

Adult Versus Juvenile Sanctions: Voices of Incarcerated Youths

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This article reports findings from face-to-face interviews with youthful offenders in Florida, about half of whom had been transferred to the adult system and half of whom were retained in the juvenile system. The focus is on the youths' global assessments of the impact of their correctional experiences relevant to subsequent offending. The overall impact of each recalled correctional disposition was rated (ranging from beneficial impact to negative impact). For respondents who had experienced multiple correctional dispositions, comparisons were made about the relative impact of low-end versus deep-end juvenile commitments and juvenile versus adult sanctions. Youths believed deep-end juvenile placements were most beneficial. Those programs were viewed as having provided education or life skills. When youths viewed adult sanctions as being beneficial, the benefit was linked to the time and pain of prison confinement. Those youths who attributed positive impact to prison had "skipped" deep-end juvenile placements.

We do not hesitate to ask what researchers, judges, prosecutors, law enforcement officers, juvenile advocates, and others involved with young offenders think about the relative value of juvenile and criminal sanctions. However, we rarely ask what those who experience the respective sanctions think. We know little about how different sanctions are viewed by youthful offenders or how they think their behaviors will be affected. In perhaps no other area of human endeavor would we so consistently and so confidently ignore the opinions of those on the receiving end of social action.

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We probably should not be surprised that offenders' perceptions are largely disregarded. Offenders are, after all, unlike customers of commercial enterprises or students in educational institutions. Customers or students are easily seen as being "worthy and deserving" of the right to evaluate the services they receive. Offenders, by contrast, are unworthy. They have violated societal norms, broken trusts, and threatened our communities. So ignoring them might be natural, and it might even be justified were it not also the case that our official reactions are intended to make a difference.

In this article we report findings from an exploratory study in Florida involving face-to-face interviews with youthful offenders. The interviews focused on their experiences in the juvenile and/or adult justice systems and their perceptions of the effects of the respective systems. These offenders, not unlike the "clients" of business or education, hold important information about the "services" delivered.

Florida began transferring large numbers of juveniles to the adult criminal justice system more than 20 years ago when it enacted prosecutorial waiver provisions. The history of Florida's transfer reforms has been documented (White, Frazier, Lanza-Kaduce, & Bishop, 1999). It shows input from all the official stakeholders and various public interest groups but nothing from juvenile offenders. This pattern is not unique to Florida (see Mays & Gregware, 1996).

Torbet et al. (1996) documented the extent to which almost all U.S. jurisdictions have expanded transfer or changed other provisions to make it easier to bring juveniles into the adult system. The expansion of transfer authority continues as illustrated by California's recently passed Proposition 21, which provides for prosecutorial waiver (Sanchez & Booth, 2000). These "get-tough" policies, in Florida and elsewhere, are based on the assumed deterrent and/or incapacitation benefits of the adult system's harsher penalties (Bishop & Frazier, 2000; Fagan, 1995). To date, research has not supported these assumptions (Bishop, Frazier, Lanza-Kaduce, & Winner, 1996; Fagan, 1991, 1995, 1996; Frazier, Bishop, & Lanza-Kaduce, 1999; Jensen & Metsger, 1994; Singer, 1996; Singer & McDowell, 1988; Winner, Lanza-Kaduce, Bishop, & Frazier, 1997). The Bishop et al. (1996) and Winner et al. (1997) research was done on Florida youths and indicates that exposure to adult sanctions is more likely than juvenile sanctions to produce rather than reduce recidivism. The next logical question is "why?" One source of relevant information comes from the youthful offenders themselves.

Only a few studies have collected survey data from transferred youths about the effects of juvenile or criminal justice practices (Bishop, Frazier, Lanza-Kaduce, & White, 1998; Forst, Fagan, & Vivona, 1989; Singer, 1996). These focus primarily on the important experiences the youths have *in* the

institutions themselves. For example, they examine issues relevant to institutional setting, institutionalization, disciplinary problems (including violence), and victimization (Bishop et al., 1998; Forst et al., 1989; Singer, 1996). The research reported below shifts the focus to the perceptions among serious young offenders of the impacts of juvenile versus adult dispositions on their subsequent criminal attitudes and behavior.

SAMPLE AND METHOD

In 1998 and 1999, the researchers conducted interviews with 144 males between the ages of 17 and 20 incarcerated in the Florida juvenile and adult correctional systems for crimes they committed while under the age of 18. These youth were serious offenders. More than 90% of them had multiple prior arrests—almost half (49.3%) had five or more priors. Moreover, many of these youth were very young when they began offending—about 25% were younger than 12 when they started (see Table 1, for interviewee characteristics). At the time of the interviews, half were retained in the juvenile system and the other half were in the adult correctional system. The subjects were sampled from four deep-end juvenile institutions and eight adult institutions in north or central Florida. Using the institutions' population records of "youthful" offenders, the researchers chose youths at various stages of their sentence (i.e., recently institutionalized, mid-sentence, and near release). Six of the transferred youths were on adult probation at the time of the interview. This sampling strategy was designed to get information about attitudes and perspectives relevant to a broader range of institutional experiences.

A total of 72 of the interviewees reported experience with the juvenile justice system only. They were housed in one of four residential commitment facilities designated as deep-end juvenile programs (Levels 8 and 10). In Florida, programs are designated Level 2, 4, 6, 8, or 10. According to the state (see Juvenile Justice Advisory Board, 1998), Level 8 and 10 facilities target high- and medium-risk offenders. Level 8 incarceration lasts from 9 to 18 months while periods of incarceration in Level 10 facilities range from 18 through 36 months. Level 8 and 10 programs are the most restrictive and have more physical security, more supervision, and longer periods of stay than do other juvenile commitment levels. Level 6 programs are also residential programs but are less restrictive and generally involve stays of four to eighteen months, depending upon the youth's progress in the program. Level 4 programs are the least restrictive residential programs and are designed to administer specialized services such as mental health and drug counseling within a short time—often about a month. Level 2 programs are nonresiden-

TABLE 1: Characteristics of Interviewees

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Gender		
Male	144	100
Race		
White	64	44.4
Black	75	52.1
Other	4	3.0
Unknown	1	1.0
Most serious current offense		
Person	68	47.2
Property	31	21.5
Drug	15	10.4
Other	22	15.3
Unknown	8	5.6
Number of prior arrests		
0	10	7.0
1	15	10.4
2	16	11.1
3	19	13.2
4	13	9.0
5 or more	71	49.3
Unknown	0	0.0
Age at first arrest		
8 or younger	5	3.5
9	9	6.3
10	7	4.9
11	14	9.7
12	20	13.9
13	31	21.5
14	28	19.4
15	14	9.7
16	7	4.9
17	4	2.8
Unknown	5	3.5

NOTE: This information is based on the youths' descriptions of themselves and their offense histories. Some characteristics are coded "unknown" because some youths chose not to talk about some of their experiences or could not remember exact things (e.g., how old they were the first time they were arrested). The percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

tial and are designed to work with minimum to low-risk youth. Although all youth in this juvenile institution subsample were in deep-end programs at the time of interview, many reported experience with judicial warning, juvenile probation, or programs in Levels 2, 4, and 6.

A total of 71 youths had been transferred to the adult system and housed in one of the adult institutions ($n = 65$) or were on adult probation ($n = 6$) at the time of interview. Of these youths, 63 reported experience with both systems, and 8 reported exposure only to the adult system. Experience with adult sanctions ranged from probation to prison. The prisons where they were housed were typically Youthful Offender facilities, which primarily held young adults through age 24. All but four of the jail sentences were part of Duval County's special "blended" program ($n = 22$), which combines adult sanctions with treatment programs more often associated with the juvenile justice system.

Because the research was exploratory, we developed an unstructured interview schedule primarily consisting of open-ended questions. The interview began with personal background information (e.g., demographics, living arrangements, school experiences, and important people in the youth's life) but focused on the juvenile's offense history (e.g., prior arrests) and experiences at each stage of the juvenile and/or criminal justice system (with police, courts, and corrections). It next focused on the juvenile's thoughts and perceptions about how these experiences influenced his attitudes and behaviors. In particular, we directed our questions to how the juvenile experienced justice and what impact he thought those experiences had on him. For this article, we focus on the latter group of questions. For example, we asked the following: What is your outlook on life now? How do you see the future? Do these views of your future prospects in any way relate to your experiences in the justice system? Do you think these experiences have affected your beliefs about crime and conformity? Have these experiences in the justice system affected the way you behave? How? Do you believe your behavior is better or worse or unchanged as a result of your experiences in the juvenile and/or criminal justice systems? Which experiences with the justice system were most important? The interviews lasted between one and three hours, depending on the youth.

The youths' responses were used to derive two kinds of global assessments about the perceptions of the impacts of juvenile and adult sanctions. First, the researchers assessed each interviewee's perceptions of the overall impact of each disposition recalled in the interview. For each disposition, a rating was assigned so that each disposition was characterized as having (a) an overall beneficial impact, (b) a mixed (some beneficial, some negative) impact, (c) no impact, or (d) an overall negative impact. These ratings measure the youths' description of the attitudinal and behavioral effects of each experience in the system. We assigned these ratings by examining the youth's "entire" description of the effects of the sanction throughout the interview (in

response to different questions), rather than looking solely at one particular quotation. For example, a youth might say in response to one question that a certain program had no effect on him at all or that it made him worse but then later say that it did make him try to straighten up for a little while after release because he did not want to return. This response would have been coded as having a "mixed" impact. If all his descriptions of a program indicated that it helped him with his attitudes or behaviors, it was coded as an overall beneficial experience, and if all descriptions indicated negative effects, it was coded as having an overall negative impact. "No impact" indicates the youth felt there were generally no positive or negative effects on his attitudes and behaviors. Some responses were too incomplete to rate. The global ratings allowed us to look for patterns across the interviewees. Percentages are reported to indicate how often the offenders shared similar perceptions about the respective dispositions. Excerpts from the interviews are used to illustrate the patterns. The excerpts convey, using the youths' own words, the "reality" of the impact as they saw it.

Second, for youths who recalled more than one kind of disposition, global comparisons were made between the relative impacts of various dispositions. Researchers determined from the interview whether deep-end juvenile placements (Levels 8 and 10) were regarded as generally more beneficial than less secure short-term front-end juvenile interventions (Levels 2 through 6) and whether adult sanctions were thought to be more beneficial than juvenile ones. Again, percentages are used to establish patterns across cases about how they compare "deep-end" with other juvenile sanctions and how they compare adult dispositions with juvenile ones. Excerpts are also presented that illustrate the comparisons that the interviewees were making.

For both the ratings and the comparisons, the focus was on the projected outcome and not on the process. The impact may have been seen by the youth as beneficial (as making them less likely to reoffend or less likely to want to reoffend) because the process was one of treatment and help or because it was one of deprivation and punishment. We operationalize "impact" here as the effect a sanction had or was expected to have on the interviewee's attitudes about and participation in future criminal behavior.

RESULTS

Ratings of Juvenile Sanctions

The ratings reflected the respondents' views about the probable impact of a disposition on subsequent offending (or attitudes directly linked to

TABLE 2: Ratings of Juvenile Dispositions and Comparisons of Low-End and Deep-End Juvenile Dispositions

	<i>% Beneficial</i>	<i># Rated Beneficial</i>	<i>Total # of Ratings</i>
Ratings of juvenile dispositions			
Low-end	20	44	221
Deep-end	58	59	101
	<i>% More Beneficial</i>	<i># Perceived as More Beneficial</i>	<i>Total # of Comparisons</i>
Comparisons of low-end v. deep-end dispositions			
Low-end	4	3	73
Deep-end	40	29	73

reoffending). A total of 113 youths provided 221 ratings about the impact of low-end juvenile sanctions (judicial warnings, probation and placements in programs at Levels 2, 4, or 6). A total of 86 youths provided 101 ratings about their perceptions of the impacts of deep-end (Levels 8 and 10) juvenile sanctions (see Table 2).

LOW-END SANCTIONS

With regard to low-end sanctions (judicial warning, juvenile probation, and placements in programs at Levels 2, 4, and 6), very few of the youths believed their experiences had positive overall effects on their attitudes or behaviors. Little impact on these serious offenders is not surprising. As several youth indicated, they were already “beyond” what these low-end programs could offer when they were placed there. Nevertheless, as “serious” delinquents, the interviewees’ beliefs about the impacts of their experiences may give insights to policymakers who wonder “why” youths continue to get in more trouble and eventually find themselves in institutions.

Many of the 135 youths who reported on juvenile dispositions had experience with more than one juvenile sanction. Of the 221 ratings of low-end juvenile dispositions, only 44 (or 20%) were characterized as beneficial. Of those ratings that indicated the offenders perceived the low-end disposition experience to be beneficial, almost three fourths ($n = 33$) were ratings of Level 6 programs—the most intensive low-end interventions. Generally, youths who thought the low-end programs were not effective in changing their delinquent attitudes and behaviors perceived these interventions to lack

the intensity needed to address their problems or to give them the skills to do better.

Those who at some point received the lightest of the low-end sanctions—judicial warnings, probation, community service, or Level 2 day programs such as anger management or outpatient drug counseling—often saw these sanctions as inconsequential and believed that these programs did not affect their attitudes or behavior. For example, some mentioned that while on probation or attending a nonresidential program, they did not see a probation officer or complete their ordered community service; yet no one “seemed to notice.” As one White respondent with four prior arrests who was now in a Level 8 program for a person offense said about juvenile probation, “I don’t remember it much.” A Black interviewee with four priors who was in a Level 10 for property offenses said, “I didn’t do it [the requirements]. I really don’t know what I was ‘sposed to do, so I forgot all about it. They never called me.” Some felt they were supervised (e.g., once a month or once a week) but that it did not help them change or keep them from committing more crime. As one Latino offender who was in a Level 10 for a person offense and had been arrested twice before said, “They didn’t help me.” Others liked their probation officers or felt the program sessions were helpful at some level (e.g., in helping with school) but said they did not prevent them from continuing their delinquency. As one Black interviewee with three prior arrests said, “Some of it helped, but then I backfell from hanging out in the street.” Others participated in programming, such as drug counseling, and liked it, but “got locked back up” soon anyway—so obviously it did little to prevent subsequent criminal behavior.¹

Youths who had been in the least restrictive, low-risk, residential programs (Level 4), also generally believed the sanctions had little effect and did not help them enough. One White offender in a Level 10 facility for a property offense but who remembered nine arrests before this one said that he felt none of the programs gave him “any treatment at all” (even though they had put him in groups) and they therefore had no effect on him. He believed he needed a job or job skills—something he could use to succeed outside. Another interviewee, who was Latino and was in a Level 10 for a person offense after five previous arrests, said that he escaped from a Level 4 program because he did not like the rules, was not ready to change, and believed at the time that the staff were just interested in punishing rather than helping him. As he said “I had a chance to straighten up, but I blew it.”

Even when youths thought the programs helped, they recognized that they had little impact on their subsequent behavior. A White interviewee who was in a Level 8 for a drug offense and remembered 29 prior arrests said,

It was a good program. Staff were fair and there to help us. They talked to us. When we did something wrong they talked to us instead of giving us extra days. But it didn't have an effect on me. I was too young.

The respondent liked the program, but he was unable to do well after release. In sum, even youths who felt good about these programs did not see them as having changed their attitudes and behaviors significantly.

Level 6 residential programs, which are designed for moderate-risk youths and have the most intensive treatment and skills training of the low-end programs, got somewhat better ratings. Although many of the youths thought these programs also had no overall impact on their behavior, some felt they were changed by their experiences there—either because they gained some life skills or because they left there motivated to do better. For example, a young Black respondent who was in a Level 8 for a person offense and who said he had about eight arrests prior to the current offense said,

They put you [in] a lot of groups, feedback stuff, then they let you play sports and stuff; it was a good program. . . . It made me change a lot, give some respect for people and myself . . . [the Level 6] program helped me most, they taught me a lot. They taught me most about anger control, bein' respectful of peers and myself.

Many of our respondents said that they left these programs feeling very hopeful but that they had been unable to keep themselves from crime once they returned to their communities—either because they had trouble getting a job, because crime “was there” and available to them, or because they had relationship difficulties (e.g., family, girlfriend) that led them to stop trying. One of the Black interviewees who was in for a drug offense and had over 20 priors put it this way:

I stayed out only a short while and I was slingin' again, then I got the job on the side and my own place. I stopped selling drugs for a while but I felt like I just wasn't getting anywhere. My mom needed help, and I started slingin' again.

Another offender, who was White, had about 19 prior arrests and was in a Level 10 for a person offense related more serious complications on the outside.

After [the Level 6 placement] I got my life together a little bit. I was doing good, living on my own with my girlfriend. . . . Then we started having a lot of arguments and it was not good for the baby, and I lost my job and then she kicked me out. I was stressed out . . . I was awful. I started doin' drugs and feeling like I was going to explode. I imagined doing a robbery to make some money. I put on a ski mask and broke into a girl's house.

DEEP-END JUVENILE SANCTIONS

The majority of the ratings about deep-end juvenile sanctions (Levels 8 and 10) were positive overall. A total of 86 youths provided 101 ratings of deep-end juvenile sanctions. Of these, 58% ($n = 59$) indicated that the deep-end placements had a beneficial impact on their attitudes and behaviors. Only two (2%) of these 86 youths, both of whom were in more than one deep-end program, reported mixed impacts of these sanctions. Of these youths, 84% ($n = 76$) were in deep-end facilities at the time of interview and were discussing the effects of the current program so caution should be used in interpreting their responses. Some of these youths may have been parroting the official line advanced and reinforced by staff; others may have been trying to “work the system” by telling us what they thought the system wanted them to say. Nevertheless the youths could articulate reasons. Many believed they were being helped even if they had some doubts about what would happen when they were released.

Youths recognized that these longer more intensive programs provided the life skills and counseling that could affect their attitudes and behaviors the most, even though many of them realized that making it on the outside continued (or would continue) to be a struggle for them. The youths believed they were most influenced by educational and job skills in these deep-end programs. Specifically, they liked opportunities to get their high school education or General Equivalency Degree (GED) and the programs’ reentry components, such as attempts to help them get into school (high school, college, or career training) and get jobs (reentry programs). As one young Black respondent who was in a Level 10 program for a drug offense and who had multiple priors (about 19 arrests) said,

This program alright because you can get your education . . . and they have community college people come teach here. They will help you get into college. That’s what I’m planning on doin’ . . . I got to the 9th grade on the outside, then I dropped out. I made real progress since I been here. I’m up to 11th.

Another Black male who was in a Level 8 program for a drug offense but said he had about nine prior arrests echoed this belief about being in Level 8:

All along, this program helped me. For one, they give you more time to think about things, they give you chance to get your GED. I am on re-entry, so they help you with jobs. . . . This is the best program I been to.

Others believed some type of counseling was the most helpful to them—whether it was about “deal[ing] with people,” controlling anger or impulses, being disciplined, or facing and working through their problems and emo-

tions. Not all of the “counseling” they received was formal or by trained counselors. Some of them learned a lot by listening to officers who talked to them about their lives and how to improve themselves (e.g., how to walk away from confrontation or how to stay in school when they got out). As a White youth who had only one prior and was in a Level 8 program observed,

This is a good place. . . . They do treatment work. They help us deal with our issues, like mine are substance abuse and criminal mentality and impulse control. They try to make us better so when we get out we can be better. . . . I feel like this place has really made a difference for me. It made me look at what is important in life, like my family. . . . I hope I don’t do drugs again. Here I learned that my peer group is important, and when I get out, I want new friends, not the ones I used to hang out with who all did drugs.

Another Latino youth who committed a person offense, had two priors, and was in a Level 10 program said,

This program is good. It makes you think. It helps with anger if you have that. . . . They put me in a drug rehabilitation program here that is also for other issues. I benefited from learning to speak out, to communicate my feelings. That helped me communicate better with my mother. . . . The future will be a lot better. . . . Hopefully I won’t do crime no more. . . . The juvenile justice system should have more programs like this, programs that try to help.

Not all the benefits were linked to programs in these deep-end placements. Some offenders reckoned the longer sentences gave them more time to think about the future. For example, one Black youth who was in a Level 8 for a property offense but thought he had been arrested at least 60 times said, “It just the time. You need enough time to think about it and fix it.” A couple of youths also indicated that they were worried about possible consequences if they continued (e.g., death on the streets, tougher punishments). They seemed to recognize their situation on the outside had been out of control and that the deep-end placement gave them time away from the many problems they faced so that they could think and have a chance to get their lives reoriented.

COMPARING DEEP-END AND LOW-END JUVENILE SANCTIONS

The ratings of the low-end and deep-end placements suggest that deep-end programs may be more effective for these serious youthful offenders because they can provide more intensive interventions—especially in regard to skills and counseling. For offenders who had both deep-end and low-end exposure, the two experiences can be compared. A total of 73 juveniles who

had experience at both ends of the juvenile continuum made comparisons about the relative impact of low-end versus deep-end juvenile sanctions. Of these comparisons, 40% ($n = 29$) indicated that deep-end commitments were or would be more beneficial in affecting subsequent criminal behaviors (or attitudes directly related to criminal behavior)(see bottom of Table 2). Another 24% ($n = 17$) thought both low-end and deep-end programs had good effects. So, a majority of these youths believed that juvenile programs were helpful at some level. The remaining 32% ($n = 23$) indicated that both types of placements either had mixed, no, or negative effects on their attitudes and behaviors. Only three interviewees (5%) thought the low-end programs had more impact on them than did the more restrictive programs. For the serious offenders in this sample, the pattern was clear. They believed the more intensive, longer programs had more beneficial impacts than did the less-intensive, shorter programs.

The comparisons confirmed what the earlier discussion of ratings suggested. The longer length of time and greater intensity of the skills training and treatment in the deep-end programs were why youths believed deep-end programs were more beneficial. In the following excerpt, one White youth who had committed a person offense and had multiple priors discussed the differential impacts of probation (community control) and the level 10 program he was in at the time of interview:

The [community control] system was soft. I didn't go in no programs. In one way it was good for me 'cuz I got to go home. In another way, it wasn't good, because I was messin' my life up. . . . I didn't like the community control counselor. . . . I was trying to get over on the system. I needed somebody to stop me. I needed a program to teach me manners and stuff. . . . This place [Level 10] is good. They treat me right. They understand and talk to you when you're mad. They are helping to try to teach me to spell and read, and I am learnin.' Somebody needed to make me sit in my seat and do stuff. I didn't like it, but it was good for me. . . . I been here for 8 months, I've made lots of changes. They taught me respect, to say, "sir, yes sir"—if you have a problem to talk it out, not use violence. They need to make more Level 10s.

A Black respondent who had three priors and said he had been on probation (community control) and in two Level 6 programs without changing—even though he thought the staff were encouraging—believed the current Level 8 program was having a bigger impact:

Now here, I'm learning. Been here 2 years, can't help but learn. I learned anger control and not to take things in my hands. There's staff here who tell us how to do and enjoy life, not backslide. About 10 years from now, I'd like to have a business in Georgia. . . . I need to finish school first. Then, I'd like to work in

building construction, doing shingles and drywall. . . . When I get out I got to go to school and get me a little job and keep off the streets. . . . Next time, it's to prison, and I don't wanna be there, no way.

So, for him, the deep-end program taught him anger control, helped him develop goals and hope for the future and gave him time to think about the possible consequences if he continued committing crime.

Many of those who perceived that the deep-end placements were relatively more beneficial maintained a realistic appreciation of what the outside world would be like. They recognized that they had had previous chances. Going back to the same family or neighborhood or facing the difficulty of getting jobs with a criminal record had kept them from succeeding in the past. They now worried about how these issues would affect their futures.

WHEN JUVENILE SANCTIONS ARE PERCEIVED TO BE UNHELPFUL

Some youths who had experience with both types of juvenile sanctions (32% of the comparisons) believed that none of their experiences to date had given them the skills they needed to stop committing crime. When they thought a program did not help, it was often because the program was perceived as being too easy or too short. Some mentioned, for example, that it was easy to just “endure” the shorter programs, rather than put energy into improving themselves. Others felt the programs themselves were problematic—either the program was just about punishment, it was inconsistently applied, or the staff was inconsistent or unfair. For example, some mentioned that the staff were either “mean” or “just there for the paycheck.” Still others, especially those who had been in many low-end programs and eventually found themselves in a deep-end one, said they just had not been ready to change at the time—they still wanted to maintain their criminal activity or their street reputation.

Ratings of Adult Sanctions

The ratings regarding adult sanctions were mixed. In our sample, 71 youths were transferred to adult court and had some experience with adult punishments; several had exposure to more than one adult sanction or facility. Only 34 of the 102 ratings of these adult dispositions (33%) were beneficial overall (see Table 3). This percentage was higher than the ratings given to low-end juvenile dispositions (20%), but lower than the ratings given for deep-end juvenile placements (58%) (see Table 2).

TABLE 3: Ratings of Adult Dispositions and Comparisons of Juvenile With Adult Dispositions

	<i>% Beneficial</i>	<i># Rated Beneficial</i>	<i>Total # of Ratings</i>
Ratings of adult dispositions			
Probation	12	2	16
"Blended" jail program	55	12	22
Other jails	0	0	4
Prison	33	20	60
	<i>% More Beneficial</i>	<i># Perceived as More Beneficial</i>	<i>Total # of Comparisons</i>
Comparisons of juvenile v. adult dispositions			
All adult dispositions	40	25	62
"Blended"		9	16
Other adult		16	46
All juvenile dispositions	17	10	62
Deep-end experience		2	12
Other juvenile experience		8	50

The ratings, however, varied by type of adult disposition. For example, more ratings of the "blended" jail program in Duval County were beneficial (55%) versus prison (33%), probation (12%), or other jails (0%) (see Table 3). The reasons given also varied. Often when adult sanctions were perceived as being beneficial, the benefit was NOT attributed to anything gained from the disposition. Rather, many youths indicated that they expected to remain "crime-free" because their experience in the adult system had been so horrible. Youths who believed the adult sanctions would keep them from committing crime primarily pointed to three reasons: pain and denigration, time, and fear of future consequences, especially tougher sentences. Paradoxically, most of those who said the adult experience was negative also mentioned pain, denigration, and/or anger, but they gave these as reasons why the adult dispositions had made matters worse. Others attributed a negative impact to adult sanctions because they learned more crime while there. The remainder of this section discusses ratings of each type of adult sanction and, as before, illustrates the youths' perceptions using their own words. The numbers of beneficial ratings attributed to adult dispositions, the total number of ratings, and the percentages for three types of adult dispositions are reported in the top section of Table 3.

PROBATION

Few of the youths in the sample experienced adult probation; there were only 16 ratings of adult probation. Two (13%) of these ratings indicated a beneficial impact overall on attitudes and behaviors. The youths for these two ratings believed that their adult probation officers were strict enough to keep them under control or were helping them get jobs. Most of the ratings of the youths' experiences with adult probation were categorized as having no impact on them. Some youths had gotten in trouble again after being placed on adult probation. But for others, the circumstances of their lives made it difficult to succeed. As one Black youth who had at least two priors observed, "probation is all right . . . I'm having trouble getting a job now. People see on my application the charges, and they don't hire me. It's not fair." Our numbers are small, but on the whole, adult probation was not perceived by this sample of serious offenders to have a substantial impact.

JAIL

A total of 26 ratings were derived from information the transferred youths provided about their experiences in jail (postconviction).² Of these ratings, 22 came from youths who were in a special "blended" program for youthful offenders in Duval County, which combines jail incarceration with treatment programs.

About half of the ratings in the Duval County program at the Jacksonville Jail (55%, $n = 12$) characterized the impact as helping the youths change so they would not get in trouble again when they were released (see Table 3). The remaining 10 ratings from the Duval program (and the 4 from youths who were in other jail programs) indicated that the jail experience was negative or had no impact.

The youths who saw the Jacksonville program as beneficial sometimes credited the programming but more often thought that the pain and fear of future consequences were having the most impact. The perception that the benefits stemmed from the mix of programming and deprivation in Jacksonville (but with deprivation being more critical) is illustrated in the following quotation from a Black youth who was locked up for a person offense but had no prior arrests:

Before I came in here I was lookin' for the easy way for everything, not working, not earning it. Now, I feel like I need to work for what I get. I didn't think of how people might feel if someone took something they earned. I didn't have any goals. Just whatever happens happens was my attitude. Now, I set goals for

myself, to finish school, get education, pursue my athletic abilities. Bein' in here caused me to realize that crime is not a way to live. You can't do anything locked up. Now, I think of how somebody would feel if they have their stuff taken. Big difference is I think of other people before I think of myself. Being locked up caused the thinking, but the program in here and the other people help you realize those things. Basically, taking away freedom starts the thinkin'.

Another Black youth with multiple priors who was in for a property offense indicated that the primary effect of jail was seeing what the future consequences for him could be, even though he, too, believed the programming was helpful:

Well, the purpose is they have groups here to help you out. I think it is really if you want to help yourself program. They give you the groups, you have to go, decide you want help. This place here, to me, this be my last step. I see guys here callin' 'em out going to prison 10 or 15 years—one guy, 40 years. There [in prison] you go to restroom in front of your roommate, you eat when they tell you to eat. . . . I say to these guys I say how long you got? They say 35 year. They had me in a cell with a guy who killed two people. It had an influence on me to see you can actually go to prison—[made me] not want to come back. I feel as though if you done went through this, I think you can do right without the programs. Because you know what you got to do to do right. I am not sayin' the programs don't help but I think you could do it yourself.

Not all youths in the Jacksonville Jail, however, believed that programming was even part of the impact. For example, one Black youth who committed a property offense but had four priors said he wanted to succeed on release because it was the “worst place” he had been in his life. He said “all you ever do is wake up, eat, go to school, sit, sit, sit, sit . . . they don't talk to you or nothin'.” Others echoed his concerns.

Perceptions about the “blended” jail program were decidedly mixed. Only a little more than half the ratings indicated a beneficial impact. Among these, the reasons varied and often the programming features were not credited with much of the overall beneficial impact.³

PRISON

Of the 71 youths, 44 (62%) with adult punishment experience talked about the effects of prison. Because some of them reported experiences in more than one facility, 60 different prison experiences received ratings. Most of these ratings were negative; only 20 (33%) were positive (see top of Table 3). When the ratings of prison experience were beneficial, imprisoned youths did not mention programming as the key. In fact, most said there was no pro-

gramming available for them. Instead, they indicated that they did not want to commit more crime because they risked coming back to prison. For many, prison had given them the time to think about their futures and their lives, but for others prison was so full of pain that they did not want to face it again. When prison was seen as beneficial, most of the interviewees indicated the benefit was due to the time itself or the maturity that came with serving the time. One young White man was locked up for a person offense, had four prior arrests, and had been in prison twice. He was now on probation after having been released and talked about his second prison stint this way:

This time I didn't hang out with too many people, did my job, read books, did a lot of thinking and planning about goals I wanted to reach. I could see I was going down the wrong road again and [prison] gave me time to clear my head.

Another Black youth who had been arrested a couple of times before said that prison had made him think both because he had matured and because it was painful:

You have more time to think on how things should have been. It's filthier than the street, and everybody is crooked. It ain't no place for young people. . . .It's like evil on evil, like war, like battle between the races and the police—different races fighting each other, all races fighting the guards. . . .I think my life will be better than it was before. I am more mature. I know more than the other inmates who are 16. . . . And, when I get out. . . I will use it for self. Coming here when you're 15 or 16, it hurts, seriously. . . .The system is organized to screw people.

Still, others focused primarily on the pain as the primary reason for a beneficial impact. Some believed the prison experience was so harsh and unsafe that it had forced them to become a "man" and made them realize that they had to change their behavior to prevent themselves from going to prison again. For example a White youth who had one prior arrest but was locked up for a person offense said,

Now, I came to prison as a boy. I will leave as a man. I don't want to see this again. . . .Here, you picked on. Officers can beat you up when they want to. Somebody can put a shank. They plant it on your bunk. . . .Inmate can catch you asleep and hit you in the head with a "sock and a lock." . . .I will try to encourage anybody out there, this is not a place for you and my actions will have to prove it.

Still others felt prison would have an impact on them because they now knew they faced much tougher, longer sentences if they committed more crime on release. Often they learned a lot from fellow, older inmates. The following

excerpt from a Black youth who had only one prior but was locked up for a person offense illustrates their experience:

This is like a graveyard. . . . I would recommend this to other people because the older inmates who have life will talk sense into you. They let you know this ain't no place for nobody. They want you to get out and be somebody. I feel now I can get out and do something with my life, be a truck driver or electrician. And, I can talk to the young brothers and let them know what I learned. . . . here, where you see old people rooting, you see what's going to happen if you keep on . . .

They knew the laws were getting tougher. As one young Black man who had a drug offense but almost 30 priors said, "Old Jeb Bush, he ain't foolin' around. . . . that 10-20-Life. . . . I value my freedom more than all that."

But, the majority of ratings of prison (61%) indicated that it had made them worse or would have no positive impact on their attitudes and behaviors.⁴ They felt staff took their hope from them and were generally too mean or apathetic, that the environment was always unsafe, and that they learned too much about how to be better criminals. The following quotation from a young Asian man who had committed a person offense sums up the majority of ratings about the effects of adult prison:

Prison makes people monsters. The staff are worse than we are. . . . My experiences in here—to me—have made me worse, but to their eyes it made me better. . . . I don't have [a future]. I just live day by day. There is no future. . . . Every time I try to do right, they kick me to the curb, so I just say fuck it, I'm not going to try. You can only tolerate so much.

In essence, these respondents thought prison was much too harsh for teenagers. They believed their childhood and hope for a good future had been taken from them in prison. Life in prison became a simple struggle to stay alive. As one Black youth said, "if you don't have a strong mind, you aren't going to survive here." If they wanted to change their behavior, it was because they did not want to face the "pains of imprisonment" again.

In sum, across all adult sanctions (102 ratings), only 33% ($n = 34$) indicated a positive impact. Of all adult punishment experiences, the ratings were highest for the "blended" program in Duval County, in part because it blended adult time with programming more characteristic of the juvenile system. It is interesting that more ratings about adult punishments were positive (37% overall) than were ratings of low-end juvenile sanctions (19% overall). But, this should be expected given this sample is made up of serious offenders. However, in terms of percentages, deep-end juvenile commitments were

more likely than the other two categories to be rated as having a beneficial effect on the youths' attitudes and behaviors (58% overall).

COMPARISONS OF JUVENILE AND ADULT SANCTIONS

Enough interviewees reported experience with both juvenile and adult sanctions to allow us to make 62 comparisons of the relative impacts of adult versus juvenile dispositions. Of these, 25 comparisons (40%) indicated that the adult sanctions were more likely to have an overall beneficial impact on their lives⁵ (see bottom of Table 3). This may be a surprising finding given evidence presented earlier that most youths who experienced adult sanctions believed they had no effect or a negative effect. There are two important points that help explain this finding.

First, 9 of the 25 comparisons indicating that adult sanctions were more beneficial came from the Jacksonville "blended" program, which had adult incarceration but also used programming more similar to the juvenile system. Indeed, although more than half of the comparisons from the Jacksonville jail (9 of 16) attributed beneficial impacts to the adult rather than to juvenile sanctions, only 35% of those coming from other adult dispositions attributed more overall benefit to the adult sanction (16 of 46) (see bottom of Table 3).

Second, and more important, 20 of these 25 comparisons (80%) that attributed more beneficial impacts to the adult disposition reported *no juvenile deep-end experience*. None of the nine youths in the Jacksonville Jail did. And, in only 4 of the 16 comparisons (25%) in which other adult facilities (e.g., prison) were perceived to be more beneficial than juvenile sanctions did the youths have deep-end juvenile experience. In essence, the youths who believed the adult system had a better impact had "skipped" the juvenile deep-end programs. Recall that the deep-end programs were the ones that the ratings indicated were most often beneficial because they required more time and provided life skills and counseling.

One Black youth who thought both the time and the Jacksonville Jail program helped him more than the Level 6 programs he had been in makes the following point:

This right here had a better effect, because you take it for a joke if you go there [Level 6], but here, this right here it don't give you no slack, no half-steppin' here. This one have a better effect. It is both the jail and programs. . . . They talk to you, they still have hope for you, they say you still have little hope, you got to take advantage with life management skills, talkin' to you and stuff. The most important part of program that keep me from comin' back is the time, just the time. You ain't got no TV. Yeah, just the time, it be it. It ring the bell. . . . It hard. I

goin' try. It be temptation that will get me 'cause you get tired [of trying to make it on the outside].

Those who felt prison had a stronger impact on them primarily cited time and pain and denigration as the primary factors leading them to want to change their lives. As one young Black respondent who had committed a person offense and had three prior arrests said,

This place wants to make you go home and do good because you're not going to do this much time in any juvenile program. . . . I think it takes treating people badly for us to realize that we need to change, that this isn't for me, and I need to do what's right.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing Our Findings

Generally, when the juvenile justice system had an effect, it was because the youths *gained* life skills, got counseling, and were given “hope” there. When the adult system had an effect, it was because the youths *lost* things—hope, safety, amenities, family, and people in their environments who treated them with respect.

Most of the youths who experienced adult sanctions thought they had negative or no impacts on their attitudes and behaviors. Those who were housed in a special adult program at the Jacksonville Jail, which retained some of the treatment components characteristic of the juvenile justice system, were most positive about the adult experience. Some liked the programs there, but many also mentioned “time” and “pain” as reasons for the jail’s effects on them. With regard to prison, youths felt time, pain and denigration, and fear of future consequences if they reoffended on release had the strongest effects on them. Some believed it made them want to succeed on release, and some thought it made them worse. Clearly, these youths were aware of the get-tough movement and the potential effects it would have on their lives. Recall, one youth said, “Old Jeb Bush he ain’t foolin’ around . . . that 10—20—life.” When youths compared adult and juvenile sanctions, those who did not have deep-end juvenile experience were likely to report that the adult sanction was more beneficial—usually because of the longer “time” associated with the adult experience or because they did not want to experience the pain of prison again (see Tunnell, 1990).

On the whole, the youths in this study believed that life skills (e.g., GED program, training in job skills, reentry programs) and counseling (help with

problems and personal behavior management) were the program components that were most effective in helping them change their attitudes and behaviors. They reported that they were most likely to find this help in the deep-end juvenile programs—in part because the programs were designed more for this purpose and in part because the deep-end programs were longer and more intense than low-end programs. Deep-end programs received the most favorable ratings of the dispositions.

A Theoretical Note

The interviews indicate that these youths learned from sanctions, at least those of longer duration. One way to think about the impact is to consider how some sanctions helped youths to contemplate “the relative frequency, amount, and probability of past, present, and anticipated rewards and punishments” they perceive to be attached to criminal behaviors (Akers, 1998, p. 66). The lessons, however, were nuanced. As Akers (1998) observed, “social behavior is seldom a series of isolated acts proximally followed by contingent rewards or punishers” (p. 69). Any differential reinforcement and punishment involves subtle variations and becomes especially complex when the range of conforming and criminal alternatives is wide. The immediate pain and/or loss experienced during incarceration, for example, is undoubtedly punishing and should help extinguish criminal behavior. The pain and loss, however, are also fraught with symbolic meaning, and sometimes the experience (especially of prison) only increased the resentment, the anger, and the hostility that serve as cue stimuli for acting out. Moreover, any punishing consequences must be balanced against other contingencies prior to prison, during prison, and upon release to understand the ultimate impact. Some youths openly discussed learning how to do crime during incarceration—something that seemed to be offset in various treatment programs but was more likely to go unchecked in adult facilities. When youths reported treatment gains in education and skills or improvements in behavior management (e.g., anger control), they would incorporate these factors into their expectations about impact. Some of them recognized, however, that their sanction experiences might be outweighed once they returned to the streets. They could articulate the problem of returning to the neighborhoods, conditions, and associations through which they had learned crime in the first place.

Policy Implications

Florida and other states continue to move toward harsher sanctions for juveniles (e.g., pushing more to adult court and punishment). However, our

findings indicate that youth believe they experience the greatest attitudinal and behavioral change in intensive treatment programs within the juvenile system. For policymakers who purport to care most about public safety, these findings indicate juvenile treatment programs may be the best bet—even for serious offenders. Unless we want to give up on these youth completely and lock them up until they die—which is difficult given the financial cost of continually building and running new prisons—they will “all come back” to our neighborhoods (see Travis, 2000). Policymakers who find it politically difficult to fund treatment for the youths’ “own good” may be able to do it for the protection of their communities. Even serious offenders who were institutionalized for person offenses or who had multiple priors indicated that they thought that at least some of the juvenile programming was helpful. Granted, many of these youth were in these programs when we talked to them and may simply be reiterating what they hear every day or may be telling us what they think we want to hear, but many of them talked about negative components of their programs as well (e.g., staff that did not care or their belief that the counseling was not helpful) (see Tunnell, 1990). The youths who said their experiences were helpful may really believe it and may have found ways to cope with their emotional stress (e.g., through anger management) and have gained life skills that they believe will help them face the external pressures that remain in the communities to which they will return. One way to help them succeed is to ensure them good aftercare, so they can transition into regular life more easily in the face of these pressures (Altschuler, 1998).

Our findings call into question the practice of “skipping” the deep-end programs when sentencing youths for serious crimes. The majority of youths who said they thought the adult experience had a bigger impact on their attitudes and behaviors did not have any experience with the deep-end programs, which got the best ratings overall. Rather, they initially were in low-end programs (probation or short-term treatment) and then were sentenced to adult sanctions. This “skipping” may be due to statutory exclusion—because the youths committed crimes that were automatic transfers to adult court. However, our initial examination of the data indicates most of their offenses were not within that category. Further examination of the case files of youths who “skip” directly from light sanctions to adult court or interviews with prosecutors themselves may give us more insight into the logic of prosecutors’ decisions in these types of cases.

Directions for Future Research

Most of the youths in this sample were interviewed while in an institution. Consequently, when talking about their current punishment, they really were

discussing their *expectations* about the behavioral effects of the sanction. The real test will be whether their expectations hold true on release. Previous research with adult offenders indicates that when on the outside, they sometimes “forget” about the possible legal consequences of their actions and instead think primarily of the good things that will come from crime therefore continuing their behavior (Tunnell, 1990). In the future, after the youth have had some time “on the street,” we will examine their official recidivism to determine whether these youths become “temporary desisters” or are able to remain crime free (Tunnell, 1990, p. 685).

This is a purposive sample with serious delinquents in deep-end juvenile or adult sanctions. Because we did not systematically sample these youths, we do not feel comfortable making conclusions about how their demographic characteristics, prior offense histories, and seriousness of the most recent offense affect how their sanction experiences influence their attitudes about crime and conformity. Our study was exploratory and was designed to gain an understanding of the youths’ perspectives about their experiences rather than to test hypotheses about the attitudinal and behavioral impacts of different sanctions. Future research that uses a larger systematic sample of youths who are or have been incarcerated in both juvenile and adult institutions might be able to determine whether what the youths said here hold for different samples of youths in different places. Some of the hypotheses suggested by our study could include (a) intensive, long-term juvenile treatment programs have a more positive attitudinal and behavioral impact on serious repeat offenders than do adult punishments; (b) attitudinal change from juvenile sanctions is a result of skills *gained* there, whereas in adult institutions, it is a result of something lost (e.g., safety, self-esteem, hope); and (c) juvenile programs reduce recidivism and slow reentry into the justice system for those who do reoffend.

For the serious offenders in our sample, Florida’s recent move to shift more money to deep-end sanctions and away from some low-end programs may be a good step (Fisher, 2000). But, serious, chronic delinquents are a small proportion of all youths who commit crime or are arrested (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). Because we only had a few first-time offenders in our sample ($n = 10$ or 7%), further research should examine the extent to which our findings hold for less serious or first-time offenders—for example, whether our findings about adult prison experiences affect them in the same ways. Most of our sample believed that the low-end sanctions were not adequate to address their needs and change their behaviors, but there are many youths who are given no or light sanctions yet do not reoffend. For them, there may be components of low-end sanctions that are adequate to affect their behaviors. We have no reason to believe that most first time offenders need to be

placed in tougher sanctions to deter them. Future studies of youths who experience only low-end punishments but desist may give us more answers about why some youths continue delinquency and some do not after getting the lightest sanctions in the juvenile system. And, this information may allow us to pinpoint better who needs more intense programs earlier thereby allowing the low-end programs to focus on those youths for whom they have the biggest impact. Clearly, we have more to learn before we can say what “punishment” works best for whom—or whether punishment is an answer at all.

NOTES

1. This quote is from a White youth in a Level 8 who had one prior arrest. The focus of this article is on behavioral impact. That probation and the less intense programs did not have a positive impact on behavior does not mean the youth saw no value in them. Some of them mentioned that while in these low-end programs, they learned that they could succeed—for example, in community service or a job. Although one youth thought completing the community service hours was difficult, he said, “I did the hours at the Urban League, and I liked it because I never had worked before.” Other youths mentioned that their probation officers cared about them and that the officers tried to help but that they were not ready for it or that they were still trying to “beat the system.”

2. Almost all of the transferred youths had been in jail awaiting trial for at least some time.

3. The probable reason for this is that the jail programs were largely a mixture of unrelated things with no central philosophical bent. There were education programs, Toastmasters aimed at public speaking, drug treatment, and so on, but no coherent central theme.

4. A few of the ratings (6%) indicated that the impact of prison would be mixed—some beneficial impact and some negative impact.

5. A total of 22% ($n = 12$) thought juvenile programs generally had a better impact on them than did the adult sanctions. A few also thought that both juvenile and adult sanctions had changed their lives (6%, $n = 3$). The remaining 26% ($n = 14$) reported mixed effects of both juvenile and adult sanctions, thought neither had any impact, or thought they both had negative impacts. As before, many of them felt “society” made it difficult for them to do well, leading them to give up hope of succeeding on the outside. Others just did not believe the sanctions gave them the skills they needed to change.

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