Age 19)

Participating in the YADC may have led participants to an increased sense of self-awareness, which may have led them to make better choices and decisions. Young adults also described obtaining resources provided by the community block grant. These resources helped them to make better decision and choices. Young adults who were income eligible could get help with paying essential necessities like car repairs or getting money to purchase clothes for a job interview. Kiara explained:

Since I’m in this class, they’ve been trying to help keep Pampers for my baby. She was gonna help me on top of that. She was gonna help me get my truck fixed, and help me get my license. I’m taking all the services to provide for my baby instead of going out and stealing. I haven’t been to the store stealing, cause I’m getting help. But being young, I wasn’t thinking; I was just going out there being—I’m not gonna say dumb, but wasn’t thinking at the time. I figured, my baby needed Pampers, I’m gonna get it one way or another. (Kiara, Black Female Age 19)

Kiara’s narrative highlighted how her decision to commit a crime was influenced by economic needs and through receiving help in the YADC, she arrived at a different set of choices. Further, the YADC was able to provide meaningful connections with caring adults.
Relationships With Caring Adults

Developing relationships with caring adults was a central aspect of the YADC.

According to program and study participants when young adults were asked if they felt connected to the program many endorsed feeling that they could talk to the staff and expressed confidence that they would receive sound advice. For instance, when Alexander was asked if he felt connected to the program, he stated, “To a certain extent, if I need to talk to anybody yeah…I feel like I could talk to anybody you know.” Similarly, when Nora was asked if she felt connected to people in the program, Nora stated, “Yeah, Y’all give me a lot of good advice to hear.” Youth consistently described the importance of having a positive and supportive relationship with caring adults. When young adults were asked about how YADC contributed to their story they expressed having a connection with caring adults who were open about their own life struggles was meaningful:

I just think they have the right staff teaching us because they have kind of been in the struggle a little bit and they can relate to a lot of people…because if you never been there, you really don’t know, and you just go off of what I am telling you. But if you have been there and you know, then you feel me. (Alonzo, African American Male, Age 17)

It was important for the young adults to feel that they had staff people that they could relate to.

Staff demonstrated and provided support through self-disclosure:

Actually part of it was Brian, how he told me what happened to him. All of his friends when he was in high school….Having people that have been through the same things that we’ve been through really. (Colby, European American Male, Age 18)

The staff’s willingness to be vulnerable about their own struggles led participants to feel that they too could be vulnerable and open about their struggles:

I mean, I don’t know it was something about these people, I just can be open, and I can be right with them already. I don’t know they just make it easy for me to
talk. They wanna listen, they want answers from you. If somebody wants to listen, then…I can say how I feel up in here. (Jackson, African American Male, Age 18)

The YADC staff demonstrated a caring and supportive attitude to the participants. The relational strategies employed by the YADC staff modeled positive relational interactions, which likely facilitated the development of the young adult participants through the care and support provided to them (Jones & Deutsch, 2011). Support was a motivating factor for some young adults as participants described the importance of having connections with caring adults. The care and support could be seen across multiple facets of the program including the interactions with the judge and probation officer within the court structure; however, it seemed that programming became a place where the young adults were able to experience the staff being vulnerable about their own mistakes. As stated earlier, programming was not held in the court. Instead, young adults were able to engage with YADC staff in a location that did not include the judge, probation officer, or other court staff. Programming became a place where the young adults and YADC staff were able to be vulnerable about mistakes and learn from the stories shared in the group. Programming was also the primary place that youth interacted with and engaged in the creative and expressive arts and other team building activities.

The next section will describe how the young adult participants experienced the creative and expressive arts while they were attending the YADC. This section is divided into subsections detailing the components of the creative and expressive arts provided in the YADC. The first subsection details the expressive writing as experienced by young adult participants. Young adult participants were asked to engage in reflective writing about their experiences both across and outside the YADC. Expressive writing tasks provided multiple benefits such as providing a space and activity for participants to reflect on their feelings and learn to manage painful emotions. The second subsection will discuss self-disclosure in a group setting as young adult participants were
asked to describe what it was like to share their writing and thoughts in a group atmosphere. Finally, the third subsection will describe how experiential and team building activities were used in conjunction with expressive writing to help participants learn different aspects of communication. The section proceeding the creative and expressive arts as experienced by participants is followed by a section which describes the perceived benefits of creative and expressive arts and incorporates data from program and study participants.

**The Creative and Expressive Arts as Experienced by Participants**

Young adult participants were asked to describe their experience of the creative and expressive arts in YADC. Participants explained that programming was a place where they engaged with the creative and expressive arts and this provided a space, which allowed time to reflect on the behavior that led them to YADC. Programming was a place that helped them get back on track. As noted, young adult participants also expressed frustration about the requirement to attend programming, as there were things they would rather be doing on a Tuesday night between 5:00 pm and 7:30 pm. Although participants shared the frustration at the inconvenience of attending programming, they also expressed benefits from participating in creative and expressive arts. For instance, Kiara expressed a common idea shared by many participants:

> It helps us, try to find our way back on track to find our mistake. Sometimes I could be tired because you be like, I don’t want to come, but...um, some of the things we do is, we do writing prompts that help us learn things. (Kiara, Black Female Age 19)

Kiara’s narrative highlighted a tension expressed by young adult participants. This tension is the idea that programming was both an inconvenience and a place where the participants received information that could help them in the future.

**Expressive writing.** Twelve of the young adults were asked directly about their
experience with writing in programming. Six of those participants expressed that they liked expressive writing and received positive benefits. Five had mixed opinions and expressed not liking writing, but benefited from expressing themselves. One participant did not answer the question. Regardless, of their level of comfort with expressive writing most derived positive.

The five participants who expressed mixed views about writing were able to acknowledge benefits from participating in writing activities despite not liking it. For instance, Sophia stated, “It [writing] was all right…My mood did kind of change a little because I was irritated at first.” Young adult participants who expressed mixed views about writing also described not liking the act of writing and preferring to share verbally in the group setting:

Oh yeah, sometimes. I have no problem. I don’t like writing, but I have no problem. I’d rather say it out loud you know cuz I like talking. (Omar, African American Male, Age 20)

While some young adult participants stated not liking writing and having a preference for verbal discussion others expressed just doing what they had to do:

I can write about it easily. I don’t hold my emotions back that much…If I have to [write] then yeah, but I don’t go out of my way to write some shit down. (Miguel, Hispanic Male, Age 18)

Miguel’s quote captures the idea of doing what he has to do to make his way through the program. In a sense, it seemed that Miguel saw the expressive writing activity as a task to be completed; whereas, other young adults engaged in the activity:

I’ve never really done writing before so writing it down, I dunno I had to think about it. I guess it kind of went through my head. It helped I guess. It was just weird writing it down…I’ve never really done that. Usually, I just think about things, and then they’re gone but I was writing it down, and I remembered what I wrote for a minute. Emma, European American Female, Age 19)

There was a range of experiences for youth who had mixed feelings about writing activities. Young adults who had mixed experiences had a preference for wanting to share verbally as
opposed to written tasks. Overall, participants with mixed views about writing were able to benefit from having a way to express themselves.

The six participants who enjoyed writing and noted positive benefits expressed that writing improved their mood. Isaiah stated, “Yeah, like it helps me…I write about like how it was before and how it was after.” Expressive writing activities prompted young adults to reflect on their own life experience. Youth experienced the expressive writing activities as a way to better themselves by helping them to reflect on their feelings and also by showing that people can re-script their own stories. Omar stated, “You talking about why you here, what got you here, what you can do to better yourself.” Youth described that the writing prompts allowed them to express their feelings and reflect on where they came from. Aliyah expressed that programming allowed her to reflect on her own experience:

In the program, it will be more about me and then like in school it will be like more of a comparison like for me in something that I read or heard about…but here it’s just like me, my feelings, how I feel, where I came from type stuff.
(Aliyah, Biracial Female, Age 18)

When given the opportunity to reflect on a nightly topic and the topic’s applicability to their lives, young adults were able to make meaningful connections. A common theme expressed by participants was feeling better and recognizing a change in their mood following an expressive writing activity. Jayden highlighted how expressive writing is vital for making meaning:

I think it’s a better way to process things…I think anything having to do with the writing is more thought out and the emotions - it can trigger emotions. For me, I’m a writer, so I write, and it triggers emotions. I don’t just write to write…when I write, it always has meaning…I want it to have meaning. (Jayden, African American, Age 20)

Jayden highlighted how one important benefit of expressive writing, which is the importance of processing emotions and making meaning of those emotions through reflective writing.

The expressive writing tasks provided multiple benefits such as providing a space and
activity for participants to reflect on their feelings. Expressive writing activities also provided therapeutic benefits as participants noted a change in their mood following the written activity and discussion. The third benefit of the expressive writing activity is that it allowed participants to receive feedback from each other and from caring adults, which may have allowed them to arrive at alternative understandings, gain insight into their thoughts and feelings, and develop new perspectives. The expressive writing component was key in guiding young adult participants to re-script their stories.

**Self-disclosure in a group setting.** Young adult participants were asked to describe what it was like to share their writing and thoughts in a group atmosphere. The level of comfort and willingness to verbally share within the group setting may be necessary, as learning to self-disclose can be an essential skill for building relationships and overall psychological functioning. Of the twelve young adult participants that were directly asked about verbal self-disclosure, one did not answer. Five young adult participants responded in a way that demonstrated discomfort with verbal self-disclosure in a group setting. Two young adult participants had mixed views about sharing in the group, and four found verbal self-disclosure in the group setting to be helpful. Some young adult participants worried about privacy and judgment in relation to verbal self-disclosure during group. Although, Participants typically expressed being comfortable sharing their reflective writing with the group. Also, the amount of verbal disclosure seemed to increase when the facilitators presented topics that were salient to young adult participants. Findings presented in this section highlight that while certain aspects of verbal self-disclosure within the group setting that made some young adult participants uncomfortable, this discomfort may be viewed as a way of challenging them to step outside of their comfort zone and experience an additional form of self-expression. In this light, programming may be viewed as an
environment where youth could find both comfort and challenge.

**Uncomfortable with verbal self-disclosure in the group setting.** The four participants who described feeling uncomfortable sharing in the group expressed wanting to maintain a level of privacy. When Sophia was asked if she liked sharing in the group, she stated, “No, cuz that’s none of their business.” Camila expressed a similar idea about why she prefers not to share:

I don’t like to…Cuz I’m not open. Never been. Once people start telling me their story, I kinda get a little open, but I don’t want to tell everything. (Camila, African American, Age 17)

In addition to wanting to protect their privacy, another concern was the desire not to be judged as participants expressed wondering what others thought about their ideas. Mason captures the uncomfortable feeling experienced by some young adults:

Uh, I’d rather not. I’d just rather have them read it themselves...Uh, cuz I don’t know how I feel like if it’s spoken, I don’t know, to me it feels like it’s out there. And I mean if you read it, only you are reading it no one else is like hearing it or reading it. So you’re the one taking it in and finding meaning in your own way. (Mason, European American Male, Age 18)

Mason’s quote highlights the complicated process that took place in programming. Although verbal self-disclosure in the group setting was uncomfortable for him, he was able to take in the weekly topics and make meaning of them in his own way.

**Mixed feelings regarding verbal self-disclosure in the group setting.** Two of the young adult participants had mixed views about verbal self-disclosure during programming. The young adult’s reasons for verbal self-disclosure may have depended on their level of engagement with a particular topic or their own personal comfort with self-disclosure in a group setting:

It depends on really what we talking about. Basically, that’s it. If it’s something I’m engaged to or got my opinion about, I say something. But pretty much I sit back. (Isaiah, African American Male, Age 18)

It was hard, but it was different. Like hard because I don’t really talk to people like that but different because…they were supportive, most of them just sat there…It was okay because a lot of them have the same problem. (Emma, White
Female, Age 19)

Despite some discomfort with self-disclosure, it appeared that youth were able to find comfort in certain aspects of programming. While there were certain aspects of verbal self-disclosure within the group setting that made some young adult participants uncomfortable, this discomfort may be viewed as a way of challenging them to step outside of their comfort zone and experience an additional form of self-expression. In this light, programming may be viewed as an environment where youth could find both comfort and challenge.

*Comfort with verbal self-disclosure in the group setting.* Four of the young adult participants found verbal self-disclosure in the group setting to be helpful:

That’s what it’s always about—us sharing and coming together. It’s very important for us to learn from each other stories. And we grow from that. It’s what it’s all about. (Jayden, African American Male, Age 19)

I share a lot because you know I been through it. I’m not gonna say I been through probation but I been you know this is not the first time I been through like in a group setting talking about personal problems. So I’m more familiar with hitting stuff close to heart maybe, and so it comes easier to me to express stuff like that. (Alexander, African American Male, Age 19)

For young adult participants that found verbal self-disclosure pleasurable typically expressed benefiting from hearing other group members stories, benefiting from telling their stories to other group members, and drawing a sense of confidence from verbal self-disclosure within the group setting. Overall, it seems that for most young adult participants, regardless of comfort around self-disclosure they were able to speak their opinions and feel valued and heard by other group members and YADC group facilitators.

The next subsection will illustrate how team-building activities were used in conjunction with expressive writing to help participants learn different aspects of communication and relational skills. During programming, participants were often required to participate in team
building activities. Usually, the activity consisted of a game where the participants were divided into random teams. Members of the research team and members of the YADC staff could also participate depending on the game. The ball toss activity described in the proceeding section is one example from a variety of team building activities used in programming.

**Experiential and team building activities.** When young adult participants were asked about activities that they found useful many described the ball toss activity as helping them work on their communication and relational skills. Team building activities often incorporated physical and skilled activities to engage youth and also utilized competition between teams as an additional motivator for participation. Experiential and team building activities allowed young adults participants to work on the skills they were learning in programming an also provided facilitators an in vivo assessment of participants relational skills and ability to apply lessons learned in programming to actual life scenarios.

The ball toss activity required each team to toss a ball in the air and keep it in the air as long as possible. During the timed trial each member of the team had to touch the ball at least once. The objective was to keep the ball in the air without letting it hit the ground. The challenge of the game was that players could not hold the ball as they had to keep it in the air. The team that kept the ball in the air the longest without it hitting the ground earned a point, and then the round restarted. Mason described how his team was winning but then ended up losing once his team's communication broke down:

Uh, I’d say the thing we did 2 weeks ago when we were outside with the dodgeballs. I think that cuz it’s like, you gotta pay attention, you gotta keep focus, and you know just um let me see, how do I say this. You got to communicate; you have to be able to respond well. We would have won, but the winning team got it cause they caught on to what we were doing and then we kept messing up. We were on the top of the hill, and we switched so we were at the bottom. It was tied up, and then we started pulling ahead and then it got close to us winning like 1 or 2 points off but we kept messing up. We lost our communication. I mean we kept
doing what we were doing. It just got to a point where we lost…communication it helps a lot no matter what it is you’re doing. (Mason, European American Male, Age 18)

Following activities such as the ball toss, participants then went back into the group room where programming took place to reflect on what they learned from the activity. They were instructed to write their reflection on 3 x 5 cards and then share with the group. Emma explained how the ball toss game influenced her:

Actually, the ball tossing thing. I haven’t really worked as a group before this, no communication, I don’t really talk to people. It’s not my area, you know… I need that for work I guess. (Emma, European American Female, Age 19)

Emma’s quote highlights how she was able to take the lessons learned in programming and think about how they may apply to her life. In a sense, Emma was presented with the opportunity to recognize that she had some interpersonal communication issues and that programming was a place where she could work on those issues. Alexander also acknowledged the importance of teamwork:

We went outside, and we had to work as a team to keep the balls up in the air. I forgot exactly what they called it but you know we all had to work together. Um, yeah depend on each other. (Alexander, African American Male, Age 19)

Team building activities such as the ball toss presented young adults with an opportunity to learn how to encourage and support others, accept help, and also how to work through frustration when members of the team were struggling. Young adult participants were able to take an abstract activity, such as tossing a ball in the air and gain valuable lessons that may help shape their future in some small way.

**Section Summary**

The above section described the experiences of young adult participants as they were enrolled in YADC. Most young adult participants expressed having charges removed from their
record as the initial reason for enrolling into the YADC. Maintaining the diversion was motivation for participating in the YADC and a stumbling block that impeded graduation from the YADC for some participants was the requirement to establish 3 consecutive months of clean drug tests. Despite the struggle to maintain sobriety, participants recognized that the YADC helped them to make better choices while providing support from caring adults. The above section also described multiple components of the creative and expressive arts provided in the YADC and experienced by the young adult participants. Broadly, the creative and expressive arts activities provided during programming allowed participants to reflect on their feelings, learn to manage difficult emotions, and participate in experiential and team building activities to enhance communication and relational skills. Participants found it helpful to receive feedback from peers and the YADC staff. Sharing within the group setting also became an opportunity to build confidence and self-esteem, despite apprehension about sharing personal matters in the group context. In some instances, the fact that youth were actually attending a court diversion program seemed to “melt away” temporally as young adult participants allowed themselves to engage in the program and interact with caring and positive adults who were invested in their growth.

The above section discussed the experience of young adult participants enrolled in the YADC. The next section will describe the perceived benefits of creative and expressive arts and incorporates data from program and study participants.

Perceived Benefits of Creative and Expressive Arts Programming

This section will discuss the perceived benefits of creative and expressive arts programming provided to young adult participants in the YADC and incorporates interview data from the YADC staff and young adult participants as well as observations made in the field regarding the perceived benefits of creative and expressive arts programming. Of the 27 young
adult participants interviewed, 12 were directly asked about their experience of creative and expressive arts. The first three themes presented in this section are based on the revised interview protocol, which intentionally focused on the perceived benefits of creative and expressive arts. Further, the first three themes presented in this section, finding voice and re-scripting life stories, managing emotions and processing trauma, and self-expression and performing new possibilities were essential components of the creative and expressive arts designed to influence prosocial behavior. The final theme presented in this section, “staff that get it,” is based on the interviews of the 27 young adult participants, interviews with the YADC staff, and field notes.

In the first subsection, I discuss the benefits of how the creative and expressive arts were used to engage, inspire, and motivate young adult participants to explore their developing identities in a setting that was supportive and encouraging. In the second subsection, I discuss expressive writing, a fundamental process in the YADC, and how this allowed participants to process trauma and difficult emotions. Expressive writing activities were designed to provide young adults with an element of control by helping them overcome challenges through reframing the meaning ascribed to events (Connolly, Baker, & Mazza, 2004; Mazza, 1979, 2003; Philips, Linnington, & Penman, 1999). In the third subsection, I discuss the benefit and importance of self-expression and self-disclosure, which provided group members the opportunity to discover similarities and differences, and to develop positive relationships with each other (Olson-McBride & Page, 2012). When participants shared personal issues with the group, it provided them with an opportunity to receive social support and empathy. The fourth theme, “staff that get it”, demonstrates the importance of providing social support and care, which allowed young adults to feel more connected to the program.
Finding Voice and Re-scripting Life Stories

Spoken word activities provided a safe space for young adults and encouraged them to share their stories and develop their voices (Reyes, 2006; Williams, 2015). The transformative nature of the creative and expressive arts allowed participants to attribute involvement in the justice system as deriving from changeable behavior; rather, than inherent characteristics. This subtle but powerful shift may disrupt internalization of a deviant identity. Nine of the 12 young adults found spoken word activities engaging, inspirational and motivating. Aliyah described spoken word performances as, “inspiring” and stated that they helped motivate her. Three of the 12 participants failed to provide a response.

Spoken word activities consisted of the poetry shared by the local spoken word organization and the letters to the court performed by young adult participants as they neared graduation from the YADC. Young adult participants found listening to spoken word presentations helpful and “eye-opening.” Miguel described listening to a letter to the court shared by a YADC graduate.

I don’t know it kind of made me happy. Like cool this guy did his stuff, graduated, didn’t get the charges. It just kind of gave me hope that you can get up out of here. (Miguel, Hispanic Male, Age 18)

Miguel indicated hearing his peer’s letter to the court provided a sense of hope. Listening to their peers led participants to feel motivated while also providing them with an opportunity to take stock of their own lives. Emma was asked about listening to a final piece performed by Alexander, a YADC graduate:

Yeah, like today Alexander’s little speech thingy. That was crazy. He went through so many foster homes I didn’t even know that. You couldn’t even tell by looking at him. He looks like he’s got his shit together. (Emma, European American Female, Age 19)

Young adult participants also found the poems performed by Brian and Manny helpful.
I can connect to what they are saying. It will help me in my future. Like how Manny went through stuff. I started thinking more about that. It makes me not want to give up. (Isaiah, African American Male, Age 18)

The spoken word performances and stories shared during programming inspired and motivated young adult participants, while also communicating that the YADC coordinators made mistakes and had to overcome things. The “Beautiful Scars” poem captured the idea that successful adults struggled and made mistakes in their youth. Isaiah referenced a programming night where Manny performed a poem about beautiful scars and described his battle with cancer and the remaining scars:

I have these scars that I felt very ugly about...Literally, it looks like I’ve had an autopsy minus a gap between the two. I started to see the scars more as beauty marks, stories, medals of honor. These symbols of honor are where one of our themes for [our spoken word organization] came from. Our scars are our beauty marks came from this poem I wrote about them. (Manny, YADC Staff)

The beautiful scars poem was performed during programming for the young adult participants. Then Brian prompted the young adults to reflect on their own beautiful scars. The idea was that involvement with the justice system could be seen as a scar, as youth involved in the justice system are susceptible to being ‘tagged’ with a deviant label. Brian implored the participants to think about how their involvement in the YADC as a beautiful scar. The program facilitators own comfort with self-disclosure seemed to influence others to share. Brian described the potency of the spoken word activity:

When we asked [young adult participants] to open up and share the personal richness in their lives, they were willing to take that risk because we were willing to do that for them. When we did the beautiful scars activity, I think they just really responded well to it, and it really resonated with them. Many of them feel ugly, I mean all of us do, you know, no matter who we are. (Brian, YADC Staff)

The young adult participants benefited from hearing the beautiful scars poem and learning about the struggles that Manny overcame. Alexander described how the spoken word performance and
subsequent expressive writing activity influenced his own story:

His story about the scars you know how he was in the hospital. It wasn’t the poem. It was his story, how he got the scar and stuff. That the fact that he’s living after he got the scars. Like basically what he said…you don’t think about it so much you just keep on doing what you got to do…he just kept on fighting and fighting. He is a good person. (Alexander, African American Male, Age 19)

Participants benefited from the YADC staff’s willingness to self-disclose personal struggles. Spoken word performances and subsequent expressive writing tasks provided young adult participants the opportunity to reflect on past choices and future decisions.

I think that was cool. I liked it. That was real cool that they did that. It was like they had that voice. It was crazy. I’m trying to explain it right. They were like into it like you know something that they really liked and enjoyed, and I could see that by how they were performing. I pretty much learned that whenever the world brings you down don’t give up. Like I could do it, it was basically an inspirational poem. That’s how I felt (Omar, African American Male, Age 20)

The finding that spoken word performances were motivating and inspiring confirms existing research, which suggested that spoken word interventions motivated participants’ to pursue prosocial behavior, bolstered self-confidence, and increased self-esteem (Reyes, 2006; Williams, 2015; Weinstein, 2007).

A core feature of programming was the use of creative and expressive arts to encourage young adults to engage in self-reflection through expressive writing. Creative and expressive arts interventions allowed young adult participants to explore their developing identities in a setting that was supportive and encouraging. Young adult participants had the opportunity to rescript their developing narratives under the guidance of caring adults. Findings presented in this section correspond to a body of developmental intervention research focused on the emergence of developmental interventions and investigation of positive identity development with adolescents and emerging adults (Eichas et al., 2010; Kurtines et al., 2008a; Montgomery et al., 2008). Key findings from positive youth development intervention research suggested transformative
activities, which utilized both cognitive and emotion-focused intervention strategies effectively addressed identity concerns through decreasing identity distress and increasing identity exploration. This finding suggests that both cognitive and emotion-focused strategies should be included in identity-focused interventions for young adults (Berman, Kennerly, & Kennerly, 2008; Meca et al., 2014; Schwartz, Kurtines, & Montgomery, 2005).

To reiterate, spoken word, a component of the creative and expressive arts in the YADC allowed young adult participants to explore their developing identities in a setting that was supportive and encouraging. The findings presented in this section extend previous research through the systematic study of how the YADC integrated and delivered creative and expressive arts programming, and how young adult participants experienced this intervention.

Managing Emotions and Processing Trauma

Expressive writing activities were a part of the fabric of the YADC, as young adults were required to write about their experiences. Expressive writing provided participants with a strategy to manage difficult emotions and to express themselves. Expressive writing provided a process to help young adult participants overcome challenges through reframing the meaning they ascribe to experiences.

Ten of the 12 young adults found expressive writing helpful. One of the 12 young adult participants did not answer the question, and one did not find the expressive writing helpful. While both Camila and Alexander explicitly expressed dislike of writing, Alexander found it beneficial. Others young adult participants identified mood regulation benefits from writing (Sophia, Mason, and Aliyah). The night of Sophia’s interview she was irritated but explained during the interview that she felt better after that night’s expressive writing activity. When Camila was asked how she felt about the expressive writing activities she responded:

Camila: I don’t feel anyway.
Interviewer: Do you like it? Do you enjoy it?
Camila: Not really.
Interviewer: Not really? So you don’t like writing?
Camila: No.

Camila did not enjoy the expressive writing activities, and it is unclear what she gained from participating based on her response to the question. Alexander also explained that he did not enjoy the expressive writing activities; yet, he was able to benefit from expressive writing activities despite displeasure with writing in general.

I don’t like writing in general, so I’m not going to lie, I didn’t like it. But I mean in the end, it was good. Like the stuff they were talking about was purposeful. I can take it out of this group with me. (Alexander, African American Male, Age 19)

Alexander benefited from the expressive writing activities and found that he could apply the lessons to his life. The expressive writing activity was even beneficial for participants that were upset about attending programming:

Interviewer: How was it for you writing it?
Sophia: It was all right. Interviewer: So you liked it? Sophia: Yeah.
Interviewer: Did it help you to feel different?
Sophia: Uh huh.
Interviewer: How so?
Sophia: I don’t know.
Interviewer: Do you find that your mood was different after you wrote?
Sophia: My mood did kind of change a little.
Interviewer: How did your mood change?
Sophia: Because I was irritated at first.
Interviewer: So you were irritated before you had to write, then after you wrote, your mood felt like what?
Sophia: It was all right…I was okay then.
Interviewer: So if I were to create a program, I should have the youth write even though they probably don’t want to write?
Sophia: Yeah.

Sophia was somewhat resistant, but she still benefited from participating in the expressive writing activities. Despite resistance and a dislike of writing for some of the young adult participants most acknowledged that the expressive writing activities were beneficial. The most common finding was expressive writing activities provided participants with a strategy to
manage painful emotions and to express themselves.

When I write poetry most of it is just past feelings I put into words…writing helps to express myself. If I don’t really feel like expressing it verbally or showing it, I just write it. (Mason, European American Male, Age 18)

Participants acknowledged that expressive writing was helpful for managing emotions.

Expressive writing may have improved well-being, increased self-understanding, and even bolstered emotional self-efficacy as the act of constructing stories helped young adult participants organize thoughts, feelings, and traumatic experiences (Esterling, L’Abate, Murray, & Pennebaker, 1999; Lowe, 2006; Pennebaker, 2000; Smyth, True, & Souto, 2001). Aliyah explained how writing helped to regulate her emotions:

I’m not a person that likes to talk about my emotions to everybody, so when I write it out, it’s like me and the paper. I could really tell how I feel even it’s just to me and I’m going to be the only person reading it, so it does help with my emotions. (Aliyah, Biracial Female, Age 18)

The interviews of the young adult participants confirmed the earlier research that expressive writing is helpful for managing emotions. Unlike previous studies, this study focuses directly on presenting the young adult perspectives and contributes to our understanding of how they perceive their own benefits. Expressive writing may help young adults regulate emotions by making meaning of past and current stressful events (Broals, 2012; Frattaroli, 2006; Jacobs, 2010). The expressive writing activity helped young adult participants share their experience in the YADC. Lance, a YADC staff member, captured the importance of the creative and expressive arts:

Through the writing, the poetry and getting them to share the hard things they been going through even if they’re not outwardly speaking it, then writing it down is a big step because how many people ask them what’s really going on. (Lance, YADC Staff)

Expressive writing helped individuals make sense of traumatic experiences by organizing, desensitizing, and managing emotions into a coherent narrative that lessened the consequences of
past traumatic behavior. Expressive writing made events and emotions more manageable by writing them down and providing the young adult with an element of control (Connolly, Baker, & Mazza, 2004; Mazza, 1979, 2003; Philips, Linnington, & Penman, 1999). The perceived benefits of expressive writing are grounded in a process that helped young adults overcome challenges through reframing the meaning of events and integrating the past and present.

The benefits of expressive writing have focused on young adults’ internal processes. The next subsection builds on the findings in this subsection by discussing the social benefits of engaging in creative and expressive arts, which may also have influenced young adults to reconstruct traumatic experiences while receiving social support in a safe environment.

**Self-Expression and Performing New Possibilities**

Twelve young adult participants were asked how they felt sharing their thoughts and reflective writing with the group. Seven of the 12 young adult participants felt comfortable expressing themselves in the group, one young adult participant did not answer the question, and 4 young adult participants did not feel comfortable. Young adults that felt comfortable sharing with the group had past experience self-disclosing in a group setting, while others embraced self-disclosure in a group setting as an opportunity to build new skills.

Young adults provided three reasons that they were uncomfortable with sharing in the group. The first was privacy and a desire not to broadcast one’s personal business as this was still a court diversion program. The second reason that young adults did not feel comfortable self-disclosing was concern about being judged by their peers.

I don’t really like [sharing]. Honestly, I like just giving it to Brian and Manny because like I said I’m totally different from these people so I feel like they’d just be like, what the hell, this little bitch. (Miguel, Hispanic Male, Age 18)

The third reason that young adults did not feel comfortable sharing their thoughts in a group
setting was that self-disclosure was a new skill.

I don’t like to because I’m not open. Never been. Once people start telling me their story, I kind of get a little open, but I don’t want to tell everything. (Camila, African American Female, Age 17)

Camila explained that she is not a person who typically self-disclosed but indicated the possibility of becoming more attuned to the relational processes occurring in the group as she became more comfortable. In addition, it is possible that some young adult participants were unable to separate the court from the programming component and may have been distrusting of the YADC altogether.

The most common finding was that many of the young adult participants felt comfortable expressing themselves in the group. For other participant’s self-disclosure within the group setting provided an opportunity to build a new skill.

It was hard, but it was different. Like hard because I don’t really talk to people like that…They were supportive, most of them just sat there, and it was okay because a lot of them have the same problem. (Emma, European American Female, Age 19)

In many ways writing about one’s individual experiences and then sharing those experiences in a group setting required a level of support and safety amongst group members and facilitators (Weinstein, 2010). Self-expression is a skill that can be learned and the amount of self-disclosure a choice that depends on the amount of safety one feels.

I share a lot because you know I been through it. I’m not going to say I been through probation but I been you know this is not the first time I been through a group setting talking about personal problems. So I’m more familiar with hitting stuff close to heart, and it comes easier to me to express stuff like that. (Alexander, African American Male, Age 19)

Sharing a personal story during group meant that participants had to feel comfortable or engaged in a topic to risk being vulnerable.

It depends on really what we talking about. Basically, that’s it. If it’s something I’m engaged in or got an opinion about, I say something. (Isaiah, African
American Male, Age 18)

The young adult participants’ had varying levels of skill and desire to share or self-disclose their “business” during programming. Aliyah’s quote represents a typical process that occurred when young adults were encouraged to share with the group.

> It is hard as I don’t know how people are going to react, but then at the end of the day, I feel good because I actually got to get that off my chest and somebody else could relate to it, and I’m just not the only one. A couple times when I shared stuff about it, it was like more people actually experienced what I have experienced, so you know they feel for me or stuff like that. (Aliyah, Biracial Female, Age 18)

Aliyah’s willingness to be vulnerable by sharing her issues during the group provided her with an opportunity to experience and receive support and empathy from her peers. The simple act of feeling that someone listened in a caring way can be healing. Further, Aliyah’s self-disclosure provided the opportunity for her peers to demonstrate empathy and express that she was not the only one struggling with a particular issue. Omar described how the self-disclosures of other young adult participants affected him.

> It depends on what situation it is. If it’s something bad sometimes, I feel bad for them and just try to give them good advice. I tell them don’t even think about stuff like that. Sometimes, I could get through to a lot of people. For some reason, people tell me I’m a good friend. I get that a lot you know. (Omar, African American Male, Age 20)

When young adult participant’s shared personal struggles it provided other group members the opportunity to demonstrate support and empathy. The interviews of the young adult participants relate to earlier research, which suggested that self-disclosure provided group members the opportunity to discover similarities, differences, and develop positive relationships with each other (Olson-McBride & Page, 2012). Unlike previous studies, this study focused directly on presenting the young adult perspectives and contributes to our understanding of how they experienced creative and expressive arts.
Social support is a perceived benefit that builds on and relates to the perceived benefits of creative and expressive arts reported in the previous sections. The creative and expressive arts activities provided the young adult participants a chance to reflect on their varied experiences. For instance, Brian stated, “we just use spoken word as the vehicle,” but the overarching goal is to share personal stories of struggle and life transformation in a structured format to inspire others. As young adult participants gained insights and reflected on their participation in the YADC, they were encouraged to share personal struggles with peers and the YADC staff present during programming. Self-disclosure and the social support provided by peers and YADC staff during programming may have influenced young adult participants to reconstruct traumatic experiences and personal struggles. The significance of this support is discussed in the next section.

**Authentic Connections: “Staff That Get It”**

Young adults felt cared about and supported when the YADC staff communicated that they understood the nature of mistakes that led to their involvement in the YADC. The care provided to youth facing criminal sanctions is vital as youth facing criminal sanctions are susceptible to internalizing a criminal label and adopting roles that are expected of them; thus, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy (Becker, 1963). Having staff willing to be vulnerable created an environment in programming that allowed young adult participants to share their struggles and reflect on a possible future. The combination of the creative and expressive arts and the support, care, and connection fostered by the YADC staff may have made participants open to the program. It may have also reduced the young adult participants’ shame and internalization of a deviant identity resultant from involvement in the justice system.

Twenty-one of the 27 young adult participants indicated feeling supported by the YADC
and six did not respond. Of the 12 young adult participants explicitly interviewed about their experience of the creative and expressive arts, 9 felt supported, and 3 did not provide a response. While support is a product of the entire YADC, this section focuses on support as a perceived benefit of programming and byproduct of the creative and expressive arts activities. Programming and the creative and expressive arts provided a pathway that engendered support for the young adult participants.

One way that support was communicated was through the vulnerable stories shared by the YADC staff and environment provided during programming which allowed young adults to feel safe to express themselves. Programming grew from a place where young adult participants did not feel comfortable sharing to a place where they felt comfortable disclosing personal stories:

It’s getting better; [the YADC] really has come a long way when you think about it. At first, no one really communicated, period, now everybody is cool. I knew it would eventually get to this place; you have to play it out. I knew because I already been in stuff like this, so I already know how it’s going to go…I am only going to get better from this, so it’s like all right come on with it. (Cameron, African American Male, Age 18)

Over time young adult participants became more comfortable with self-expression. It is likely that the YADC staff’s willingness to share stories in which they overcame difficult circumstances modeled the importance of vulnerability and self-disclosure as one way of healing from trauma and person struggles. Brian shared a story about his past, which influenced several young adult participants:

I don’t know if you know what happened my senior year of high school, but that same year, 5 of my friends killed themselves and, they were all on drugs when they were making these really poor decisions. I was the one dealing their drugs, so I feel in many ways responsible for the choices that were made. (Brian, YADC Staff)

Brian shared this story with young adult participants, and they were able to see him take
responsibility for his mistakes. More importantly, Brian’s story likely reduced the shame that some participants may have felt from being enrolled in a court program.

Actually part of it was Brian, how he told me what happened to him and all of his friends when he was in high school. Having people, that’s been through the same things that we’ve been through really…They’re real supportive, and they listen well. They help with a lot of stuff. I know even if I’m done with the program, I could call them, and they would be there for me. (Colby, European American Male, Age 18)

Vulnerable stories were a way of connecting with the young adult participants and provided them with the hope that they too could overcome mistakes and be successful in life. A YADC staff member explains how he related to the young adult participants:

I haven’t had the extreme nature of their circumstances, but I was a hustler. I was a drug dealer, and I was on the verge of heading to jail…I know that just because of the mistakes they’ve made, or the situations they’ve been in that they’re not limited, they can use that. My big thing was that I was creative at money management. I was the ultimate hustler. I knew how to make deals; I knew how to negotiate, I knew how to get repeat customers, all that. Now I do all of our taxes and books. I’m just transferring a skill set into something legal that’s going to be good for us now. (Manny, YADC Staff)

The YADC staff’s self-disclosures were also a way of demonstrating care and encouraging participants to make better choices in the future:

After hearing all those stories about Brian and Manny when they were young made me think I can do better now since I am getting older and more mature I got to go down the right path. (Malik, African American Male, Age 19)

The YADC staff’s self-disclosures created a connection, and some young adult participants became more comfortable with their stories and sharing within the group:

Anytime really, when I come to the group, and we all connect, and we all feel similar to one another even though our environment or living situation might be different, we can all connect and understand each other. That’s pretty much one of the best feelings of coming to the YADC. (Diego, Hispanic Male, Age 18)

It was important that young adult participants had staff who “get it.” Manny illustrates this point when talking about his mistakes:
It made me realize that there was somebody that I looked up to that was successful that did what I did, and it literally made me realize that I didn’t have to be a bad person later in life which was hugely impactful. I think it is one of the things that take place with the students we work with because we’re so open and transparent with them about the mistakes we’ve made.

Manny explained that his mistakes and the second chance afforded to him as a young adult are critical to his philosophy for working with young people. The young adults appreciated having staff who made mistakes and freely shared this information with them.

The social supported provided to young adult participants through their participation in the creative and expressive arts allowed them to reflect on their developing identities in a supportive environment. The YADC provided young adults the opportunity to engage in creative and expressive arts activities designed to foster identity exploration and possibly interrupt internalization of a deviant identity and consider alternative possible future selves.

**Section Summary**

There were multiple perceived benefits derived from the integration of creative and expressive arts in the YADC. The perceived benefits suggest that the YADC provided young adult participants a space to explore their developing identities in a setting that was supportive and encouraging. The findings presented in the above section confirm existing studies that spoken word motivated participants to pursue prosocial behavior, bolstered self-confidence, and increased self-esteem (Reyes, 2006; Williams, 2015; Weinstein, 2007), while expressive writing helped young adults regulate emotions by making meaning of past and current stressful events (Broals, 2012; Frattaroli, 2006; Jacobs, 2010). Further, interviews with young adult participants suggested that self-disclosure provided group members the opportunity to discover similarities, differences, and develop positive relationships with each other (Olson-McBride & Page, 2012). Spoken word, expressive writing, and self-disclosure were core components of the creative and
expressive arts provided to young adult participants in the YADC. The creative and expressive
arts allowed young adult participants to engage in identity exploration through provision of
transformative activities which utilized both cognitive and emotion-focused intervention
strategies to address identity concerns and foster positive identity development of young adult
participants’ (Eichas et al., 2010; Berman, Kennerly, & Kennerly, 2008; Kurtines et al., 2008a;
Meca et al., 2014; Montgomery et al., 2008; Schwartz, Kurtines, & Montgomery, 2005). The
findings presented in this section extend previous research through the systematic study of how
the YADC integrated and delivered creative and expressive arts programming, and how this
intervention was experienced by young adult participants. Unlike previous studies, this study
focused directly on presenting the young adult perspectives and contributes to our understanding
of how they perceive their own benefits.

**Epilogue: The Imagined Future After Participation in the YADC**

The above section detailed the experiences of young adult participants as they were
enrolled in YADC. This section will detail the perceived next steps of the young adult
participants’ stories. Young adult participants were enrolled in the program, discharged, or they
graduated from the YADC. At the end of data collection, of the 27 young adults that consented
to be included in the study 7 were terminated, 6 graduated, and 14 were still enrolled. The first
theme in this section focuses on getting straight, which refers to the young adult participants’
articulated desire to abstain from behaviors that would risk their freedom. The second subsection
describes the ways that YADC helped the young adult participants reflect on their purpose and
possible future after leaving YADC. This section focuses on the potential resolution of stories
captured from young adult participants between the ages of 17 and 20. Transitions and
possibilities represent this developmental period, and the perceptions presented in this section
reflect the ongoing and incomplete nature of the stories lived and told by young adult participants.

**Getting Straight**

Seventeen of the 27 young adult participants responded to questions about how they perceived their story is moving forward in the next 3 to 5 years. All 17 young adult participants envisioned positive aspirations for the future that were dependent on their current ability to obtain work, finish school, and secure adequate housing. The hope of getting straight meant that the young adult participants envisioned a life where educational requirements were complete, and they had obtained a stable living environment and reliable source of income.

- Hopefully a job, still no kids. And my own house. (Tamara, African American Female, Age 17)
- Out of my grandma’s house, on my own (Hailey, Biracial, Age 18)
- Hopefully getting a good job and getting my own spot. I just got my GED. (Colby, European American Male, Age 18)
- As long as I got a roof over my head and a job that’s all I really care about. Finish high school and get into school that’s when things will be straight. (Jayden, African American Male, Age 19)
- Connected to the idea of getting straight is a desire for autonomy and fulfillment of basic needs (Deci & Ryan, 1985). As participants articulated the need to find a job and a stable living situation they also emphasized wanting to have their own space. Young adults also articulated a desire to complete high school and then enroll in college or open their own business.

- After probation, I am probably going to get my own place, get established like my brother. I want to follow in my brother's footsteps and go to college. (Malik, African American Male, Age 19)
- Be a CNA. Or if not, working with children…I want to stay in the nursing field, and see how it is to bring babies into the world. (Kiara, Black Female, Age 19)
- I see myself being a lot better off, being successful…Some sort of small cleaning
business with me and a couple of my friends. (Diego, Hispanic Male, Age 18)

Despite involvement with the justice system, interruptions to their secondary schooling, and the lack of resources in their neighborhoods participants expressed and believed that they could one day lead a successful life. The YADC was a place where young adults were challenged to think about their future and consider how their choices influenced possible outcomes. Getting straight meant that young adult participants would have to make prosocial choices with the hope that these choices would pay off in the future:

It’s going to be a good outcome. If I was to stay motivated, it would be good. Getting up, ready for work. Factory job, get off at 5 pm, go get the kids something to eat and keep repeating that day. Knowing that the house bills are paid, and the kids come home with good grades. I just want a life like that…I just want to keep at a steady pace. To stay clean and to stay true to me, just do good. I don’t need a big house, just something comfortable for my family. (Lamar, African American Male, Age 18)

The YADC challenged participants to reflect on their choices, behaviors, and overall identity. The various components of the YADC may have helped participants like Lamar to begin developing an adaptive narrative identity, which is the ability to reflect on life and make decisions about what is essential given one’s circumstances and available support systems (Ward & Marshall, 2007). Seemingly, as individuals can gain increased awareness of their values, beliefs, and capabilities, they can make informed decisions, which may lead to prosocial outcomes.

**Purpose in Life**

Purpose is concerned with the discovery of meaningful goals that provide direction in life (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003). In a sense, the discovery of one’s purpose is analogous to finding a compass that guides one’s life. Young adult participants were asked if YADC helped them to think about their purpose, or direction, in life. Sixteen of the 27 respondents answered the question. Ten of the participants described the program as helping them think about their
purpose in life, four were unsure, and 2 participants indicated that they had not thought about their purpose. When asked if the YADC had helped him think about his purpose Miguel stated, “Honestly no, not really. I’m still thinking. I kind of just let things happen”. The 4 participants with mixed views about their sense of purpose ranged from being unsure to feeling that they would figure out their purpose independent of the YADC. When asked if the YADC helped him to think about his purpose Mason explained:

I guess somewhat. Like continuing my education so that way I can go to ITT Tech… I love computers. Computers, phones, anything to do with electronics. I can build a computer from scratch. Just take like 4 of them and make sure they’re all similar, like the same brand. I could throw em’ in. Stuck together. Set up OS. Boost software. All of it. (Mason, European American Male, Age 18)

The responses of the 10 participants who felt that the YADC helped them to think about their purpose ranged from expressing a general need to stay out of the system and abstain from risky decisions to describing insights about their identity gleaned from participation and support in the YADC. For instance, when Omar was asked if he had thought about his purpose he responded, “Uh, yeah, makes me not want to come back, to be honest.” Alexander was able to reflect on his personal growth in the YADC:

This program has made me think about my purpose. I get a lot of compliments on my leadership skills. I had low confidence and stuff, but when I got into the program and felt that I had help from others it just made me want to be a better individual…I didn’t know my potential, a lot of people look up to me. (Alexander, African American Male, Age, 19).

I’ve been in the drug world ever since I was 15. It takes a toll on you; it’s not good…I believe in myself finally to be a sober person. I’ve been depressed since I was about 12 and from an abusive family so I didn’t always see myself as a good person but through the last 3 or 4 years, I’m starting to see that more and more. (Diego, Hispanic Male, Age 18)

The YADC provided young adult participants the space to think about their future. Participants were able to develop self-confidence and self-esteem in an environment that promoted self-
expression. Further, participants were able to heal from past mistakes and begin making decisions about the future they wanted.

**Section Summary**

The above sections detailed the experience and stories told by young adult participants as they consider possible futures after the YADC. The two themes in this section focused on the young adult participants’ desire to get straight or adopt a crime-free life and on developing a purpose in life. Both themes are related to identity development and reflect the importance of identity exploration during a time of possibilities. For instance, Alonzo was asked about if the YADC helped him with his purpose and he explained:

> It did, it made it click. The streets are not meant for me. Having someone just say wassup O.G. to me doesn’t sit right with me…I don’t want kids to look up to me being in jail; you cannot have anyone looking up to you being in jail…I am actually trying to get a job working with kids, and watching them after school shoot some hoops and talk to the young men; I feel like I would like to do something like that. (Alonzo, African American Male, Age 17)

One clear benefit of participating in the YADC is that young adult participants’ were able to envision and articulate multiple possibilities for their future, which may have interrupted internalization of a deviant identity, fostered a developing sense of purpose, and increased opportunities for positive identity development (Becker, 1963; Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003; Harter et al., 1997; Jones, 2017). The YADC was a place that allowed the young adult participants to reflect on the many experiences that brought them to the justice system and make decisions that could potentially alter the trajectories of their lives.

**Chapter Summary**

The results presented in this chapter explored how and why the Young Adult Diversion Court (YADC) integrated creative and expressive arts to promote prosocial outcomes of young adult participants. I used a narrative approach to tell a story within a story. The results presented
in this chapter told a story about young adult participants’ experiences in a criminal justice intervention designed to help them and the perceived benefits of their participation. Multiple perceived benefits were observed from the integration of creative and expressive arts in the YADC. The perceived benefits include the use of creative and expressive arts as a modality for young adults to rescript their stories, develop their voice, and identify a sense of purpose. Also, the creative and expressive arts were provided in a structured environment with supportive adults who helped the young adult participants learn to regulate their emotions, process insights about their experiences while providing support, care, and connection. Only through understanding the young adult participants’ stories before, during, and after contact with the YADC does the reader gain a contextual perspective of the lives the intervention was designed to serve.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this narrative study was to discover how and why the Young Adult Diversion Court (YADC) integrated creative and expressive arts to promote prosocial outcomes of young adult participants. This study also sought to understand the experience of young adult participants and the perceived benefits of their participation in creative and expressive arts programming. In a sense, this dissertation presents a story within a story as the findings presented and discussed in this dissertation chronicle the creation of the YADC, describe the experiences of the YADC staff and young adult participants, and explore the intersection of these stories.

A qualitative approach informed by interpretive interactionism and narrative provided a method to understand the experience of participants in the context of a problem-solving court program. Narrative contributed to this dissertation in multiple ways. First as a theory to understand identity development and secondly as a method to access the stories and meanings young adults ascribed to their experience. Essentially, a narrative approach was utilized to tell the story of how and why the YADC emerged and how young adult participants experienced a criminal justice intervention designed to help them. The young adult participants’ stories before, during, and after contact with the YADC provide a contextual perspective of the very lives the intervention was designed to serve. This chapter will discuss key findings, conclusions, and recommendations from a study completed to understand how one problem-solving court used creative expression as means to engage and influence young adults.

One fundamental social problem is that interaction with the criminal justice system often exacts substantial costs on human potential. This study was designed to understand how
innovative policies, programs, and interventions were used to promote positive young adult development. The following framing questions guided this study:

1. How and why were the creative and expressive arts integrated into a problem-solving court to promote prosocial outcomes for young adults?
2. How do young adult participants experience creative and expressive arts programming?
3. What are the perceived benefits of creative and expressive arts for young adults in a problem-solving court program?

The next section will present the conclusions that emerged from the findings.

Conclusions presented in this chapter provide insight into the lives of young adult participants and the court's influence on their behavior. Moreover, the conclusions that can be drawn from this study went beyond the perspectives of facilitators and court officials and account for the experiences of young adult participants enrolled in a problem-solving court through stories told by them.

**Conclusions**

This study is situated in a historical context where scholars have been critical of the criminal justice system and its many failures. These failures include over-policing in under-resourced neighborhoods populated by ethnic and racial groups, especially African American communities that were ravaged by the loss of manufacturing jobs and the war on drugs. Shifts in the U.S. economy combined with racially biased policies such as the war on drugs led to overrepresentation of African Americans in the criminal justice system (Alexander, 2012; Hughes & Wilson, 2010; Shelden, 2010). Also, the lack of support and informal social control across multiple contexts that include school personnel, police officers, and other adults creates the youth control complex, which is a ubiquitous system of criminalization that labels and
entraps young people through formal and informal interactions within their social ecology (Rios, 2011). Moreover, the interactions between young people and important adults is a driving force within the youth control complex as these interactions lead young people to internalize the roles and behaviors expected of them. It is the accumulation of negative interactions and lowered expectations that lead to the internalization of a deviant label. Also, mass incarceration and the disproportionate representation of people of color in the criminal justice system is related to economic inequality and over-policing in communities of color. Shifts in technology, the growth of a global economy, and loss of manufacturing jobs through automatization and outsourcing have contributed to economic disparities (Shelden, 2010).

Problem-solving courts have the potential to play a pivotal role in fostering criminal justice reform. I argue that problem-solving courts are a part of the growing smart justice paradigm. The smart justice paradigm is a socio-political paradigm rooted in broad criminal justice reform that aims for a reduction in incarceration rates, fiscal responsibility, a focus on solving local community issues, integration of evidenced-based practice, and provision of services and treatment options. The smart justice paradigm is in contrast to traditional approaches, which have relied primarily on punishment, deterrence, and use of punitive sanctions. Further, this study highlights the need to restructure the social supports currently available to young people. The young adults interviewed in this study articulated hopes, dreams, and aspirations; they were able to envision a future where they were successful. Existing social supports and resources must be modified to assist young people in meeting their goals. The conclusions presented below detail how one problem-solving court helped young people meet their goals.
Discussion of Research Questions

Research Question 1

How and why were the creative and expressive arts integrated into a problem-solving court to promote prosocial outcomes for young adults?

One of the primary research questions considered how and why the creative and expressive arts were integrated into the YADC. In general, the policies, programs, and interventions utilized in the YADC were created to help young adults 17 - 20 years of age complete requirements for probation. For instance, a local issue observed by the YADC judge was that young adults entered the justice system eligible to receive a diversion for their charges, but often failed to meet the requirements of probation and subsequently lost their chance for a diversion. The judge brought together a team comprised of court administrators, probation officers, and community practitioners who had experience working with young adults. The goals of the YADC were to create a program to address the underlying reasons that led the young adults to be involved in the criminal justice system, to reduce the likelihood of future criminal behavior, and to increase prosocial behavior.

The YADC was created to provide young adults a chance to keep criminal charges off their public record. Maintaining eligibility for diversion is important as a drug charge could prevent a young adult from qualifying for federal financial aid in college, or limit future employment opportunities, which would create additional barriers for young adults. The YADC utilized the opportunity for diversion as a primary motivator for young adults to participate in the program. The mission of the YADC is to work with young adults to create a network of support that encourages successful attainment of diversion and the development of valuable skills to use as they move forward in life. The YADC was created to solve local issues, address the underlying behavior of criminal acts, leverage local resources, and foster collaboration with
community partners to solve essential issues in the community. The reason that the creative and expressive arts were integrated into the YADC was the guiding philosophy of problem-solving courts that encourages collaboration with experts in the community to address a particular concern.

The creative and expressive arts were integrated into the YADC because the YADC planning committee recognized the importance of partnering with organizations with expertise in serving youth in the local community. The YADC leveraged local resources to create a program to address the issues of young adults. The creative and expressive arts provided a tangible curriculum to engage the youth, improve their self-esteem, and decrease the likelihood of young adults’ participation in future criminal behavior. The YADC used the creative arts to encourage participation and to engage them in activities designed to promote prosocial behavior.

Typically, young adults were willing to participate in the YADC to avoid charges on their public record. However, there is a difference between attending a program and engaging in the program. The use of the creative and expressive arts encouraged the youth to participate in the YADC. Spoken word performances often engaged participants in reflecting on their purpose and identity, and this is a prominent finding as considering one's purpose and identity may interrupt the development of a deviant identity.

Interaction with the criminal justice system during the transition from adolescence to young adulthood is problematic as this developmental period sets the stage for optimal functioning in adulthood. In fact, contact with the criminal justice system has adverse immediate, and long lasting effects as findings from a nationwide longitudinal study suggested that incarceration has implications for mental health and general health across the life course (Esposito, Lee, Hicken, Porter, & Herting, 2017). Contact with the criminal justice system
compromises optimal functioning through the severance of social bonds as those marked with a deviant or criminal label are excluded from educational and vocational opportunities. Further, enrollment in school or procurement of gainful employment can entitle one to receive health care and mental health benefits, but contact with the criminal justices system may reduce pathways for enrollment in education and also mediate obtainment of gainful employment, which often is tied to obtaining health and mental health benefits.

Young adults who have contact with the criminal justice system may see their future aspirations jeopardized as they are ensnared through increased surveillance and decreased opportunities resultant from being labeled as deviant. Labeling theory helps to understand how creative and expressive arts may contribute to reducing adoption of deviant identity. For instance, a young person may engage in shoplifting but not identify as a thief. However, once the young person is caught and labeled a thief, the shoplifting behavior may become a part of their identity. Labeling theory posits that societal structures create deviance by labeling acts as deviant and young adults then go on to adopt the roles that are expected of them; thus, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy (Becker, 1963). The creative and expressive arts were integrated into the YADC to interrupt the internalization of a deviant identity, through encouraging young adults to consider their purpose and identity. The creative arts were meaningful as they captured participants’ attention and invited them to consider how their past experiences (e.g., shoplifting) and future aspirations (e.g., a factory job) meld together into an emerging unified identity guided by purpose. Expressive writing tasks were useful in promoting young adults to reflect on their experiences and consider future possibilities. For instance, during programming youth had the opportunity to check-in with the group and discuss how they were progressing toward their goal of graduating the YADC. During programming, the YADC staff and young adult peers provided
support and care during group discussion. Programming was particularly crucial for identity development as the environment created a place for self-disclosure, vulnerability, and constructive feedback to guide and redirect young adults towards choices aligned with their purpose.

Young adults were encouraged to write about the many experiences they had in the YADC, to include community service, experiences in court, and the events that occurred in their daily lives outside of the YADC. As young adult participants neared completion of the requirements of the YADC they were invited to spend time with a YADC staff member to organize their reflective writings competed during programming into a letter to the court. They had the opportunity to read their letters to the court when they graduated from the program. These letters are one example of how the YADC interrupted the possible internalization of a deviant identity for youth through encouraging them to consider their purpose and identity. The two excerpts presented below highlight how young adults learned to rescript their narratives through a multifaceted dialogic process. This process required them to consistently reflect on their experience across the multiple aspects of the YADC. Two excerpts obtained from the letters to the court captured how the creative and expressive arts allowed young adult participants to reflect on their purpose and identity:

When you look at me you see me as someone who belongs in the system…. What you don’t know is the night I got in my drinking accident an angel must have been watching me, I totaled my car, but no one was hurt…What you don’t know is I was raped twice when I was younger, and that haunts me every day. I try so hard to be happy, but it’s never real happiness…Now that you know this you know a few parts of me, you’ll never fully know me, but at least you know a little. I feel that a lot of people with drug issues, or really anything along those lines, come through probation a lot. The question is, is this truly the right way to help people? Maybe some people don’t need jail time or tough looking people to scare you right. Maybe they just need someone to really talk to. (Brianna, European American, Female Age 18)
An excerpt from another letter to the court:

I belittled myself because I had been treated like nothing. I had gone down the wrong path because I thought it was where I belonged. I felt like I had no choice...But now I realize my potential; I just had to see it for myself. Now I see my beauty; I just had to look a little harder in the mirror. Now I see my journey, what it was meant for, to make me stronger. Now I see my self-worth more than I could have ever imagined. Now I see my mistakes and what I have to do to fix them. I take responsibility for what I’ve done and am ready to face the consequences. I am ready to start a new journey, a new road, a new life I am ready to be me, the best me that I can be. (Unidentified female participant)

The above quotes provide an example of how the YADC provided young adult participants the structure and space to rescript their narratives. The young adults benefited from the resources, caring adults, and programming, which provided them an opportunity to consider that their past did not have to be their future. The letters to the court demonstrate how participants reflected on their interaction with the court and how they developed voice, purpose, and an increased sense of self-worth. Further, this intervention was provided during a crucial developmental period for exploring and developing an identity.

In general, The YADC was created to address the underlying issues that led young adults to the court. The YADC used existing policy to provide young adults the opportunity to have criminal charges made nonpublic. The YADC also used the funds obtained through the block grant to provide participants with resources. Funds were used to provide participants money to pay past due electric bills, new clothing for a job interview, and emergency funds to fix a car so that they would have transportation to make it to school and work. Perhaps, other components of the YADC were sufficient to encourage prosocial behavior; however, the creative and expressive arts was the glue that bound the program together. While the opportunity for a diversion was frequently cited as the primary reason for participation in the YADC, the creative and expressive arts were vital for sustained engagement and participation. A key finding is that the creative and
expressive arts provided a suitable method to interrupt the occurrence and internalization of deviant identity, allowing the development of prosocial behavior for participants enrolled in the YADC.

**Research Questions 2 and 3**

How do young adult participants experience, and what are the perceived benefits of, creative and expressive arts in a problem-solving court program?

The core research questions explored how young adult participants experienced creative and expressive arts and the perceived benefits of their participation in the YADC. The creative and expressive arts as presented in the current study explains how the YADC used four interrelated processes to engage the young adult participants in programming. The processes include spoken word performances, expressive writing, self-disclosure in a group setting, and a supportive environment, which fostered social support, care, and connection. During programming, the facilitators used spoken word performances and self-discourse as the initial method to connect with the young adult participants. The facilitators’ willingness to self-disclose their past mistakes and struggles while also sharing how they managed to overcome barriers imposed on them created a space that allowed young adult participants to connect and engage. Spoken word was an essential component of programming as it allowed the facilitators to build an alliance with young adult participants.

**Spoken word.** A key finding was spoken word, a component of creative and expressive arts, allowed young adult participants to explore their developing identities in a setting that was supportive and encouraging. What makes this finding interesting is that despite the young adult participants’ initial frustrations about attending a weekly court-mandated program, young adults were willing to engage in the activities and ultimately benefited from the care and support provided to them. In a sense, the spoken word performances were used as a method to enable
young adult participants to buy-in during programming. Participants found the spoken word performances engaging, inspiring, and motivating.

One example of how spoken word was engaging was during programming when Brian and Manny performed the poem Beautiful Scars, and Manny told his story about surviving cancer. The takeaway lesson that night was that involvement with the justice system could be seen as a scar and the choices that the young adult participants made while enrolled in the YADC would help them to heal the scar. The beautiful scar is the realization that conflict and struggle can make us stronger. For participants, developing a sense of purpose and leading a life free from involvement in the criminal justice system was their opportunity to heal and acknowledge their involvement in the YADC as a beautiful scar. The participants were able to see how the mistakes that led them to be involved with the YADC did not have to mark them as deviant adults or criminals; instead, they were able to see that the choices which led them to the YADC were temporary. After hearing the poems and stories about beautiful scars, young adults described that they were more hopeful, and determined; they realized that they did not have to feel ashamed about being in the YADC. Omar, a 20-year-old African American Male, stated:

That was real cool that they did that. It was like they had that voice. It was crazy. I’m trying to explain it right. They were into it you know something that they really liked and enjoyed, and I could see that by how they were performing. I pretty much learned that whenever the world brings you down don’t give up. I could do it; it was basically an inspirational poem.

The finding that spoken word performances were engaging, inspiring, and motivating confirms existing research, which suggested that spoken word interventions motivated participants to pursue prosocial behavior, bolstered self-confidence, increased self-esteem, and provided a safe space where youth were encouraged to share their stories and develop their voices (Reyes, 2006; Williams, 2015; Weinstein, 2007). Spoken word performance was used as a
method to engage the participants, and over time participants were also required to produce and perform spoken word for the court at graduation.

**Letters to the court.** Young adult participants found that when their peers performed letters to the court, the letters were especially motivating as young adult participants were able to see a peer reflect on what brought them into contact with the YADC and witness how their peer persisted in meeting the challenges of getting off probation. More importantly, letters to the court signified that participants had reflected on their past, found their voice, and discovered their purpose, which are essential experiences to guide them in the future. Listening to the letters of the court read by their peers gave young adult participants hope, inspiration, and determination to persist toward program completion. For instance, after listing to a peer’s spoken word performance, Miguel stated, “It just kind of gave me hope that you can get up out of here.”

Implications of the findings on spoken word and letters to the court as observed in this current study are that the transformative nature of spoken word allowed participants to attribute involvement in the justice system as deriving from changeable behavior; rather, than inherent characteristics. This finding was illustrated in beautiful scars poem. The scars served as a metaphor for the young adult participants’ and their involvement in the justice system, while the beautiful scars symbolized the realization that although they were involved in the justice system, they did not have to internalize a deviant identity. Overall, spoken word performances provided young adult participants the opportunity to recognize that although past experiences may shape current realities, these experiences do not have to define or limit their future potential. Implications of these findings are that spoken word activities are an essential component in disrupting the potential internalization of a deviant identity through prompting participants to reflect on their past behavior, present circumstances, and possible futures.
Expressive writing. Expressive writing is the second component of the creative and expressive arts as provided in the YADC. After listing to spoken word poems, the young adults were typically provided a writing prompt and asked to write about their own experience silently. Young adult participants found expressive writing helpful. Key findings suggested that expressive writing helped participants manage difficult emotions, learn to express themselves, and explore their identities.

Managing difficult emotions. Expressive writing tasks were beneficial for participants even when they were upset about participating in them. Typically, after writing, participants found that their mood improved. For instance, Aliyah explained, “I’m not a person that likes to talk about my emotions to everybody so when I write it out…it does help with my emotions.” Expressive writing tasks improved participants’ well-being as the act of constructing stories helped young adult participants organize thoughts, feelings, and traumatic experiences (Esterling, L’Abate, Murray, & Pennebaker, 1999; Lowe, 2006; Pennebaker, 2000; Smyth, True, and Souto, 2001). Further, expressive writing helped young adults regulate emotions by making meaning of past and current stressful events (Broals, 2012; Frattaroli, 2006; Jacobs, 2010). The interviews of the young adult participants confirmed earlier research that expressive writing is helpful for managing emotions. However, unlike previous studies, this study focused directly on presenting the young adult perspectives, thus contributing to our understanding of how they perceive their own benefits.

Expressive writing made events and emotions more manageable by writing them down and providing the young adults with an element of control (Connolly Baker & Mazza, 2004; Mazza, 1979; Mazza, 2003, Philips, Linnington, & Penman, 1999). The perceived benefits of expressive writing are grounded in a process that helped young adults overcome challenges.
through reframing the meaning of stressful events and integrating the past and present.

**Self-expression.** In addition to the benefits gained from learning to manage difficult emotions, young adult participants were also provided with the space to express themselves. For instance, Mason explained how writing helped him express himself, “When I write poetry most of it is just past feelings I put into words…writing helps to express myself.”

**Identity exploration.** The third component of the expressive writing was identity exploration. Expressive writing activities prompted young adults to reflect on their own life experience. For instance, Isaiah stated, “Yeah, like it helps me…I write about like how it was before and how it was after”. The expressive writing allowed participants to explore their identity through the reflective writing assignments. Young adult participants were able to re-script their own stories. When asked about their stories moving forward they often blended lessons learned from past experience, goals for future, and their current realities. Tiana was able to envision a prosperous future:

> Finishing up school…probably being a cosmetologist and try to start my own business or something. I know I want to be my own boss. (Tiana, African American Female, Age 19)

The YADC was a place where young adults were challenged to think about their future and consider how choices influenced possible outcomes. Young adult participants were motivated to get straight. Getting straight meant that young adult participants would have to make prosocial choices with the hope that these choices would pay off in the future:

> It’s going to be a good outcome. If I was to stay motivated, it would be good. Getting up, ready for work. Factory job, get off at 5 pm, go get the kids something to eat and keep repeating that day. Knowing that the house bills are paid, and the kids come home with good grades. I just want a life like that…I just want to keep at a steady pace. To stay clean and to stay true to me, just do good. I don’t need a big house, just something comfortable for my family. (Lamar, African American Male, Age 18)
Omar illustrated the concept of re-scripting when he stated, “You talking about why you here, what got you here, what you can do to better yourself”. Similar to the current study, participants in studies by Jocson (2006), Weinstein (2007), and Wiseman (2011), benefited from expressive writing as expressive writing helped participants explore the complexity of identity, provided an outlet for expression, and a means to vent emotional frustrations. In general, the identity exploration promoted across activities in the YADC demonstrated that even through involvement in the justice system, interruptions to their secondary schooling, and the lack of resources in their neighborhoods participants expressed and believed that they could one day lead a successful life.

**Self-disclosure in a group setting.** Eleven of the 12 young adults responded when asked about verbally sharing their reflective writing in the group. Seven felt comfortable sharing their writing while 4 did not. Participants that felt comfortable recalled prior successful experiences of self-disclosure or were willing to embrace self-disclosure as an opportunity to build new skills. For instance, Aliyah stated, “It is hard as I don’t know how people are going to react, but then at the end of the day, I feel good because I actually got to get that off my chest and somebody else could relate to it.” Participants who were uncomfortable with verbal self-discourse cited issues of privacy and concern about judgment from their peers. Although nervous, Emma shared with the group and described that it was a challenging experience. She stated “I don’t really talk to people like that...They were supportive, most of them just sat there, and it was okay because a lot of them have the same problem.” Existing research confirms that writing about one’s individual experiences and then sharing those experiences in a group setting requires a level of support and safety amongst group members and facilitators (Weinstein, 2010). Although hesitant, Emma felt safe enough to share in the group.

Despite reservations about verbal self-disclosure, there were multiple benefits observed
when youth were willing to self-disclose during group. The first benefit was that self-disclosure provided a cathartic release. The second benefit derived from self-disclosure was the opportunity to receive support and empathy from peers and for peers to provide support and empathy. The benefits of self-disclosure provided group members the opportunity to discover similarities, differences, and develop positive relationships with each other (Olson-McBride & Page, 2012). Self-discourse created a reciprocal process which deepened relationships and increased perceptions of safety for some participants.

**Social support, care, and connection.** The fourth competent of the creative and expressive arts as provided in the YADC is the social support, care, and connection. Of the 12 young adult participants explicitly interviewed about their experience of the creative and expressive arts, 9 responded to the question, and they all indicated feeling supported. One way that care was communicated was through the YADC staff’s willingness to share vulnerable stories. Often when adults are in roles of authority, they are unable or unwilling to disclose their struggles and hardships, but the YADC staff’s willingness to share stories in which they overcame difficult circumstances modeled the importance of vulnerability and self-disclosure as one way of healing from trauma and personal struggles. For instance, Brain a program facilitator in the YADC shared part of his story during programming, and it resonated with Colby who stated:

> Actually part of it was Brian, how he told me what happened to him and all of his friends when he was in high school. Having people, that’s been through the same things that we’ve been through really…They’re real supportive, and they listen well. They help with a lot of stuff. I know even if I’m done with the program, I could call them, and they would be there for me. (Colby, European American Male, Age 18)

Colby described how programming provided a space where the YADC staff was able to demonstrate a caring and supportive attitude to the participants. The YADC staff utilized
relational strategies that modeled positive relational interactions for the young adult participants, which facilitated prosocial development through the care and support provided to them (Jones, & Deutsch, 2011). Malik’s quote further highlights the importance of the creative and expressive arts and the social support engendered in such an environment:

After hearing all those stories about Brian and Manny when they were young made me think I can do better now since I am getting older and more mature I got to go down the right path. (Malik, African American Male, Age 19)

The four components of the creative and expressive arts. Although each component was discussed separately in the above sections, they often worked in overlapping ways. Findings suggest that spoken-word was engaging for participants, expressive writing and group self-disclosure provided space to reflect on thoughts and feelings, and these processes occurred in a supportive environment. Bodies of literature concerned with both spoken word programs and the expressive writing tasks have substantial findings that document the efficacy of these interventions. A key finding in this study is that combining expressive writing within a format that provides social support and opportunities for self-disclosure can be particularly beneficial in helping young people rescript their narratives. Further, some young people were uncomfortable with verbal self-disclosure during the group discussion. Kiara expressed:

I like it when we get to do our private reflection on the writing because it’s hard for me to like talking to people about what I go through really but when I write it down, I feel better because I don’t have to say it so that everybody knows what I’m going through. (Kiara, Black Female Age 19)

Kiara noted a preference for wanting to share through writing as opposed to verbally in the group. Participants who did not verbally share with the group likely benefited from expressive writing tasks. Overall, it seems that youth who saw writing as less favorable preferred to express themselves verbally. In contrast, youth who saw writing as a favorable activity and preferred to share through the written form were tentative about expressing themselves verbally.
in the group setting. Combining both written and verbal modalities may be a useful way to engage a diverse group of young adult participants and encourage them to grow in ways that are uncomfortable but necessary.

Multiple perceived benefits can be derived from the integration of creative and expressive arts in the YADC. The perceived benefits include the use of creative and expressive arts as a modality for young adults to rescript their stories, develop their voice, and identify a sense of purpose. Also, the creative and expressive arts were provided in a structured environment with supportive adults who helped the young adult participants learn to regulate their emotions, and process insights about their experiences while providing support, care, and connection.

Reflections on the YADC

A broad tension in problem-solving courts is the negotiation of treatment and punishment. Participants enrolled in problem-solving courts gain access to individualized treatment plans and community services, they are also held accountable for adhering to program criteria and may receive graduated sanctions or rewards, dependent on their progress through the program (Berman, 2009; Boldt, 2009; Miller & Johnson, 2009). At the same time, to participate in the problem-solving court program young adults are required to plead guilty, are subject to increased surveillance, and the threat of legally sanctioned punishment is used to encourage treatment (Boldt, 2009; Nolan, 2003). Furthermore, individuals who fail to complete the court’s requirements may receive jail time, end up serving their full sentence, and may even be discharged from the problem-solving court. The negotiation of treatment and punishment is a critical tension that also manifested in the YADC.

Another tension observed in the YADC was the 3-month requirement to maintain sobriety. Young adults struggled to discontinue use of marijuana. It was typical for a young adult
to complete the majority of the program requirements with the exception of maintaining sobriety. More than any other reason, the inability for some young adults to test clean was the reason that young adult participants did not complete the program. Of the 55 YADC participants enrolled during data collection, 10 individuals successfully completed the YADC, comprising 18.2% of the overall group. Eleven individuals were still enrolled in the program when data collection ended comprising 20% of the sample. Thirty young adults (54.5%) were terminated from the program, and four (7.3%) had active bench warrants. Therefore, accounting for the individuals enrolled at the end of data collection, one individual graduated for every 3.4 that did not graduate. It would be useful to know of the 30 young adult participants that were terminated how many were terminated for failure to obtain/maintain sobriety; however this information is not available.

Young adult participants benefited from the program despite not graduating. One example of this is Tiana who was able to maintain a factory job, complete the community service requirements, and participate weekly in programming but was unable to maintain sobriety. She described her struggle:

I'm still struggling with smoking weed; I don't think the program is really helping me stop smoking the weed, but it's helping me think about my future more like schooling, and jobs, and how this weed case can affect my future. That's basically why I ended up taking probation instead of taking the ticket because I could just take the ticket and go about my business, but I didn't want this on my record because at the time I was trying to do the CNA program. I don't want to do that anyway, but I still don't want this on my record. (Tiana, African American Female, Age 19)

Tiana was able to meet all the program requirements except for maintaining sobriety. Other young adults described using marijuana to cope with past trauma and personal struggles. Recall Ray’s narrative about his girlfriend that cheated on him:

I cannot get over that. It’s the only thing I think about when I'm sober man, you
Marijuana and alcohol were consumed by young adult’s participants for the thrill and adventure of using it, to bond with peers, and to cope with personal issues. The most striking finding demonstrating how entrenched some participants were when it came to substance use is that some young people had begun consumption of marijuana in 6th grade. For instance, Alonzo stated, “I can say I have been smoking for like 7 or 8 years strong nonstop every day. That is why I told the judge it is hard for me to stop smoking.” Alonzo’s quote highlights how entrenched some youth were when it came to marijuana consumption. What is most striking about the narratives detailing marijuana use is that some of the young adult participants reported they were smoking since middle school; which would mean they are approaching almost a decade of marijuana consumption. This finding alone demonstrates the challenge that an intervention like the YADC would have to help young people establish and maintain sobriety. In light of the shifting policies nationwide regarding legalization and consumption of marijuana, a recommendation is decriminalization of marijuana and honest conversation with young adults about the effects of marijuana on brain development that enable them to make informed choices about consumption that align with their purpose. Also, the YADC may have increased program completion by requiring young adults to establish progress towards sobriety instead of requiring complete abstinence. A final recommendation would be to enroll participants with substance use issues into a treatment program specializing in addiction and recovery.

Another critical tension is the issue of race and the disproportionate representation of African Americans in the criminal justice system. Young adults who identified as African American were disproportionately represented in the YADC. Out of 55 young adults in the
program 35 identified as African American representing 63.6% of the overall sample. The second largest group was 15 European American participants that made up 27.3% of the sample. There were a smaller number of individuals who identified as Hispanic (5.5%), and as Biracial/Multiracial (3.6%). Also, of the 55 young adults arrested for being a minor in possession of alcohol or an illicit substance 18 were African American (32.7%), 9 were European American (16.3%), and 3 were Native American/Hispanic (5.4%). These figures mirror the national statistics that suggest that African Americans are disproportionately represented in the justice system relative to their percentage in the population. Police encounters were not directly asked about during the interviews but they emerged organically in a few of the youth’s narratives.

Alonzo’s narrative captures how his neighborhood was policed by a specialized drug unit:

Alonzo: Our house kept getting raided.

Q: Your house? Where you sleep and lay your head at every night?

Alonzo: Yes. I would come home, and the stuff would be flipped over. Imagine couches flipped over, your bedroom shook, like a tornado hit your house. And you know you have to pick that up every time, they don’t pick any of their mess up.

Q: Who? Do you know who?

Alonzo: They are [specialized drug unit], they work with the police, they come in out for like dope and stuff like that. So they just kept raiding the house back to back, from April until July. My granny is in her upper 50’s…The mayor wanted us evicted; they wanted us to move off the block. She liked the house a lot, and she didn’t want to move. Then Sam stepped in and helped my granny; he started backlashing against the mayor and going against all of them. Since Sam did that, they have not raided my house one time. I haven’t seen a police officer over there not one time since Sam is a powerful man. It changed a lot about how I looked at him; I was like damn he is really trying to help me…ever since then, I have looked at him differently.

Given the legacy of racism in the United States, it is not surprising that African Americans continue to be disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system. The symbolic assailant is a concept articulated by Jerome Skolnick (1966), which suggests police officers
utilize a schema to discern potential criminal behavior. The schema is based on an officer’s worldview of who is dangerous and potentially criminal. From Skolnick’s field observations, he noted that officers observed gestures such as the way one walks, language, and attire to discern individuals and situations that are potentially dangerous. In the U.S. Black males from under-resourced and over policed neighborhoods embody the symbolic assailant. It is their style of dress, their walk, and language patterns that signal to an officer that one is potentially criminal. Without a doubt racialized policing is the primary entry point for African Americans into the criminal justice system as police are sanctioned as authorized agents of the state and granted discretion of whom to arrest and where to arrest them. Also, police are granted a license to discriminate. “The supreme court indicated that in policing, race can be used as a factor in discretionary decision making” (Alexander, 2012, pp. 130-131). Therefore, individuals fitting the description of a symbolic assailant are “justifiably” questioned, as they appear to be suspicious based on an officer’s mental schema and worldview. Further supporting the construct of a symbolic assailant is the concept of symbolic policing which calls attention to social control and the formal and informal ways that Black bodies are, controlled, regulated, and surveilled (Hattery & Smith, 2017). Mechanisms of social control include the police, citizens suspecting suspicious behavior, and the structural racism embedded in institutions.

One useful framework for understanding how race and racism interact with social policy is Mill’s (1997) racial contract which draws on political philosophy to reveal the tacit agreement that governs social policy and directs the behavior of citizens. Mills draws on social contract theory to explain how governments and societies come to exist. While there are varied interpretations of social contract theory, the common hypothetical idea is that before the existence of government humans acted in their self-interest, as there were no incentives for
cooperation. Therefore, perpetual war for limited resources characterized this hypothetical (pre-government) world. To leave the state of nature, each person is required to relinquish some natural freedoms and enter into a contract to form an organized society and government to protect remaining personal freedoms. The racial contract flips the traditional understanding of social contract theory and argues that society is governed by white supremacy which operates as a political system based on a contract between those classified as White – a racial contract (Millis, 1997). Nowhere is this contract more pronounced than the criminal justice system. Further, according to Mills, “non-whites may be regarded as inherently bestial and savage and by extension carry the state of nature around with them, incarnating wildness and wilderness in their person” (Mills, 1997, p. 87). Those who are non-white embody the state of nature and are not privy to the accouterments afforded to those classified as White. From a racial contract perspective, having dark skin while donning a hoodie becomes the indicator that one is not a part of the governed and thus, the racial contract legitimizes violence against Black bodies.

**Limitations of the Study**

The results presented in this dissertation are based on the study of one unique program. An additional limitation of the study is that it was not designed to track the young adults over time at predetermined intervals to find out if they were re-arrested after having contact with the YADC. It is important to note that findings discussed in the study are snapshots in time. Thus the stories presented in this study are not static. It is possible that the YADC has undergone changes based on evaluations and assessment of the program; therefore, if another researcher conducted a study of the YADC their data collection may yield different findings. Further, the findings are based on data collected from humans with imperfect memories who may need to present themselves as socially desirable. It is possible that participants could have presented information
in a socially desirable way. However, a strength of the study is that researchers spent substantial time with actual humans and collected the data. Given the proliferation of online data collection procedures and the anonymity afforded by the Internet, there exists a real possibility for individuals, social organizations, and interest groups to create fake profiles. These fake profiles or fictionalized identities approximate humanity with the goal of deceiving the public to advance a cause or special interest through inflated influence. A strength of this study is that it avoids collecting online data from fictionalized identities.

To mitigate limitations and increase trustworthiness several methods were employed to promote the reliability of findings. These methods included prolonged engagement in the research setting, persistent observation, triangulation, and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The results presented in the study are based on data collected by a research team which spent 20 months of engagement in the field, conducted interviews at multiple time points, and conducted over 30 interviews of young adult participants and the YADC staff. Persistent observation was used to enhance credibility by ensuring that interviews and observations were performed long enough to identify salient issues (Mertens, 2005). The use of observations and interview data created a rich and thick data set that may assist readers in making sense of the findings presented in this study and appropriately transferring to other contexts. Using three sources of data, which included the voices of multiple young adult participants, the YADC staff, and the observations made by each member of the research team, increased the rigor, usefulness, and authenticity of this study. The data as presented confirms the findings and implications by ensuring that the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest shaped the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1999, 2011; Mertens, 2005). I have provided a detailed description of the young adult participants and problem-solving court setting, which
should allow readers to judge for themselves the trustworthiness of the data. Moreover, I provided direct quotes to support my analysis. These direct quotes came from the participants themselves; thus readers may derive alternative interpretations of the data presented.

**Policy and Practice Implications**

The findings presented in the dissertation will guide practitioners working with young adults. One of the most important recommendations is to consider that youth make mistakes; they are not the mistakes. It is also vital to decriminalize substance use and provide adequate treatment outside of the criminal justice system. I also call attention to the power and influence of reciprocal caring relationships with adult staff who were willing to disclose their own mistakes. For instance, when Alonzo was asked about the one thing he will take from the program he stated is:

> Knowing that it is some people who do care about you. You grow up thinking nobody cares about you but it is people other than your family that will support you. Also learning how to carry myself, I want to bold. The things they are teaching me, I can teach somebody in my neighborhood. I cannot really pinpoint it because we have done a lot, but it is a lot that I can take from these people and the YADC program period. I never knew it was that many opportunities outside the hood. When we first got here, I told them I wanted to see more of the world than the little four corners that I am in, and I am starting to see more. (Alonzo, African American Male, Age 17)

The YADC staff were willing to be vulnerable and provide appropriate self-disclosure, which likely decreased the relational distance between young adult participants and the YADC staff, which further strengthened participant’s ties to the program.

The creative and expressive arts programming provided participants with an engaging curriculum matched to normative developmental tasks. Given the multiple perceived benefits and the relatively low cost, the provision of creative and expressive arts should be implemented in youth-serving organizations to promote positive youth development. The creative and expressive
arts engaged participants, promoted identity exploration, and provided therapeutic benefits as participants learned to manage painful emotions. Further, young adults committing acts considered non-violent crimes should be provided with interventions that reduce the amount of contact with the criminal justice system, and also promote positive identity development. Decreasing contact with the criminal justice system and increasing contact with social supports addressing the underlying reason that led a particular youth to commit crime seems most appropriate. For instance, a young adult participant stealing personal hygiene items from a local retail store is a crime, but what underlies the behavior? Possibly, they are saying that they need help and do not have the adequate resources to meet their perceived needs.

Policy implications suggest that state budgets should provide the necessary funding to undergird social structures to support young adulthood. It is clear that not all youth will or want to go to college. The question is what do we do with them once they leave high school? Is there a place for non-college bound youth in the economy? Policies that support youth who do not desire to attend or cannot afford to attend college immediately after high school should provide adequate support. It seems that college is a holding place for emerging adults that provides the adequate time and resources for them to make mistakes without being criminalized, explore their identities, and develop skills to enter the workforce. College creates a path towards adulthood. Maybe free community college could provide youth entangled in the criminal justice system a similar holding place to stave off adult responsibilities until they too are ready for adulthood. Young adults in this study expressed a desire to work and achieve a sense of autonomy. A major question is how future public policy can be created to provide ample social supports to assist young adults in meeting developmental milestones and achieving future aspirations.
Next Steps and Future Research

Even with involvement in the justice system, interruptions to their secondary schooling, and the lack of resources in their neighborhoods, participants expressed and believed that they could one day lead a successful life. Future research should consider innovative ways to study how participants overcome involvement in the criminal justice system to lead productive lives. Future research should also track the perceived benefits of participation in a problem-solving court at 1-year intervals to better understand outcomes after participating in a problem-solving court program. Additionally, the YADC staff brought a unique perspective to their work with young adults participants. As stated by Alonzo, “I just think they have the right staff teaching us because they have kind of been in the struggle a little bit and they can relate to a lot of people.” Future research should consider the essential features and characteristics of a competent youth development practitioner and provide training to enhance the effectiveness of youth-serving organizations and the staff that work in them.

Chapter Summary

The conclusions presented in this chapter detailed how the YADC integrated creative and expressive arts to promote prosocial behavior of young adult participants. Furthermore, this study explored the experience of young adult participants and the perceived benefits of their participation in the YADC. A key finding was that the creative and expressive arts provided therapeutic benefits, which allowed participants to identify, reflect, and process challenging experiences that brought them into contact with the court. Young adult participants who engaged in the program and completed the program were able to hit the reset button. They were able to reflect on past experiences, refine current goals, reconsider possibilities, and hopefully re-launch with a newfound sense of purpose. This study extended problem-solving court literature by going
beyond the theoretical literature and perspectives of court officials to explore the experience of participants in a problem-solving court. Overall, the findings presented in this study confirm and extend previous research through the systematic study of how the YADC integrated and delivered creative and expressive arts programming, and how young adult participants experienced this intervention.
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Appendix A

Original HSIRB Research Application
Western Michigan University HSIRB Application

Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court

Principal Investigator: Jeffrey N. Jones  
Student Investigator: Ricky Pope, Brittney Tinnon

Abstract

There exists a potential for juvenile and young adult courts to look beyond the application of legal consequences—to enjoin individuals in meaningful personal transformation. Indeed, such interventions may alter social and academic trajectories in the short and long term. The 8th District Court is partnering with multiple community-based organizations (Kalamazoo County Health Department, Kalamazoo Community Mental Health, Speak it Forward/Kinetic Effect, Big Brothers/Big Sisters) and has created the Young Adult Diversion Court (YADC). The purpose of the program is to identify and elevate individual strengths, to empower young adults placed at risk, and to break the cycle of recidivism. It seeks to remedy the symptoms of trauma, and further, to address the roots of maladaptive patterns of behavior. We propose an applied study of organizational context, strategies, and participant experience in the YADC, using observations of planning meetings and youth programming sessions, participant surveys, and interviews with adult coordinators and young adult (aged 17-21) participants.

Purpose/Background Information

There exists a potential for juvenile and young adult courts to look beyond the application of legal consequences—to enjoin individuals in meaningful personal transformation. Indeed, such interventions may alter social and academic trajectories in the short and long term (Scott, & Steinberg, 2008). The local 8th District Court is partnering with multiple community-based organizations (Kalamazoo County Health Department, Kalamazoo Community Mental Health, Speak it Forward/Kinetic Effect, Big Brothers/Big Sisters) and has created the Young Adult Diversion Court. The purpose of the program is to identify and elevate individual strengths, to empower young adults placed at risk, and to break the cycle of recidivism. It seeks to remedy the symptoms of trauma, and further, to address the roots of maladaptive patterns of behavior. This section considers this type of intervention in context of the literature on juvenile and young adult diversion, development and emerging adulthood, and the integration of counseling in alternative diversion programs.

The juvenile and young adult courts are complicated and enigmatic systems, filled with contested spaces and conflicting priorities. One example of this paradox is the balance between individualized rehabilitation (the ideal of the juvenile system) and proportional punishment (the mandate of the adult system). There are an increasing number of alternative interventions to engage young adults in prosocial activity, in hopes of altering social, academic, and career outcomes (Berger, 1996). Wilson & Hoge (2012) documented that diversion programs are more effective that traditional court interventions in a meta-analysis of 73 programs across 45 studies that used recidivism as an outcome.
Juvenile justice and young adult courts straddle the years of late adolescence and emerging adulthood. Developmentally, individuals in the young adult court (aged 17-21) are still formalizing adult roles and assuming responsibilities. While self-regulation, decision-making, and brain functioning are not fully developed, there is also a real potential to intervene in these years, as developmental and social trajectories are malleable (Gibson, & Krohn, 2012). In terms of developmental variation, there is increasing attention on gender-specific pathways and treatment conditions (Hodgdon, 2013), as well how systems of justice differentially affect female and male participants (Watson, & Edelman, 2012; Nurse, 2010).

A majority of diversion programs intervene in the lives of participants, and rightly so. Individuals in this population have more traumatic live experiences and mental health needs. In a study of juvenile and young adult prevalence rates, 68% of young offenders were found to have one psychiatric disorder, and 43% had two or more (Washburn, et al., 2008). There are various ways to integrate counseling and mental health services in diversion programs, and multiple perspectives on diagnostic testing and screening (Vincent, & Grisso, 2005).

Community psychology and the prevention sciences provide a socio-ecological framework to view the complexities of development within and across social contexts. Comprehensive approaches address the multiple ecological realities that face young offenders, and may be more able to uncover needs, provide appropriate and targeted support, and allow for healing to take place, and for personal growth to flourish (Foster, et al., 2005).

In this study, we are interested in the intersection of YADC organizational context and strategies and the experience of young adult participants. Specifically, the questions that frame this study are:

1. How does the YADC integrate counseling and therapeutic services?
2. How does the YADC balance the dual purposes of court sanctions and individual rehabilitation?
3. How do participants perceive the formal and informal learning environment in YADC programming?
4. How does involvement affect participants’ experiences (quality of life, developmental assets, problem solving skills, vocational-self efficacy)?

**Subject Recruitment**

- Number of subjects: 35 total. This study will involve interviews with 10 adult program coordinators, and surveys and interviews with up to 25 YADC participants.
- Inclusionary criteria for subjects: Adult coordinators must be involved in the coordination and implementation of the YADC program. These professionals (ages of 25-60) are from the court and community-based agencies. YADC participants are aged 17-21. The means by which they are introduced to YADC is that they are on a probation under a diversion provision of the state statute (or local diversion for retail fraud offenses only) and they are facing a probation violation for noncompliance with the probation.
- Exclusionary criteria for subjects: Other young adults in the juvenile or adult court systems
that are not involved in the YADC program are not eligible to participate. Other professional adults working with the courts or community-based agencies that are not directly involved in program coordination and implementation are not eligible to participate.

- Potential adult program coordinators will be recruited through an announcement at a YADC team planning meeting by Jeffrey Jones, Associate Professor and Principal Investigator.
- Individuals will be informed of the objectives, activities and requirements of the study. They will be told that participation is voluntary and confidential.
- Potential YADC subjects will be recruited through an announcement at YADC programming (see Appendix B). Individuals will be informed of the objectives, activities, and requirements of the study. They will be told that participation is voluntary, confidential, and is in no way connected to their case or progress in the YADC. They will be told that the consent procedure was specifically designed so that court officials are not involved in acquiring consent, will not know who is participating or not in the study, and will only see results in aggregated and de-identified form. YADC coordinators will be asked to step into the hall so that coordinators will not be a part of this process or have access to this information.
- How potential subjects will contact the investigator(s) to express interest in participating: Researchers will facilitate the collection of informed consent forms in a large envelope. Individuals can provide informed consent by signing and returning the form, or decline to participate by returning the form unsigned (see Appendix A).
- The investigator will respond to individuals expressing interest in the study, by contacting them in person at a regular YADC program session to schedule an interview (to be held before, during, or after YADC programming). Participants are frequently pulled from programming for additional conversations, paperwork, and services—as such, we intend to “blend in” as much as possible to the regular educational programming in the setting.

**Informed Consent Process**

Potential adult program coordinators will be recruited through an announcement by Jeffrey Jones, principal investigator, at a YADC team planning meeting. Individuals will be informed of the objectives, activities and requirements of the study. They will be told that participation is voluntary and confidential. Adult participants can sign and return the form to the large provided envelop, indicating informed consent and willingness to participate, or they can return the form without signature.

The YADC program consists of two components: 1) a court component, where participants check in with their parole officer and judge, and 2) programming, where participants engage in a variety of planned activities designed to promote reflection, service, and healthy choices. Recruitment will take place at YADC programming to reduce perceived coercion (to prevent informed consent forms to be presented at the court or by a representative of the court system).

A general announcement will be made at a regular YADC program meeting by Jeffrey Jones, principal investigator (see Appendix B for script of announcement). In this announcement, the purpose, risks, benefits, and participant responsibilities will be shared. Program participants will be informed that signed consent forms from the participant are required for participation in the surveys and interviews for the study.
Informed consent forms will be made available for all individuals (see Appendix A for informed consent forms). Individuals will have the opportunity to ask questions about the study. After the recruitment script is read, and any questions answered. All individuals will be asked to return forms. Individuals can return the signed informed consent documents, or return the form unsigned. YADC program coordinator will be asked to step into the hall during this process so that they do not know who is and who is not interested in participation.

Upon receipt of the signed informed consent forms, the researcher will schedule a survey and interview with the participant. These will take place before, during or after regularly scheduled program meetings. Participants are frequently pulled from programming for additional conversations, paperwork, and services—as such, we intend to “blend in” as much as possible to the regular educational programming in the setting.

This population of young adults is a vulnerable group and protected class because of their involvement in the justice system. As such, we have contacted several WMU faculty who do research on juvenile and young adult populations, and have consulted recent research in this area (specifically National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2013; Wolbransky, Goldstein, Giallella, & Heilbrun, 2013) to identify appropriate measures to ensure ethical and proper research.

We have created a type of “firewall,” or barrier, between the court and the research study. We did this by planning to recruit during programming and not during the court session. We did this to reduce perceived coercion (or the perception that participation is required as a part of the probation process). As such, the study will not be introduced by court officials, and the court will not be notified as to who is in (and who is not in) the study. When the study is introduced at programming YADC coordinators will be asked to step into the hall, and the participants can make a decision without the influence or presence of the program coordinators.

Additionally, though court records were offered as a potential data source, we are intentionally not planning on using this source of information (to maintain a distance from the court, and because this would require matching court records with individuals in the study). Together, these strategies provide additional protections and will allow participants to freely participate, or decline to participate, without the undue influence of court oversight.

NOTE: As per feedback from the full review on 11-20-13, we request a waiver for participants that are 17 years of age. The reasoning behind this decision is that although 17 years olds are minors in terms of IRB regulations, they are being charged and treated as adults in the YADC and the 8th District Court. This will address the concern that having to take an envelope home will identify 17 year olds that wish to participate.

Research Procedures

Methods of Data Collection and Instrumentation

We propose an applied study of organizational strategies and participant experience in the YADC, using observations of planning meetings and youth programming sessions, participant surveys, and interviews with adult coordinators and young adult (aged 17-21) participants.
Instrumentation for this study will involve interviews with adult coordinators and young adult participants, and surveys with young adult participants.

Adult interviews will focus on the individuals’ role and experience in the YADC, perceptions of program organization and implementation, and observations of YADC participants’ behavior (see Appendix C). These questions are informed by the literature on organizational leadership and development, and diversion programs for juvenile and young adult populations.

The first survey with YADC participants will assess quality of life indicators (Patrick, Edwards, & Topolski, 2002), and the second focuses on developmental assets (Klein, et al., 2006) and career aspirations and efficacy (see Appendix D).

The first interviews with YADC participants will assess individuals’ pathways into and through the juvenile and young adult court systems. The second will assess their psychosocial experiences in the program and examine their ideas for moving forward. The interview questions are informed by the literature on social-cognitive perspectives of motivation, interpersonal relationships, and career preparation and readiness, and parallel the constructs in the surveys (see Appendix C).

Not all participants will be involved in both surveys and interviews. For those individuals about to graduate and leave the program, we will only be able to conduct a single survey and/or interview. In an ideal world, participants would take part in the first survey and interview as they enter (or early in) the program, and would engage in the second survey and interview later in the program after several months of interaction with the intervention. With high turnover, we will not be able to collect complete data in all cases and will need to adjust to changing conditions due to the transient nature of participation in the YADC.

Participants will be asked to agree to both surveys and interviews in the consent form. However, not all participants will be asked to complete both surveys and interviews, depending on their progress in the program (see above). Further, while signing the informed consent forms makes them eligible, participants may choose to not participate in a survey or interview.

Interviews will be recorded with a digital audio recorder for transcription purposes. After reading the interview introduction (see interview protocol for YADC participants) and answering any questions prior to the interview, the researcher will start recording. These interview files will not be transmitted via email or through online means. They will be taken directly to the principal investigator’s office and stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office. Audio files will be destroyed/deleted following transcription.

The surveys and interviews will be conducted by Jeffrey Jones (faculty researcher), as well as Ricky Pope and Brittney Tinnon (student investigators).

**Location of Data Collection**

YADC court sessions and team planning meetings are held at the County Courthouse at 227 W. Michigan Ave., Kalamazoo, MI, 49007 (see Appendix E for letter of support).
YADC programming sessions are held at the Kalamazoo Community Mental Health Building at 418 W. Kalamazoo Ave., Kalamazoo, MI, 49007.

The interviews will take place in the kitchen or hallway to separate from the group discussion and to provide a quiet space for conversation. As discussed in the full review on 11-20-13, this is the closest to a neutral/private space that is available. YADC programming is the only time to access these individuals. Programming is run by coordinators from community-based organizations, and court representatives are not present during programming.

**Duration of the Study**

The time required for this study will be approximately 40 minutes for adult coordinators that agree to participate in the interview. The time for YADC participants could be 80 minutes over several months (if they are involved in both surveys and interviews). Data collection will follow obtaining informed consent of subjects, and will continue through the first year of study. Analysis will begin with data collection, and the writing of results for dissemination will occur in the spring and summer of 2014.

**Methodology**

**Design**

This is a qualitative-dominant mixed methods study. We will use a survey to assess developmental assets and quality of life indicators. We will use these surveys to inform interviews with participants, and will contextualize these data sources with observations at YADC planning, court, and programming sessions.

We take an interpretive ethnographic approach, a cultural view of qualitative research that draws inferences grounded in field observation and inquiry based on interactions with participants (Denzin, 1989). We assume that program influences are determined by the ways in which individual participants interact with, and interpret, such programming. We utilize surveys, interviews, and observations to gain access to perceptions and experience (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). We are further guided by narrative inquiry. Individuals explain their experiences through culturally-influenced story form, and narrative inquiry is a study of the stories that people live and tell (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; McAdams, 1993).

**Analysis**

Researchers will select pseudonyms for each YADC participant. Pseudonyms will be used instead of real names in all data and analysis.

The analytic process, consistent with interpretive and inductive research, is iterative throughout the course of the study as researchers observe themes, patterns, and associations within the data (Merriam, 2002). Observations gather data that are independent of participant and coordinator perceptions, and interviews aid the discovery of meanings that individuals assign to observed
interactions (Seidman, Tseng, & Weisner, 2006). Field notes will be typed and compiled, and interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Focused codes will be created for preexisting theoretical constructs and open codes will originate through onsite observation and analysis. These codes will be informed by survey constructs and applied to all field notes and interview transcriptions. We will utilize NVivo, a qualitative software program, to organize and revise codes, determine inter-rater reliability, and to analyze data. Field notes will be used to situate themes and patterns identified in the analysis of survey and interview data.

Surveys will provide quantitative ratings of several constructs of interest. We will use these data for two purposes: 1) to assess ratings across individuals, and 2) to inform semi-structured interviews. As such, we will apply standard statistical analytic strategies (e.g., descriptive statistics, t-tests, and correlations), as well as analyze survey responses in context of qualitative interviewing.

Several strategies will promote the reliability of findings, including a prolonged engagement in the research setting, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checks, thick description, and reflexive journaling. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Dissemination**

The findings from this research will be distributed in multiple ways. These findings will be presented at research conferences. Results will also be written as full length articles and submitted to peer-reviewed journals. All research products will be shared with the local YADC team to inform programming, evaluation, and funding efforts. This research may serve as dissertation or pre-dissertation research for Ricky Pope (graduate research assistant).

**Risks and Cost to and Protections for Subjects**

The measures used in this study ask for participant experiences in program activities. There is a slight risk that certain questions may cause participants discomfort. There is a slight risk that participants view certain questions as personal, or as an invasion of their privacy.

At the onset of all interviews, participants are informed that they can decline to answer any or all interview questions. Feelings of discomfort can be alleviated by moving on to another topic of inquiry, or in the case of extreme discomfort, terminating the interview. The interviewers are trained to respond with empathy and understanding in such cases. There are no social, economic, or physical risks associated with this type of interpretive interview. The principal investigator has conducted similar ethnographic studies with interpretive interviews of youth program experiences and activities; while some youth fail to directly answer some interview questions, no youth have expressed discomfort or asked to terminate interviews.

Participants are informed of measures to ensure confidentiality. Researcher-selected pseudonyms are used in place of participant names. Pseudonyms will be used instead of real names in all data and analysis. After survey data is entered into a spreadsheet, the paper copies of surveys will be destroyed—there will be no identifying information in the resulting data set.
Benefits of Research

There is no direct benefit. Individuals that participate in the interviews may benefit by sharing program experiences with interested researchers. The YADC team may benefit from having empirical research on the perceived outcomes. This information may assist the organization in programming and evaluation efforts. This study has the potential to yield valuable insight into the context and development of young adult diversion programs. The results of this study could contribute to the literature on applied developmental psychology, integrating counseling in the justice system, and alternative diversion programs for young adult populations.

Confidentiality of Data

There are several mechanisms that will ensure the privacy of participants. Researchers will select pseudonyms for the research study. These pseudonyms are used in all published and released materials. Identifying information will be altered to promote confidentiality. Data will retained for at least three years following the completion of the study, locked in a file cabinet in the principal investigators’ office.

The principal investigator’s office is room 4023 Sangren Hall, 1903 W. Michigan Ave., Kalamazoo, MI, 49008—on the campus of Western Michigan University.

Data will be kept on person and directly taken to the PI’s office for secure storage. All electronic data files will be stored on secure, password-protected computers.

References


**Appendices**

- A: Informed consent/assent documents (2)
- B: Announcement script
- C: Interview protocols (3)
- D: Surveys (2)
- E: Site approval letter
Western Michigan University
Department of Teaching, Learning, and Educational Studies
Informed Consent for
Program Coordinators

Principal Investigator: Jeffrey N. Jones
Student Investigator: Ricky Pope, Brittney Tinnon
Title of Study: Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled “Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court.” This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
We are trying to understand how the Young Adult Diversion Court (YADC) is organized, and how strategies and activities affect participants’ perceptions and experiences.

Who can participate in this study?
All coordinators of the YADC are invited to participate in this study (coordinator is defined as court personnel and representatives of the community-based agencies that are a part of this intervention).

Where will this study take place?
The study will take place at the normal meeting places for the YADC (the 8th District Court and the Kalamazoo County Community Mental Health office).

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
Adult coordinators will be asked to sit down for a semi-structured interview on their role in the YADC and perceptions of program implementation. Interviews will be recorded for transcription purposes.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
Interviews will take approximately 40 minutes.

What information is being measured during the study?
Researchers will ask coordinators about their role, perceptions of the program, and how the program may be affecting participants’ lives outside of the program.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?
There is a slight risk that certain questions may cause participants discomfort. There is a slight risk that participants view certain questions as personal, or as an invasion of their privacy. Participants can decline to answer any or all interview questions. Feelings of discomfort may be alleviated by moving on to another topic, or in the case of extreme discomfort, terminating the interview.
What are the benefits of participating in this study?
There is no direct benefit. Individuals that participate in the interviews may benefit by sharing program experiences with interested researchers. YADC may benefit from having research on the program.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?
There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?
There is no compensation for participants in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?
Information with identifying information will be seen only by the researchers. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the locked office of the principal investigator. Pseudonyms are used in all published and released materials, and identifying information will be altered to promote confidentiality.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?
You can choose to stop participating in the study at anytime for any reason. You will not suffer any penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences if you choose to withdraw from this study, and will not face any penalty in the workplace. Please notify the researcher if you wish to stop participating in the study.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Jeffrey Jones at 269-270-4299 or jeff.jones@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

Signature

Date
Western Michigan University Department of Teaching, Learning, and Educational Studies
Informed Consent for Participants (Ages 17-21)

Principal Investigator: Jeffrey N. Jones
Student Investigator: Ricky Pope, Brittney Tinnon
Title of Study: Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled “Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court.” This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?
We are trying to understand how the Young Adult Diversion Court (YADC) is organized, how the strategies and activities are working, and how it affects participant experience.

Who can participate in this study?
All participants in the YADC are invited to participate in this study. Participants must be 17-21 years old, and must be on probation under a diversion status.

Where will this study take place?
The study will take place at the normal meeting places for the YADC (the 8th District Court and the Kalamazoo County Community Mental Health office).

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
Participants will be asked to complete 2 surveys and 2 interviews. Interview will be recorded for transcription purposes.

We plan to speak with participants as they enter and are involved in the YADC, during regular programming sessions. Not all participants will be asked to do both surveys and interviews, depending on where they are in the program.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
Surveys will take approximately 20 minutes. Interviews will take approximately 20 minutes. If you participate in both surveys and interviews, the total time should be about 80 minutes.

What information is being measured during the study?
Researchers will ask participants about their perceptions of the program, and how the program is affecting their life outside of the program.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?
There is a slight risk that certain questions may cause participants discomfort. There is a slight risk that participants view certain questions as personal, or as an invasion of their privacy. Participants can decline to answer any or all interview questions. Feelings of discomfort may be
alleviated by moving on to another topic, or in the case of extreme discomfort, terminating the interview.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?
There is no direct benefit. Individuals that participate in the interviews may benefit by sharing program experiences with interested researchers. YADC may benefit from having research on the program.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?
There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?
There is no compensation for participants in this study.

Who will have access to the information collected during this study?
Information with identifying information will be seen only by the researchers. Researchers will select pseudonyms (or fake names) for the research study. These pseudonyms are used in all published and released materials. All identifying information will be altered to promote confidentiality.

What if you want to stop participating in this study?
You can choose to stop participating in the study at anytime for any reason. You will not suffer any penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either if you choose to withdraw from this study. Please notify the researcher if you wish to stop participating in the study.

Note: Your participation is entirely voluntary and the decision to participate is completely up to you. Participating will not affect your progress in the YADC, and not participating will not affect your case or probation (positively or negatively) in any way. Information will not be shared with the judge, parole officer, or any court officials or YADC coordinators except in anonymous form.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Jeffrey Jones at 269-270-4299 or jeff.jones@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

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I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.
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Young Adult Diversion Court Project: Recruitment Script for YADC Participants

Good afternoon. Today, we’re inviting you to participate in a research project titled “Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court.” We want to take a moment to explain what we’re trying to find out in this study, the potential risks and benefits of participating, and what you’ll do if you agree to participate.

First, we want to be clear on our role in studying the YADC. We are from WMU and are not directly associated with the judge, the court, or the court system. This means that we have a different role and different responsibilities in this program. We have taken several steps to keep a separation from the court. We are recruiting here at programming instead of at the court sessions because we want you to be able to hear about this study, and make a decision to participate or not participant without the presence of representatives of the court. We will not share who has agreed to participate with the court, and will only report information with fake names (and without your real name). Also, we won’t we using court records and will rely on the information that participants share through surveys and interviews for this research.

If you agree to participate, you’ll be asked to agree to 2 surveys and 2 short interviews to get your perceptions of the YADC. Not all individuals will be asked to complete both surveys and interviews, depending on where you are in the program.

There is a slight risk that certain questions may cause participants discomfort. Participants can decline to answer any or all interview questions. Feelings of discomfort may be reduced by moving on to another topic, or in the case of extreme discomfort, stopping the interview.

There is no direct benefit, but individuals that participate in the interviews may benefit by sharing program experiences. The YADC may benefit from having research on the program, and this may help them make changes to the program. Also, other programs may benefit from knowing about how the YADC is working.

Informed consent forms are required for this study for those aged 17-21. Upon receipt of the signed informed consent forms, we will schedule an initial survey and interview with the participants. These will take place before, during or after regularly scheduled program meetings. We will hand out informed consent forms and can answer any questions at this time. If you wish to participate, please sign the informed consent form on the last page and return to this large envelope. If you do not wish to participate, simply return the form unsigned to the envelope.

Overall, we are interested in your thought, perceptions, and stories of the YADC. We respect your privacy and individual rights, and the decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you.
Young Adult Diversion Court

Interview Protocol for Coordinators

Thank you for participating in this research study and taking time to meet with me today. We’re studying the organization of the YADC and how taking part affects the experience of participants. Everything that you share will be kept confidential. We will pick a pseudonym (or fake name) that can be used in place of your real name. All names are coded and identifying information is changed to protect privacy. If any of the questions make you uncomfortable, or you would rather not share any information, please feel free to ask to skip to the next question. You may stop the interview at any time, without any penalty in the work place.

Pseudonym (selected by researchers):
Race/ ethnicity:
Gender:
Age:
Length of participation:

1. How did you get involved in the YADC? How does this fit into your professional world?

2. Tell me about your role in the YADC. What do you think about your role?

3. Do you have all the resources you need? Are you set up to be successful in your role?

4. Does the YADC have all the resources to support participants’ needs? Is the YADC set up to be successful?

5. Have you been involved in juvenile or young adult courts in the past? Can you tell me a little bit about those experiences? How is YADC different?

6. What are the main risk factors that are present in participants’ lives as they enter the YADC?

7. What are the needs that participants have as they enter the program?

8. How does the program address those needs for the group? For individuals within the group?

9. What are the strengths of the YADC? How can the YADC do more of that?

10. What are the limitations of current efforts? What does the YADC team need to do to address those limitations?

11. How successful is the YADC in supporting participants? In changing patterns of behaviors?
12. How successful do you feel in your role in the YADC? Do you feel empowered to take on these challenges?

13. Has working with the YADC changed your thinking about young adults in the justice system?

14. How has the YADC changed over time? How were changes made along the way to revise the program and better serve participants?

15. Has your experience with YADC changed over time? How?

16. How do YADC coordinators support each other? How do maintain balance in your work? How do you recharge your batteries when you need to?

17. What do you think of the organization of the YADC (court sessions + programming)?

18. How does the YADC prepare participants for the workforce? Is this support enough for participants as they transition to work roles and responsibilities?

19. Do you feel connected with the YADC? With individuals in the program?

20. Do you value YADC and what it’s trying to do?

21. What are your goals for the YADC? What motivates you in this work?

22. What do you think that participants get out of YADC?

23. Are there activities or experiences that you’ve had that had been important for you in YADC?

24. What is the biggest/ most significant thing that you’ll take from this experience?
Young Adult Diversion Court

Interview Protocol 1

Thank you for participating in this research study and taking time to meet with me today. We’re studying how taking part in YADC affects the experience of participants. Everything that you share will be kept confidential. We will use a pseudonym (or fake name) that can be used in place of your real name. All names are coded and all identifying information is changed to protect privacy. If any of the questions make you uncomfortable, or you would rather not share any information, please feel free to ask to skip to the next question. You may stop the interview at any time, without any penalty.

Pseudonym (selected by researchers):
Race/ ethnicity:
Gender:
Age:
Length of participation:

1. Describe yourself to me. Tell me about yourself.
2. What was your story before YADC?
3. What led you here?
4. What’s been your story since YADC?
5. How has YADC played into that story?
6. How are you changing over time? What is influential in those changes?
7. What’s your story moving forward (in 3-5 years)?
8. Have you been involved in juvenile or young adult courts in the past? Can you tell me a little bit about those experiences? How is YADC different?
9. What’s your experience been like in school?
10. Does participating in YADC affect how you feel about school? Think about school?
11. What will you differently about school after this experience?
12. Do you generally feel safe? Where do you go when you have questions or need help?
13. What are your 2-3 biggest challenges today? How are you taking these on?
14. What are your 2-3 biggest supports today? Do you have the right kind and amount of support from the people and programs in your life?

15. What additional support do you think that you’ll need?

16. Do you have a good view of yourself these days?

17. Are you on a good path today?
Young Adult Diversion Court

Interview Protocol 2

Pseudonym (or fake name): _____________________

1. Has your experience with YADC changed over time? How?

2. How have you changed personally over this time in YADC?

3. Does interacting and working with coordinators affect your experience in the program?

4. How are the court folks (judge, probation officer) different from the service providers and program coordinators (counselors, Kinetic Effect)?

5. What role do court actions (conferring with judge, community service, diversion extensions) have on your thoughts and behaviors?

6. What role does programming have on your experience in YADC? Outside of the YADC?

7. Are there activities or experiences that you’ve had that had been important for you in YADC?

8. What has kept you coming to YADC sessions?

9. Are you working these days? Do you have plans to get a job in the short term? Do you have plans for a career in the long term?

10. Has YADC helped you think about, plan for, or apply for a job?

11. Do you feel connected with the YADC? With individuals in the program?

12. Do you value YADC and what it’s trying to do?

13. What are your goals? What motivates you?

14. Has participating in YADC made you think about your sense of purpose, or what direction you want to go in life?

15. What was your best/most interesting experience in YADC? Did you have an “Aha!” moment? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

16. What is the biggest/most significant thing that you’ll take from this experience?
Date: November 20, 2013

To: Jeffrey Jones, Principal Investigator
   Ricky Pope, Student Investigator for dissertation Brittney Tinnon, Student Investigator

From: Christopher Cheatham, Ph.D., Vice Chair Re: HSIRB Project Number 13-11-05

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled “Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court” has been approved under the full category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project (e.g., you must request a post approval change to enroll subjects beyond the number stated in your application under “Number of subjects you want to complete the study”). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation. In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

Reapproval of the project is required if it extends beyond the termination date stated below.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: November 20, 2014
Appendix B

Revised HSIRB Research Application
Memo Describing Changes to Existing HSIRB

To: Western Michigan University Human Institutional Review Board (HSIRB)

From: Jeffrey Jones and Ricky Pope

Research Study: Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court

This memo describes changes to HSIRB #13-11-05, and the study entitled “Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court.” This letter will describe the following modifications: 1) a revised set of interview questions, 2) the addition of several survey prompts, 3) the use of “letters to the court” and other written artifacts from court diversion programming, 4) to change the number of participant interviews, and to 5) increase the number of subjects that we want to complete the study. These changes are a result of the evolution of this research, and for Ricky Pope’s dissertation that focuses on the integration of the written and expressive arts in court diversion for young adults.

1) Interview questions for participants. The revised interview protocol consists of 12 questions from the original interview protocol 1 and protocol 2. Questions 13 through 24 are new questions. These new questions focus on the use of written and expressive arts in the YADC program. (Please see “Interview Protocol YADC (revised).doc”, and the original interview questions, “Interview Protocol YADC1 (original).doc” and “Interview Protocol YADC2 (original).doc”.)

2) Additional survey prompts. Several additional prompts (questions 42-45 in survey 1 and questions 36-40 in survey 2) were added to the two surveys to address new areas of interest. (Please see “Survey YADC1 (revised).doc”, “Survey YADC2 (revised).doc.”)

3) In the culminating activity for graduates of the YADC, participants read a “letter to the court.” This statement, addressed to the judge, is a personal narrative that is developed, practiced, and refined in the YADC programming sessions. We propose a modification to allow access to the “letters to the court” and other written artifacts from court programming. The use of these materials is included in the recruitment script and informed consent document. (Please see “YADC recruitment script (revised).doc”, and “YADC informed-consent participants (revised).doc”.)

4) Number of interviews for YADC participants. The revised interview protocol is a shorter set of questions, and will be included in a single interview (vs. two interviews). This information is included in the recruitment script and informed consent document. (Please see “YADC recruitment script (revised).doc”, and “YADC informed-consent participants (revised).doc”.)

5) Number of participants. In the original protocol, the maximum number to recruit was 62, with 35 as the number wanted to complete the study. To date, 25 individuals (18 participants and
7 coordinators) have participated. We want to enroll 25 more individuals (20 participants and 5 coordinators). The number that we want to complete the study (50) is more than originally anticipated, though still less than the original maximum number to recruit (62).
Western Michigan University  
Department of Teaching, Learning, and Educational Studies  
Informed Consent for Participants (Ages 17-21)

Principal Investigator: Jeffrey N. Jones  
Student Investigator: Ricky Pope  
Title of Study: Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court

You have been invited to participate in a research project titled “Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court.” This consent document will explain the purpose of this research project and will go over all of the time commitments, the procedures used in the study, and the risks and benefits of participating in this research project. Please read this consent form carefully and completely and please ask any questions if you need more clarification.

What are we trying to find out in this study?  
We are trying to understand how the Young Adult Diversion Court (YADC) is organized, how the strategies and activities are working, and how it affects participant experience.

Who can participate in this study?  
All participants in the YADC are invited to participate in this study. Participants must be 17-21 years old, and must be on probation under a diversion status.

Where will this study take place?  
The study will take place at the normal meeting places for the YADC (the 8th District Court and the Kalamazoo County Community Mental Health office).

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?  
Participants will be asked to complete 2 surveys and 1 interview. Interviews will be recorded for transcription purposes. Participants will be asked to grant access to their narrative “letters to the court” and other written artifacts produced during programming.

We plan to speak with participants as they enter and are involved in the YADC, during regular programming sessions. Not all participants will be asked to do both surveys and interviews, depending on where they are in the program.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?  
Surveys will take approximately 20 minutes. Interviews will take approximately 20 minutes. If you participate in both surveys and interviews, the total time should be about 60 minutes.

What information is being measured during the study?  
Researchers will ask participants about their perceptions of the program, and how the program is affecting their life outside of the program.

What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?  
There is a slight risk that certain questions may cause participants discomfort. There is a slight
risk that participants view certain questions as personal, or as an invasion of their privacy. Participants can decline to answer any or all interview questions. Feelings of discomfort may be alleviated by moving on to another topic, or in the case of extreme discomfort, terminating the interview.

**What are the benefits of participating in this study?**
There is no direct benefit. Individuals that participate in the interviews may benefit by sharing program experiences with interested researchers. YADC may benefit from having research on the program.

**Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?**
There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

**Is there any compensation for participating in this study?**
There is no compensation for participants in this study.

**Who will have access to the information collected during this study?**
Information with identifying information will be seen only by the researchers. Researchers will select pseudonyms (or fake names) for the research study. These pseudonyms are used in all published and released materials. All identifying information will be altered to promote confidentiality.

**What if you want to stop participating in this study?**
You can choose to stop participating in the study at anytime for any reason. You will not suffer any penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either if you choose to withdraw from this study. Please notify the researcher if you wish to stop participating in the study.

**Note:** Your participation is entirely voluntary and the decision to participate is completely up to you. Participating will not affect your progress in the YADC, and not participating will not affect your case or probation (positively or negatively) in any way. Information will not be shared with the judge, parole officer, or any court officials or YADC coordinators except in anonymous form.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the primary investigator, Jeffrey Jones at 269-270-4299 or jeff.jones@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.
I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

Please Print Your Name

Participant’s signature  Date
Young Adult Diversion Court Project: Recruitment Script for YADC Participants

Good afternoon. Today, we’re inviting you to participate in a research project titled “Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court.” We want to take a moment to explain what we’re trying to find out in this study, the potential risks and benefits of participating, and what you’ll do if you agree to participate.

First, we want to be clear on our role in studying the YADC. We are from WMU and are not directly associated with the judge, the court, or the court system. This means that we have a different role and different responsibilities in this program. We have taken several steps to keep a separation from the court. We are recruiting here at programming instead of at the court sessions because we want you to be able to hear about this study, and make a decision to participate or not participant without the presence of representatives of the court. We will not share who has agreed to participate with the court, and will only report information with fake names (and without your real name). Also, we won’t we using court records and will rely on the information that participants share through surveys and interviews for this research.

If you agree to participate, you’ll be asked to agree to 2 surveys and 1 short interview to get your perceptions of the YADC. Not all individuals will be asked to complete both surveys and interviews, depending on where you are in the program. Participants will also allow researchers access to the “letter to the court” and other written projects from programming.

There is a slight risk that certain questions may cause participants discomfort. Participants can decline to answer any or all interview questions. Feelings of discomfort may be reduced by moving on to another topic, or in the case of extreme discomfort, stopping the interview.

There is no direct benefit, but individuals that participate in the interviews may benefit by sharing program experiences. The YADC may benefit from having research on the program, and this may help them make changes to the program. Also, other programs may benefit from knowing about how the YADC is working.

Informed consent forms are required for this study for those aged 17-21. Upon receipt of the signed informed consent forms, we will schedule an initial survey and interview with the participants. These will take place before, during or after regularly scheduled program meetings. We will hand out informed consent forms and can answer any questions at this time. If you wish to participate, please sign the informed consent form on the last page and return to this large envelope. If you do not wish to participate, simply return the form unsigned to the envelope. Overall, we are interested in your thought, perceptions, and stories of the YADC. We respect your privacy and individual rights, and the decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you.
Young Adult Diversion Court

Revised Participant Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating in this research study and taking time to meet with me today. We’re studying how taking part in YADC affects the experience of participants. Everything that you share will be kept confidential. We will use a pseudonym (or fake name) that can be used in place of your real name. All names are coded and all identifying information is changed to protect privacy. If any of the questions make you uncomfortable, or you would rather not share any information, please feel free to ask to skip to the next question. You may stop the interview at any time, without any penalty.

Pseudonym (selected by researchers):
Race/ ethnicity:
Gender:
Age:
Length of participation:

IDENTITY
1. What was your story before YADC? (Question 2 Protocol 1)
2. How have you changed personally over this time in YADC? (Question 2 Protocol 2)
3. How has participating in YADC made you think about your sense of purpose, or what direction you want to go in life? (Question 12 Protocol 2)
4. What are your goals? What motivates you? (Question 13 Protocol 2)

CRIMINAL JUSTICE
5. Have you been involved in juvenile or young adult courts in the past? Can you tell me a little bit about those experiences? How is YADC different? (Question 8 Protocol 1)
6. Do you feel connected with the YADC? With individuals in the program? (Question 11 Protocol 2)
7. Does interacting and working with coordinators affect your experience in the program? (Question 3 Protocol 2)
8. What role does programming have on your experience in YADC? Outside of the YADC? (Question 6 Protocol 2)
9. Are there activities or experiences that you’ve had that had been important for you in YADC? (Question 7 Protocol 2)
10. What has kept you coming to YADC sessions? (Question 8 Protocol 2)
11. What was your best/ most interesting experience in YADC? Did you have an “Aha!” moment? Can you tell me a little bit about that? (Question 15 Protocol 2)
12. What is the biggest/ most significant thing that you’ll take from this experience? (Question 16 Protocol 2)
CREATIVE AND EXPRESSIVE ARTS
13. Describe for me what programming is like. What has your experience been in the creative and expressive arts programming?
14. Tell me about your favorite expressive activities during programming.
15. Tell me about your experience writing.
16. How do you get ideas about what to write in your poem?
17. Describe for me what it is like to share your writing/thoughts in a group atmosphere.
18. Do you find yourself influenced by what other members share? If so, give me an example.
19. How is the writing in programming different from the writing that you did in school?
20. What is like to hear the final piece/ spoken-word performed by other group members/peers?

EXPRESSIVE ARTS/IDENTITY QUESTIONS
21. What have you learned about yourself through writing and performing your “letter to the court”?
22. What does the “letter to the court” say about you and how you’re potentially changing?
23. What will it take to change the story of your life?
24. Have you benefitted from programming? From writing a “letter to the court”? How?
Revised HSIRB Approval Letter Date: November 10, 2014

To: Jeffrey Jones, Principal Investigator
    Ricky Pope, Student Investigator for dissertation
    Brittney Tinnon, Student Investigator

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 13-11-05

This letter will serve as confirmation that the changes to your research project titled “Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court” requested in your memo received November 6, 2014 (to modify interview questions, provide additional survey prompts, add written artifacts as data, reduce number of interviews to one, to increase number of subjects wanted to complete the study to 50, and revise recruitment and consent materials to reflect these changes) have been approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

The conditions and the duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: November 20, 2015
APPLICATION FOR CONTINUING REVIEW OR FINAL REPORT FORM

In compliance with Western Michigan University’s policy that “the HSIRB’s review of research will be conducted at appropriate intervals but not less than once per year,” the HSIRB requests the following information:

PROJECT INFORMATION

PROJECT TITLE: Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court
HSIRB Project Number: 13-11-05 Date of Last Approval (Initial or Continuing Review): 11/20/14
Previous level of review: ☒ Full Board Review ☐ Expedited Review ☐ Administrative (Exempt) Review

INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR OR ADVISOR
Name: Jeffrey Jones
Department: TLES Mail Stop: 5276 Electronic Mail Address: jeff.jones@wmich.edu

CO-PRINCIPAL OR STUDENT INVESTIGATOR
Name: Ricky Pope
Department: CECP Mail Stop: Electronic Mail Address: ricky.j.pope@wmich.edu

CURRENT STATUS OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Please answer questions 1-5 to determine if this project requires continuing review by the HSIRB.

1. Has subject recruitment begun? If no, please provide an explanation ☒Yes ☐ No

2. Is the project closed to recruitment of new subjects?
   ☒Yes (Date of last enrollment 9/14) ☐ No (Project must be reviewed for renewal.)

3. Have all subjects completed research related interventions?
   ☒Yes ☐ Not Applicable ☐ No (Project must be reviewed for renewal.)

4. Has long-term follow-up of subjects been completed?
   ☒Yes ☐ Not Applicable ☐ No (Project must be reviewed for renewal.)

5. Has analysis of data been completed?
   ☒Yes ☐ No (Project must be reviewed for renewal.)

- If you have answered “No” to ANY of the questions above, you must apply for Continuing Review.
- If you need to make changes in your protocol, please submit a separate memo detailing the changes that you are requesting.
- If you have answered “Yes” or “Not Applicable” to ALL of the above questions, the project may be closed if the project is closed please use this form for the “Final Report”

☒ Application for Continuing Review ☐ Final Report

Revised 06/2013 WMU HSIRB (all other copies obsolete).
**HSIRB Project Number: 13-11-05**

6. Are there any changes in study personnel (add or remove investigators) not previously reported to the HSIRB?  
   □ Yes  □ No  
   If you need to add an investigator, provide details on an “Additional Investigator(s) Form” (available at [http://www.wmich.edu/research/forms/complianceforms.html](http://www.wmich.edu/research/forms/complianceforms.html)). To remove an investigator submit a memo to the HSIRB detailing the change.

7. Since the last approval (initial or continuing review) has there been any modifications or additions to the protocol, not previously reported to the HSIRB to with respect to the following?  
   a. Procedures  □ Yes  □ No  
   b. Subjects  □ Yes  □ No  
   c. Design  □ Yes  □ No  
   d. Data collection  □ Yes  □ No

8. Has any instrumentation been modified or added to the protocol that has not already been approved by the HSIRB?  
   □ Yes  □ No  
   If yes, attach new instrumentation and a memo indicating the modifications made.

9. Are there changes to the consent/assent form not previously reported to the HSIRB?  □ Yes  □ No  
   If yes, attach new consent/assent form and a memo indicating changes made.

**Verification of Consent Procedure:** Provide copies of the whole consent documents signed by the last two subjects enrolled in the project. Cover the signature in such a way that the name is not clear but there is evidence of signature. If subjects are not required to sign the consent document, provide a copy of the most current consent document being used.

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**SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH**

10. Have there been any adverse events, unexpected or unanticipated study-related problems which have not previously been reported to HSIRB? If yes, provide details on an attached sheet.  
    □ Yes  □ No

11. Is there new risk or benefit information not previously reported to the IRB?  
    □ Yes  □ No  
    If yes, attach a memo indicating the risk or benefit information.

12. Summarize progress of the research using non-technical language that can be easily understood by a reviewer outside the discipline. Please use complete sentences to briefly summarize the research since the last review (initial or continuing). Data collection for this study is complete, and no new participants will be recruited. Ricky Pope (doctoral candidate in CECP) is writing his doctoral dissertation using the data collected in this study.

13. List and describe any complaints about the research study since the last HSIRB review (initial or continuing review); include action taken to resolve the complaints (If not applicable, type NA).  
    NA

14. List any voluntary withdrawals by participants from the study since the last HSIRB review (initial or continuing review); include action taken as a result of the withdrawals. (If not applicable, type NA).  
    NA

Revised 06/2013  WMU HSIRB (all other copies obsolete).
HSIRB Project Number: 13-11-05

SUBJECT RECRUITMENT

15. Have research subjects been enrolled (or subject records, specimens, etc. obtained)? [ ] Yes [ ] No
   Provide a letter of explanation if no research subjects have been enrolled (or subject records, specimens, etc. obtained).

16. Total number of subjects approved in original protocol: 62

17. Total number of subjects enrolled so far: 42 (34 participants, 8 adult coordinators)
    If applicable: Number of subjects in experimental group: NA Number in control group: NA

18. Estimated number of subjects yet to be enrolled: 0

Please remember to include a clean original of the consent documents to receive a renewed approval stamp.

INVESTIGATOR’S ASSURANCE

I certify that the information contained in this HSIRB Application for Continuing Review and all attachments are true and correct. I certify that the research has been and will continue to be conducted according to the protocol as approved by Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

I agree that I will not implement any changes in the protocol until such changes have been reviewed and approved by HSIRB. If, during the course of the research, unanticipated risks or harm to subjects are discovered, I will report them to HSIRB immediately. I agree to follow all applicable federal regulations, guidelines, state and local laws, and university policies related to the protection of human subjects in research, as well as professional practice standards and generally accepted good research practices for investigators.

If this is a FINAL REPORT you may return the form electronically (signature is not required).

Principal Investigator/Faculty Advisor Signature

Co-Principal or Student Investigator Signature

Co-Principal or Student Investigator Signature

Approved for a one-year extension by the HSIRB:

HSIRB Chair Signature

Revised 06/2013 WMU HSIRB (all other copies obsolete).

11/24/15
Date

11/24/15
Date

12/11/15
Date
Date: March 29, 2016

To: Jeffrey Jones, Principal Investigator  
   Ricky Pope, Student Investigator for dissertation  
   Brittney Tinnon, Student Investigator  
   James Croteau, Statistical Consultant

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 13-11-05

This letter will serve as confirmation that the changes to your research project titled “Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court” requested in your memo received March 28, 2016 (to add James Croteau as statistical consultant) have been approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

The conditions and the duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: November 20, 2016
Date: October 10, 2016

To: Jeffrey Jones, Principal Investigator
    Ricky Pope, Student Investigator for dissertation
    Brittney Tinnon, Student Investigator
    Mary Z. Anderson, Statistical Consultant

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 13-11-05

This letter will serve as confirmation that the changes to your research project titled “Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court” requested in your memo received October 10, 2016 (to add Mary Z. Anderson as statistical consultant) have been approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

The conditions and the duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: November 19, 2016
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
Human Subjects Institutional Review Board
WMU Mail Stop: 5456 Phone: (269) 387-8293

APPLICATION FOR CONTINUING REVIEW OR FINAL REPORT FORM

In compliance with Western Michigan University’s policy that “the HSIRB’s review of research will be conducted at appropriate intervals but not less than once per year,” the HSIRB requests the following information:

PROJECT INFORMATION

PROJECT TITLE: Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court
HSIRB Project Number: 13-11-05 Date of Last Approval (Initial or Continuing Review): 11/20/15
Previous level of review: ☑ Full Board Review ☐ Expedited Review ☐ Administrative (Exempt) Review

INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR OR ADVISOR
Name: Jeffery Jines Department: TLES Mail Stop: 5276 Electronic Mail Address: jeff.jones@wmich.edu

CO-PRINCIPAL OR STUDENT INVESTIGATOR
Name: Ricky Pope Department: CEC Mail Stop: Electronic Mail Address: ricky.pope@wmich.edu

CURRENT STATUS OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Please answer questions 1-5 to determine if this project requires continuing review by the HSIRB.

1. Has subject recruitment begun? If no, please provide an explanation
☑ Yes ☐ No

2. Is the project closed to recruitment of new subjects?
☑ Yes (Date of last enrollment: 6/15) ☐ No (Project must be reviewed for renewal.)

3. Have all subjects completed research related interventions?
☑ Yes ☐ Not Applicable

4. Has long-term follow-up of subjects been completed?
☑ Yes ☐ Not Applicable

5. Has analysis of data been completed?
☐ Yes ☐ No (Project must be reviewed for renewal.)

- If you have answered “No” to ANY of the questions above, you must apply for Continuing Review.
- If you need to make changes in your protocol, please submit a separate memo detailing the changes that you are requesting.
- If you have answered “Yes” or “Not Applicable” to ALL of the above questions, the project may be closed if the project is closed please use this form for the “Final Report.”

☐ Application for Continuing Review ☐ Final Report

Revised 06/2013 WMU HSIRB (all other copies obsolete).
HSIRB Project Number: 13-11-05

6. Are there any changes in study personnel (add or remove investigators) not previously reported to the HSIRB? ☐ Yes ☒ No
   If you need to add an investigator, provide details on an “Additional Investigator(s) Form” (available at http://www.wmich.edu/research/forms/complianceforms.html).
   To remove an investigator submit a memo to the HSIRB detailing the change.

7. Since the last approval (initial or continuing review) has there been any modifications or additions to the protocol, not previously reported to the HSIRB to with respect to the following?
   a. Procedures ☐ Yes ☒ No
   b. Subjects ☒ Yes ☐ No
   c. Design ☐ Yes ☒ No
   d. Data collection ☐ Yes ☒ No

8. Has any instrumentation been modified or added to the protocol that has not already been approved by the HSIRB? ☐ Yes ☒ No
   If yes, attach new instrumentation and a memo indicating the modifications made.

9. Are there changes to the consent/assent form not previously reported to the HSIRB? ☐ Yes ☒ No
   If yes, attach new consent/assent form and a memo indicating changes made.

Verification of Consent Procedure: Provide copies of the whole consent documents signed by the last two subjects enrolled in the project. Cover the signature in such a way that the name is not clear but there is evidence of signature. If subjects are not required to sign the consent document, provide a copy of the most current consent document being used.

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

10. Have there been any adverse events, unexpected or unanticipated study-related problems which have not previously been reported to HSIRB? If yes, provide details on an attached sheet. ☐ Yes ☒ No

11. Is there new risk or benefit information not previously reported to the IRB? ☐ Yes ☒ No
   If yes, attach a memo indicating the risk or benefit information.

12. Summarize progress of the research using non-technical language that can be easily understood by a reviewer outside the discipline. Please use complete sentences to briefly summarize the research since the last review (initial or continuing). Data collection for this study is complete, and no new participants will be recruited. Ricky Pope (doctoral candidate in CECP) is writing his doctoral dissertation using the data collected in this study.

13. List and describe any complaints about the research study since the last HSIRB review (initial or continuing review); include action taken to resolve the complaints (If not applicable, type NA). NA

14. List any voluntary withdrawals by participants from the study since the last HSIRB review (initial or continuing review); include action taken as a result of the withdrawals. (If not applicable, type NA). NA

Revised 06/2013 WMU HSIRB (all other copies obsolete).
HSIRB Project Number: 13-11-05

SUBJECT RECRUITMENT

15. Have research subjects been enrolled (or subject records, specimens, etc. obtained)? ☑ Yes ☐ No
   Provide a letter of explanation if no research subjects have been enrolled (or subject records, specimens, etc. obtained).

16. Total number of subjects approved in original protocol: 62

17. Total number of subjects enrolled so far: 43 (34 Participants, 8 adult coordinators)
   If applicable: Number of subjects in experimental group: NA Number in control group: NA

18. Estimated number of subjects yet to be enrolled: 0

Please remember to include a clean original of the consent documents to receive a renewed approval stamp.

INVESTIGATOR’S ASSURANCE

I certify that the information contained in this HSIRB Application for Continuing Review and all attachments are true and correct. I certify that the research has been and will continue to be conducted according to the protocol as approved by Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

I agree that I will not implement any changes in the protocol until such changes have been reviewed and approved by HSIRB. If, during the course of the research, unanticipated risks or harm to subjects are discovered, I will report them to HSIRB immediately. I agree to follow all applicable federal regulations, guidance, state and local laws, and university policies related to the protection of human subjects in research, as well as professional practice standards and generally accepted good research practices for investigators.

If this is a FINAL REPORT you may return the form electronically (signature is not required).

Principal Investigator/Faculty Advisor Signature

Co-Principal or Student Investigator Signature

Co-Principal or Student Investigator Signature

Approved for a one-year extension by the HSIRB:

HSIRB Chair Signature

11-7-16

11-7-16

11-7-16

11/8/16

Revised 06/2013 WMU HSIRB (all other copies obsolete).
APPLICATION FOR CONTINUING REVIEW or FINAL REPORT FORM

In compliance with Western Michigan University's policy that "the HSIRB's review of research will be conducted at appropriate intervals but not less than once per year," the HSIRB requests the following information:

PROJECT INFORMATION

PROJECT TITLE: Exploring Organizational Strategies and Participant Experience in the Young Adult Diversion Court
HSIRB Project Number: 13-11-05 Date of Last Approval (Initial or Continuing Review): 11/20/16
Previous level of review: □ Full Board Review ☒ Expedited Review □ Administrative (Exempt) Review

INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR OR ADVISOR
Name: Jeffery Jones
Department: TLES Mail Stop: 5275 Electronic Mail Address: jeff.jones@wmich.edu

CO-PRINCIPAL OR STUDENT INVESTIGATOR
Name: Ricky Pope
Department: CECP Mail Stop: Electronic Mail Address: ricky.pope@wmich.edu

CURRENT STATUS OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Please answer questions 1-5 to determine if this project requires continuing review by the HSIRB.
1. Has subject recruitment begun? If no, please provide an explanation
   ☒ Yes □ No
2. Is the project closed to recruitment of new subjects?
   ☒ Yes (Date of last enrollment: 6/15) □ No (Project must be reviewed for renewal.)
3. Have all subjects completed research related interventions?
   ☒ Yes □ Not Applicable □ No (Project must be reviewed for renewal.)
4. Has long-term follow-up of subjects been completed?
   □ Yes ☒ Not Applicable □ No (Project must be reviewed for renewal.)
5. Has analysis of data been completed?
   □ Yes ☒ No (Project must be reviewed for renewal.)

- If you have answered "No" to ANY of the questions above, you must apply for Continuing Review.
- If you need to make changes in your protocol, please submit a separate memo detailing the changes that you are requesting.
- If you have answered "Yes" or "Not Applicable" to ALL of the above questions, the project may be closed. If the project is closed please use this form for the "Final Report."

☒ Application for Continuing Review □ Final Report

Revised 06/2013 WMU HSIRB (all other copies obsolete).
HSIRB Project Number: 13-11-05

6. Are there any changes in study personnel (add or remove investigators) not previously reported to the HSIRB? Yes ☐ No ☑
   If you need to add an investigator, provide details on an "Additional Investigator(s) Form" (available at http://www.wmich.edu/research/forms/complianceforms.html).
   To remove an investigator submit a memo to the HSIRB detailing the change.

7. Since the last approval (initial or continuing review) has there been any modifications or additions to the protocol, not previously reported to the HSIRB to with respect to the following?
   a. Procedures ☐ Yes ☑ No
   b. Subjects ☐ Yes ☑ No
   c. Design ☐ Yes ☑ No
   d. Data collection ☐ Yes ☑ No

8. Has any instrumentation been modified or added to the protocol that has not already been approved by the HSIRB? Yes ☐ No ☑
   If yes, attach new instrumentation and a memo indicating the modifications made.

9. Are there changes to the consent/assent form not previously reported to the HSIRB? Yes ☐ No ☑
   If yes, attach new consent/assent form and a memo indicating changes made.

Verification of Consent Procedure: Provide copies of the whole consent documents signed by the last two subjects enrolled in the project. Cover the signature in such a way that the name is not clear but there is evidence of signature. If subjects are not required to sign the consent document, provide a copy of the most current consent document being used.

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH

10. Have there been any adverse events, unexpected or unanticipated study-related problems which have not previously been reported to HSIRB? If yes, provide details on an attached sheet. Yes ☐ No ☑

11. Is there new risk or benefit information not previously reported to the IRB? Yes ☐ No ☑
   If yes, attach a memo indicating the risk or benefit information.

12. Summarize progress of the research using non-technical language that can be easily understood by a reviewer outside the discipline. Please use complete sentences to briefly summarize the research since the last review (initial or continuing). Data collection for this study is complete, and no new participants will be recruited. Ricky Pope (doctoral candidate in CECP) is writing his doctoral dissertation using the data collected in this study.

13. List and describe any complaints about the research study since the last HSIRB review (initial or continuing review); include action taken to resolve the complaints (If not applicable, type NA). NA

14. List any voluntary withdrawals by participants from the study since the last HSIRB review (initial or continuing review); include action taken as a result of the withdrawals. (If not applicable, type NA). NA

Revised 06/2013 WMU HSIRB (all other copies obsolete).
HSIRB Project Number: 13-11-05

SUBJECT RECRUITMENT

15. Have research subjects been enrolled (or subject records, specimens, etc. obtained)? ☐Yes ☐No
Provide a letter of explanation if no research subjects have been enrolled (or subject records, specimens, etc. obtained).

16. Total number of subjects approved in original protocol: 62

17. Total number of subjects enrolled so far: 43 (34 Participants, 8 adult coordinators)
   If applicable: Number of subjects in experimental group: NA Number in control group: NA

18. Estimated number of subjects yet to be enrolled: 0

Please remember to include a clean original of the consent documents to receive a renewed approval stamp.

INVESTIGATOR’S ASSURANCE

I certify that the information contained in this HSIRB Application for Continuing Review and all attachments are true and correct. I certify that the research has been and will continue to be conducted according to the protocol as approved by Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.

I agree that I will not implement any changes in the protocol until such changes have been reviewed and approved by HSIRB. If, during the course of the research, unanticipated risks or harm to subjects are discovered, I will report them to HSIRB immediately. I agree to follow all applicable federal regulations, guidance, state and local laws, and university policies related to the protection of human subjects in research, as well as professional practice standards and generally accepted good research practices for investigators.

If this is a FINAL REPORT you may return the form electronically (signature is not required).

Principal Investigator/Faculty Advisor Signature

Date 11/13/2017

Co-Principal or Student Investigator Signature

Date

Co-Principal or Student Investigator Signature

Date

Approved for a one-year extension by the HSIRB:

HSIRB Chair Signature

Date 11/16/17

Revised 06/2013 WMU HSIRB (all other copies obsolete).