

## **Doing the Programme or Doing Me? : The Pains of Youth Imprisonment**

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This article draws from research about young people's responses to being governed in secure residential facilities. It focuses on young people's expressions of agency as they 'do programme' in these facilities. It points to the ways that young people's language of choice and responsibility reflects their performances of 'programme' as they manage complicated emotions about change and growth. It is argued that there are various 'splits' that exist between official notions of programme compliance and those embodied and understood by young people. The article illuminates some of the more invisible pains experienced by young people in custody by revealing the intractability of the discourses of self-control in these young people's lives.

### ***Introduction***

Previous examinations of the pains of imprisonment suffered by young people have charted the harms caused by bullying and peer violence, the loss of freedom, and constraints on their development (Inderbitzen, 2006, Cesaroni and Alvi, 2010, Abrams and Hyun, 2009, Phillips, 2008, Wilson, 2003, Halsey, 2007, Bartollas, 1982). This article examines the pains that young people experience as they struggle to express their agency in ways that are recognisable to authorities in behavioural change programmes that operate within secure residential facilities.<sup>1</sup> The article explores young people's experiences in a secure residential facility in the United States. It will be argued that the language and intent of the treatment interventions aimed at young people in custody – to 'change' them, prevent them from re-offending, and help them to live more productive lives – were at odds with the results achieved. There were 'splits' in this terrain relating to the disconnect between the intent and results of the treatment programme, which created an alienating experience for the young people as they attempted to demonstrate 'change.' The psychoanalytic literature on 'splitting' is grounded in the idea that there is a fundamental 'split' between self-consciousness and the unconscious which can lead to anxieties and inhibit growth (Elliot,

2002: 10). There were pains that lay in the 'split' between what the programme dictated as appropriate for progress, and how the process of change and growth were actually experienced.

There is a rich literature which excavates the relationship between agency and structure within confinement (Sparks et al., 1996, Carrabine, 2004, Bosworth, 1999). Sparks *et al.* have argued that the exercise of agency in the face of 'overweening institutional constraint' (1996: 81) both 'mobilises' and reproduces some of the institutional 'discursive formations' which structure the experience of imprisonment. That is, the imprisoned can assert their identity within confinement, and thus challenge institutional practices. However, expressions of self-identity, such as those related to responsibility-taking, may resemble institutional discourses, such as those of normalisation and control, and thus play a role in embedding those discourses (see also Carrabine, 2004: 38-40, Scott, 1990). Institutional actors can thus bend prisoners to their will, but there may be counter-forces at play in resisting the exercise of total domination.

Few scholars have examined the tensions between agency and structure in custodial institutions for young people (although see Halsey, 2007). An analysis of the project of governance in juvenile justice should grapple with the ways that power is differently extended over young people. The issues of 'care' and 'control' which emerge in analyses of power are relevant to young people, especially as paternalistic practices and what has been termed 'repressive welfarism' (Phoenix, 2009: 130) are uniquely present in youth justice systems.<sup>ii</sup>

It has been argued that some criminal justice interventions for young people address them as rational individuals capable of self-transformation, and thus encourage them to self-govern 'actively and autonomously' (Crewe, 2009: 141, Kemshall, 2008: 23, Garland, 2001,

Garland, 1997). It is arguable that these efforts derive legitimacy from discourses about socialization and development. If, as some scholars argue, fundamental life experiences have been rendered governable (Dean, 1999: 96-7), then it is critical to analyse the ways that these processes of governing are animated through behavioural change programmes aimed at young people in confinement. Others have argued it is important to interrogate the ways that these forms of 'governmentality' may or may not be realised in practice (Crewe, 2007, McNeill et al., 2009).

Some scholars have studied individuals' experiences of the forms of 'therapeutic governance' that exist in contemporary adult penal institutions, particularly through cognitive behavioural programming (Haney, 2010, Crewe, 2009). In her study of cognitive self-change programmes, Fox found that the expression of 'self-discipline is disciplined' (1999a: 94) through some interventions; in other words, prison authorities exercised strict control over the therapeutic realm of programming and thus the exercise of self-discipline by prisoners was tightly governed by those authorities. Reich, in his account of young men's experiences of cognitive behavioural programmes in a juvenile facility, describes the expression of self-control by young men in the institutions as one which reflects the 'internalization of the...disciplinary regime' (2010: 32). He argues that submission to institutional regimes does not result in any benefit to the young people, because, in effect, 'they consent to remaining relatively powerless within society as a whole' (2010: 32). Halsey similarly found that young people's expressions of responsibility within custodial contexts involved a demonstration of 'unwavering respect' to authority figures and a conception of 'themselves and what they have done as solely the product of personal and 'impulsive' decisions' (2008: 218).

There is robust research pointing to the harmful effects of incarceration on the future abilities of young people to 'grow' out of crime (see also Rutherford, 1986, Matza, 1964, Gatti et al., 2009). Rutherford argues, for example, that 'incarcerative institutions ...thwart [the] normal development' of young people (1986: 20). Yet, we have little empirical research that closely examines *how* these institutions actually thwart such development. This article explores the degree to which young people in custody self-govern in the ways that authorities intend them to, as well as the extent to which young people 'change' and mature in the manner expected of them in an institution that enforces a highly agentic form of socialization.

The literature on emotion-management, an approach which bridges some of the dramaturgical frameworks developed by Goffman (1959) and psychoanalytic approaches, takes account of ideology, structure, *and* the subconscious in the expression of emotion (Hochschild, 1979). This 'emotion work,' Hochschild argues, is central to the 'human capacity for, if not the actual habit of, reflecting on and shaping inner feelings' (1979: 557). This approach is used to analyse young people's negotiation of agency in the emotional landscape of confinement. It allows for a closer examination of the role that emotion plays in young people's struggles to grow up and out of institutions. The analysis of young people's expressions of agency in this article was also aided by what has been termed a 'psychosocial' approach. As Clarke argues, this approach is a 'position whereby the researcher is aware of the unconscious and emotional dynamics that fuel the social construction of realities' (2009: 112). This recognises that individuals' *choices* may be more accurately described as 'investments,' in the sense that 'identity conflicts experienced within the flow of social practices are not necessarily resolvable by conscious intention or will' (Hollway and Jefferson, 2009: 124).

### ***The Study***

This article draws on qualitative research about a group of young people in the youth justice system in an Eastern American state called Olympia.<sup>iii</sup> The study aimed to discover some of the ways that young people engaged with punitive interventions. This involved a close examination of how they internalised the spirit of those interventions and resisted them. The aim was to grapple with some of the sociological puzzles about agency and structure that exist in a context which exerts an ostensibly totalizing influence over young people's actions, yet which places strong expectations on them to govern themselves.

A period of one year was spent conducting ethnographic research with 39 young people between the ages of 15 and 24 who were arrested and charged with crimes as both juveniles and adults. The group included 12 young women and 27 young men.<sup>iv</sup> Although the broader study focused on their time along the 'correctional continuum' of court to probation and parole, the particular focus of this article is on some of the participants' experiences in three secure residential facilities, with data gathered from individual interviews in three other facilities. Boys and girls who are adjudicated as delinquents (from the ages of seven to 15) as well as 13-15 year olds convicted as adults are sent to these facilities and can remain there until the age of 21. The facilities ranged in classification level and involved mixed aims of punishment and treatment, including a combination of behavioural modification, milieu therapy, and individual treatment strategies. The philosophies underlying these behavioural and therapeutic strategies were sometimes in conflict and tensions were visible during the fieldwork, which took place amid systemic reforms aimed at making the facilities less punitive and more 'therapeutic' by reducing physical restraints, introducing new treatment modalities, and ultimately closing facilities.<sup>v</sup>

The vast majority of the young participants came from impoverished urban communities and defined themselves as members of ethnic minority groups. A number of the participants had previously been institutionalized in psychiatric hospitals, residential mental health settings, group homes, and foster homes. Many were not attending school on a regular basis, nor were they participating in community-based organized activities prior to their system involvement. They were thus marginalized, alienated from traditional institutions of social control, and lacking in positive social capital, yet hypervisible in their racialised identities as 'bad' kids.

### **The Landscape of Interventions**

The behavioural change system in Olympia involved various cognitive change curricula and systems of behavioural modification that are used in juvenile and adult facilities correctional facilities across the world (see, for example Bottoms, 2003, Bosworth and Liebling, 1995, Abrams et al., 2005). Researchers have suggested that cognitive behavioural interventions have some success in reducing re-offending (Lipsey and Wilson, 1998), which has led many correctional administrators to adopt such programmes. The interventions found in Olympia included Aggression Replacement Therapy, victim awareness training, and moral reasoning programmes, which involved the ongoing monitoring of young people's 'thinking errors' or neutralisations. The interventions were partly guided by developmental psychological discourses which emphasize cognition over emotion (Urwin, 1986).

All the facilities operated an Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme, in which young people ascended 'stages' based on their compliance with the rules and their demonstration of institutionally acceptable behaviour. Achieving a stage – each of which was made visible by the colour of one's shoelaces – took months. A resident successfully ascended a stage by demonstrating that they could take responsibility for their actions, and

by showing that their goals and behaviours were self-motivated. The premise behind these programmes was that the denial of responsibility represented an externalisation of blame, and thus the displacement of the processes of change to sources beyond one's control (see Maruna and Mann, 2006). Young people's progress in the stage system was monitored and assessed through reports and meetings.

A typical resident was said to enter the facility unaccustomed to following rules, unused to 'structure' in their daily lives, and with little self-control, particularly over their emotions. The system was intended to facilitate the resident's progression into someone who was compliant with the demands of the adults in charge, able to exercise self-control, and able to model behaviour for other residents. These interventions, as constructed through the existing written materials, handbooks, and rules, and through the group curricula, represented a view about the young offender as someone who had deviated from norms of behaviour in a way that was considered pathological, and whose continued deviance from facility rules was evidence of these pathologies (see also Fox, 1999b). Physical restraints were perceived by some staff members as a 'tool' for treatment, used to reinforce disciplinary standards. The new interventions, which reduced the use of restraints and limited the use of punitive consequences for institutional deviance, were guided by the assumption that young people's continued resistance to institutional rules can be 'fixed' through a combination of self-responsibility and healing. This new model created some tensions about the role of responsibility, as the following sections detail.

### **Doing the Programme?**

Compliance with the rules of the programme and engagement with its discourses was described by young people and staff as 'doing programme.' The awkwardness of the

expression 'doing programme' is suggestive of the difficulty young people faced in engaging with it. *The* programme did not exist as a singular, graspable entity; rather, the 'programme' encompassed the totality of life in the facility. The behavioural expectations were codified in manuals and repeated in regular progress meetings. 'Doing good programme' allowed young people to gain privileges in institutional life, such as more time on the phone, more money to spend in the commissary and access to the best jobs. Yet, 'doing good programme' may have also signified young people's incorporation of the behavioural change strategies into their lives in a manner which demonstrated their submission to such strategies, raising questions about their agency.

Some young people who 'did programme' said that a weight was lifted for them in custody. They discovered that they might be released sooner, or at least *feel* closer to freedom. Panama, an older resident who did 'good programme,' was told by some younger residents that 'the system got ya'll,' and 'you've changed.' Panama was unaffected by these accusations, as he knew that his ability to 'do programme' placed him on a path to go home sooner than the younger residents. For him, 'doing programme' was in part about *relieving* the pains of confinement. Other young people feared that they might become 'institutionalised,' a term which implied an incorporation of the routines, discourses, and behavioural expectations of 'the programme'. Curiously, however, the term 'institutionalised' more often referred to the young people who were actively *resistant* to the regime, and thus *not* 'doing programme.' These individuals were seen as undisciplined and unaware of the negative effects of the violence that they engaged in. They were seen as *dependent* on confinement and lacking a critical engagement with it.

Eddie, another resident who did 'good programme,' said that he was not 'institutionalised' because he had the self-possession and self-knowledge that was necessary

to be reflective about the custodial experience. He felt, for example, that violating the rules of the institution proved to those in authority that young people *deserved* to be under total control.<sup>vi</sup> Yet, Eddie also expressed concerns about shedding the dispositions of institutional life, speaking about how 'we got that jail talk in us.' He recognised that the 'jail' identity is something which was not easily abandoned.

Newz was described by other residents as 'institutionalised' and was uncomfortable with that attribution. When asked why he didn't like it, he said that 'in a way I am.' He said that 'I get comfortable anywhere I go.' Newz also asserted that he was 'in control 100 per cent of the time' while he was in the facility. The tensions between his assertion of total self-control and his insecurity about being institutionalised perhaps point to his struggle to manage these split emotions.

Both Eddie and Newz reflect some of the tensions inherent in the notion of 'institutionalisation': the term can symbolise both a resistance *and* a submission to 'the programme.' This reveals the anxieties young people faced in trying to maintain their sense of agency while 'doing programme' in confinement. Eddie and Newz felt they had the ability to recognise the ways that the expression of self-mastery and discipline may also help them to keep a kind of psychological distance from their environment, or exercise *control* over it. Thus, for them, 'doing good programme' was not simply about submitting to it. Other young people described their fears about living *without* the programme, which is suggestive of some of the ways 'the programme' extended its reach over their lives and was sometimes difficult to abandon. In other words, the programme provided them with a form of self-control while also limiting their agency. Skippy was anxious about returning home, fearing that the temptations of his old lifestyle might overwhelm him in the absence of the institutional controls he had assimilated:

...like I didn't want to be on the outside. In the beginning, I was like, I wanted to go home to my mother so much, now it's kind of like, I don't know if I want to go home or not right now because I'm used to being told what to do and stuff like that and when they were asking me questions of *what I wanted to happen*, it was like, I didn't know what to say (emphasis added).

Skippy's confusion about 'what I wanted to happen' reveals his sense of alienation and his complex feelings about de-programming. He was conflicted about being released because he had become accustomed to listening to and taking orders from others, and actually desired a programme which was even more explicit in its behavioural aims, such as a boot camp.

Skippy wanted his aftercare worker to give him an electronic ankle bracelet, despite the fact that he would not be required to wear one, because he felt it might prevent him from re-offending. He was returning home to a context in which he would have to regularly face his victim, someone he had violently assaulted and who might seek retribution. Thus, he seemed to fall back on the notion of 'the programme' as a point of safety or comfort. Yet it would ultimately fail to protect him from the harms and temptations he might face on the outside. Skippy's desires for self-control are infused with these more subconscious anxieties and he grasps onto 'the programme' as a way of managing those emotions.

Although 'doing good programme' allowed some young people to feel the weight of confinement lifted from them, as they more fully assimilated 'programme' into their lives, they began to feel the pains that accompanied programme compliance. These pains related to their experiences of submission to the behavioural regime, their confusion about where their agency was located (in the case of Skippy), and their struggles in confronting their programmed dispositions ('jail talk').

### **Street Mentality**

Being 'street' was often a source of pride for the young people, as it indicated their knowledge of a complex set of rules, identities, secrets, and codes that were unknown to

those in authority. This was a world where young people used monikers that they distinguished from their 'government' names, where power could be achieved through association with a street organization, and where government institutions played a minimal regulatory role (Venkatesh, 2006).<sup>vii</sup> Newz described the 'street' world in this way:

...street mentality is basically you've gotta have the dog eat dog mentality, you've got to get yours before anybody else get...you've got to get it by any means necessary. You've got to sell drugs...you gotta rob people you rob people, you gotta set people, you set people up. You know what I'm saying, you got to do things that is easy for you ... before you get yours.

This alternative world is captured by the authors of so-called 'street lit,' or 'gangster books,' which were read widely by young people in residential facilities. These books, which are often self-published, were described by one participant as 'like a fantasy world of true reality.' This reveals the ways that 'street' life is often a caricatured one: gangsterism and violence, though they may exist, are often as much an exaggerated performance of badness as they are true acts of violence. In one of the most popular books amongst young people who are incarcerated, *Dutch*, by Teri Woods, the author describes an eponymous Machiavellian figure who bears no empathy or mercy for his enemies, and finds strength on the street by any means necessary:

Most cats didn't think the wild young nigga even knew how to read, let alone want to. His choice of literature, Sun Tze's *Art of War*, Machivelli's (sic) *The Prince*, or George Jackson's *Blood in my Eye*, and then mash a nigga's face over a card game. His moods alternated, and he was unpredictable. No one trusted him except those who didn't trust themselves, so therefore, they understood him. Only the most incorrigible and unredeemable could see the potential in Dutch. He had been raised in the streets and perfected in prison (Woods, 2003: 59).

Dutch cares little about friends or enemies, but is considered a masterful and disciplined drug dealer and a denizen of the 'street.' The popularity of a character like Dutch and books like *The Prince* amongst some of the young people in confinement reveals some of the ways in which young people felt that self-control, power, and domination could be achieved and expressed in environments which felt somehow *out* of control for them. Like Dutch, Eddie spoke about how his time in custody 'made me who I am.'

Some young men found that the skills of self-government and discipline learned in confinement could be valued by both residential facility staff *and* their peers. Those young people who did programme well, such as Panama and Eddie, were seen by some staff members and residents as the archetypes of self-discipline, but they also often had authority and respect that they had imported from outside the institutions. Young people found that they could actually *enhance* their status amongst their peers inside the institution if they exercised the dispositions of self-control valued by the programme.

### **'You Need Hostility'**

The young men's embrace of discourses of self-control and responsibility espoused by the treatment programmes reflected the ways in which they related more easily to the masculine, rational frameworks of the cognitive behavioural discourses than girls did (see also Shaw and Hannah-Moffat, 2004). Young men described their processes of adaptation within the institution as involving 'humility,' 'discipline,' 'responsibility,' and the ability to exercise more 'control' over one's life. These words were often identical to those used in the behavioural interventions, revealing that the young men incorporated the institutional discourses into their own vocabularies. It may also show the ways that they attributed a kind of power to institutional notions of will and agency which extended beyond the power these concepts could actually possess in their lives.

Some young men argued that they could *only* achieve self-control if the staff employed punitive models of control, such as restraints. These remarks were made in the context of institutional reforms in which the use of restraints was a highly debated and controversial topic, with many staff openly bemoaning their inability to use these 'tools.' One young man said 'you *need* hostility from staff.' Other young people spoke of a desire for

a more 'hands on' approach, or – like Skippy (above) – a 'boot camp-style' facility. After the reforms in Olympia, control was exercised in less overt but perhaps no less powerful ways, through the ramping up of 'treatment' programmes. Restraints had been a more explicit and direct form of control than these programmes. Thus, young people's desires for restraints seemed to reflect their ambivalent feelings about the 'softer' form of control that had replaced them.<sup>viii</sup>

The young men's desires for external sources of control were sometimes coupled with their open *critiques* of institutional practices, which related to their frustrations about the inability of the institutions to provide them with the resources to prepare them for the outside. Their desires for external sources of control thus spoke to their ambiguous emotions about the power of the institutions to shape their lives, and thus their search for ways to manage those emotions; for some, restraints offered such a solution. Below, I examine the cases of two young women which reveal the ways that young people's experiences of the programme differed by gender, as well as their ambiguous emotions about the experience of confinement and its ability to meaningfully effect change in their post-release lives.

### **The Ambiguity of Discourses of Change**

The appeal to young people's agency that is conveyed through treatment discourses was less fully embraced by the young women than the young men. Young women also spoke more frequently of the horrors of restraints than did their male counterparts. They had more often experienced placements in the mental health and foster care systems and tended to have less certainty than the boys about where they would be placed when they exited custody. Young women thus overwhelmingly entered confinement through contexts which

were less focused on blame than on notions of pathology and dependency. Their pathways into custody were *structurally* different from young men's and this played a role in the way that they negotiated the treatment programmes. Although sharing similar frustrations as the young men about the lack of relevance of 'the programme' for their lives, the young women's strategies for managing the programme were often different than the young men.

Young women often conveyed a level of resigned self-awareness about the process of change. Christina, for example, said that she had been confined repeatedly 'cause I made wrong choices.' She said 'I deserved to be in these places because of what I did.' Christina, who was white and from a rural area in Olympia, was in a residential mental health facility before she came to the secure facility. She was representative of many of the young women in confinement, who were often at the facilities as a result of 'failing' other placements, rather than simply being arrested and then confined. Christina was placed into custody after the police convinced her mother that her daughter's psychiatric care could be provided by the State if she would allow her daughter to be arrested. Her mother, unable to afford treatment for Christina, decided to have her arrested for what she described as her daughter's 'obsessive' and irrational behaviours. Christina said she was in placement 'because I did something wrong,' but she also felt that her placement had been unfair. Like a number of young women, she had been subjectified into an institutional identity even before she was imprisoned.

Christina could be both deeply introverted and animated, depending on the context. She cried frequently, and grew frightened and upset after witnessing a restraint. She spoke in a detached and monosyllabic way about her past and her treatment, but became more animated in the presence of institutional staff members with whom she had built a bond, sometimes teasing them in a flirtatious manner. When asked about her time in treatment,

Christina became withdrawn and distant: she said she had become more 'acceptant' of the programme, but spoke in a way that suggested a sense of resignation rather than acceptance of its legitimacy as a tool for enabling her to fulfil her potential. Her body language conveyed some of the ways she had connected with some caring staff members and the ways in which she felt disconnected from the abstract programme goals designed to facilitate her autonomy. For Christina, who was to be placed in another residential programme upon her release and therefore had no end in sight to her institutional life, the goal of autonomy and independence that her treatment programme created for her was arguably unattainable. Christina was one of a number of the young women who were characterised as 'really damaged' and 'difficult' by staff members who worked with them. These constructions of young women arguably impacted on staff members' ambivalence about deploying discourses of self-control: cognitive behavioural interventions were used, but often rather reluctantly. However, physical restraints continued to be used by staff regularly, despite the changes in policy.

The intractability of the discourses of self-control and change were revealed when they were imposed on those young people who struggled to embrace them. Ellen, a 17 year old, was given a 'Change' journal which she was required to write in to address her putative 'deficit' - 'problem solving.' In the official discourse, 'problem solving,' was said to be resolved by thinking through various 'steps' and engaging in a rational decision-making process in which repeated practices of self-assessment were seen to instil new habits of mind (Bottoms, 2001). Ellen's 'Change' journal was examined regularly by treatment staff; thus, these methods involved a process of self-reflection that was assessed publicly. Ellen acknowledged that the journal 'doesn't really work' to help her make meaningful changes, although she still wrote in it in order to meet programme requirements.

Ellen, like other young people in confinement, used the expression 'I'm here to do me, and to do me only,' suggesting that she was engaged in a process of self-change that would not be derailed by other young people and indicating that she was singularly focused on self-change. She also said 'I volunteered to come here' from a mental health facility. This statement may not have reflected the realities of her placement, as she would have had to have been arrested to have been placed in the secure facility, but it speaks to her desire to express agency about her experience in custody that is distinct from the officially-condoned expression of agency – the 'Change' journal. Writing in the 'Change' journal is less about 'doing me' than it is about 'doing programme.'

Ellen's behaviour in the facility reflected some of the ways in which she managed some of her conflicted emotions about what constituted 'change' in her life. In some senses, Ellen had very little hope for building a life after confinement: her parents were incarcerated and she had no other family members who she could live with. She was going to be released to a group home in a town where she knew no one and had no resources. She had 'failed' numerous mental health and foster care placements. In describing her experiences of her various placements, she said that 'it felt like the system did not give two craps about me,' and that system actors 'didn't respect my opinions or needs.' Thus, she had little faith in the 'system' to help her after her release from custody, and it felt normal for her to be rejected. So, when she 'act outed' shortly before she was ready to be released from each of her placements, or when she failed her state examinations, despite her high performance in school in the facility, these forms of resistance may have been one way for her to fall back on the familiarity of the feeling of rejection, as she knew that she would face punishment. When staff responded to her failures to comply with programme expectations in a negative way, because they understood them as failures in her problem solving abilities, her feelings

of rejection were thus compounded, as well as her experience of alienation from the institutional notions of 'change.'

Ellen's experience reveals some of the ways in which discourses of change can become assimilated in young people's language, and thus 'faked,' but also lose their traction as young people grapple with the form of individualism these narratives require. In turn, the programmes promote a rationalisation of life choices that flies in the face of the irrationality that young people like Ellen experience in the context of abandonment, loss, and violation (see, for example Samuels, 2009).

### **'Changed' Selves**

'Doing programme' involved the adoption an institutional persona of a changed self. The expression 'fake it till you make it' was used by staff and young people to describe the ways that the programme was performed. Some young people feel like they could resist what they felt was the absurdity and illegitimacy of 'the system' by *saying* that they were 'faking it.' However, others used the expression to describe the ways that performances could lead to change.

Newz said that his behaviour was a 'performance' at first, but then 'it became real.' He described several catalytic moments in which he had realized that he would need to 'do programme' differently. At one point, he was two points shy of advancing a 'stage,' which meant that he had to wait 25 months to move up another stage. He said that he then decided to go 'off the wall' - 'I said, you know what? Forget it, I'm not trying no more.' However, another resident told him that his esteem with staff would decline precipitously if he chose to resist in this way, and this would have consequences. Newz is referring to himself in this passage, although his use of pronouns is notably confusing:

*It's going to look like he don't want to change*, he's an asshole, he's like that and so it happened and I realized right before my eyes it was going to happen. So I said you know what? I can't do this. I'm not going to let that come true. So I started getting my act together. I eventually got my adjustment stage (emphasis added).

Newz conveyed his desire for change by deciding that he was 'gonna be a Mr. Robot. I gonna do everything perfect. I so I started living my programme off of robots.' He mimicked another resident in order to accomplish this task:

N: ...He did perfect programme. So I started doing what he did, and they left me alone.  
A: What were some examples of the things he did?  
N: Raising his hand, and for not necessary things, raise his hand, Ms. B, can I get a pencil? Or when he know he can get it he still, 'can I get it? can I do this?' And 'can I do that?'  
A: Do you think he was faking it a little bit?  
N: I don't know.  
A: You'll never know?  
N: Yeah. Probably his personality, that he was never one to get in trouble.

Newz suggests that the programme could be accomplished through almost total deference and compliance, yet his thoughts imply a more complex process of incorporation *and* resistance:

A: What do you think about the robot thing now?  
N: You know, if you do it long enough it becomes you.  
A: Yeah.  
N: I was told that as well. See some sometimes you gotta fake the funk, know what I'm sayin'? And, it happened.

The expression 'fake the funk' comes from a song which says that if you fake the funk your nose will grow, or your fakery will be revealed, like Pinocchio. Yet Newz implies that this fakery sometimes *has* to happen. He argued that he had not become a dupe of the regime, in that he had made a deliberate choice to become a robot, a position which he felt pride in. Institutionalisation, he claimed, was when 'you forget that you are in jail. So it's like, when you're a robot, you are constantly thinking about *being* in jail.' It is revealed again here that *awareness* and reflexivity is central to young people's expression of agency in the institutions.

Yet, the metaphor of the robot is a complex one: Newz talks about becoming a robot, yet describes how his conformity to the programme is 'real.' Newz's personal history

points to some of the ways that this real/fake dynamic might have emerged. When he was 14, Newz was convicted of a violent sex offence. He faced lifetime sex offender registration and the possibility of homelessness upon his release. His childhood was marred by his parents' inability to care for him and their continued enmeshment in the drug and sex trade. Newz's notion of his responsibility for his actions and his ability to change was linked to his childhood experiences. Yet, Newz never told staff at the residential facility about those experiences, even during the stage in his sex offender treatment when he was required to tell his life story as part of the process of 'reform,' and in order to be released from the treatment programme. Thus, Newz was ambivalent about where the responsibility for the actions that caused his incarceration lay. For him, being a robot may have been one strategy for managing this ambivalence.

In order to feel that he had some ownership over the process of change, Newz did programme. Yet, the irony of this form of agency is that it involved mimicking another resident as they engaged in such robotics. Thus, Newz developed his putatively agentic persona because of his observation of and reliance on someone else. This form of robotics is thus particular to the institutional landscape, and may not actually serve to liberate Newz from some of the difficulties he will face upon his release.

### **Conclusion: The authenticity of change?**

Young people experience pain in imprisonment as they navigate the discourses of treatment which try to stimulate their agency but which may also perpetuate their vulnerability and alienation. I argue that the 'wholly individualized fully competent subject' (Ruddick, 2007: 683, see also Viego, 2007) envisaged by juvenile justice systems is a fiction, and that young people's aspirations for wholeness may result in their domination by the behavioural change

practises which are said to liberate them. This form of domination encourages them to *express* self-discipline and control, yet provides them with few opportunities for an *exercise* of such forms of control. The programme teaches young people in custody the tools of mastery and self-control that they can then use on the streets. This expression of domination is ironic: it takes place in contexts where young people actually possess few opportunities for social mobility, and thus their enactment of domination over others can cause their further enmeshment in institutions of social control.

There are historical analogues to this process of domination: Hartman argues in her exploration of African-American subjectivity in post-Reconstruction America that 'self-mastery was invariably defined as willing submission to the dictates of former masters, the market, and the inquisitor within' (1997: 134). She suggests that it is important to 'critically interrogate' concepts like will, agency, and responsibility in order to explore the experiences of domination, oppression and punishment (1997: 6). Hartman's historical example has contemporary salience in youth justice institutions that pose similarly troubling questions about freedom from domination, as there is a way in which the facilities may serve to *deepen* the patterns of marginality that these young people have experienced.<sup>ix</sup> They are encouraged to exercise total deference and self-control to authority (or what Halsey (2008) terms 'hyper-responsibility') rather than a form of responsibility-taking which may liberate them from the forms of low-waged employment and impoverished social spaces which further embed their structural marginality.

Some commentators have argued that while this may be an era of heightened individual 'choice' (Giddens, 1991) individual agency is restricted in terms of waged labour options (Näsman, 1994, Furlong and Cartmel, 2007). Rudd and Evans (1998) use the term 'bounded agency' to point to some of the socially structured boundaries that young people

face as they move into adulthood. Young people charged with crimes have particularly limited abilities to acquire social, cultural and symbolic capital – or to achieve 'social recognition' (Barry, 2006). Thus, while young people have been said to play an active role in expressing agency and responsibility in contemporary life (Barry, 2006, Thomson et al., 2002), the expression of agency by young people in institutions may be more 'bounded.'

Young people's ability to escape the net of institutions is not simply tied to the length of their sentence. They may thus fight their uncertainty about life with exaggerated forms of choice, responsibility, individualism, and self-control. They are sometimes *defiantly* individualist in their outlooks and orientations, which reveals their desires to be self-reliant in the context of access to limited resources and support (Sánchez-Jankowski, 1991).

Young people face obstacles to their full expression of 'control' because self-control is so highly regulated in youth justice systems. Thus, 'self-control' can be demonstrated in residential facilities through the embrace of programme language, deference, and the completion of an aggression training course, but not necessarily through one's efforts at resolving the 'splits' in identity which sometimes accompany adolescence (Erikson, 1968). The process of resolving these splits involves dealing with difficulty and disappointment, an examination of self-identity, and a grappling with the loss that sometimes accompanies the individuation process. The ambivalence that accompanies these processes is actively discouraged in these institutions.

Doing programme involves a degree of mimicry or modeling, both of staff and of other residents. Bhabha describes mimicry as an act that is 'both against the rules and within them' (1984: 130). Mimicry is a way of 'doing' programme, but it is also an act of appropriation and reconstruction. Yet it serves to reproduce the very discourses of

responsibility and choice by individuals who often have no 'choice' about when they will be released and few opportunities to exercise 'responsibility.'

These institutions aim to prevent young people from offending but are often unable to achieve this (see Gatti et al., 2009). Part of the difficulty lies in young people's inability to either demonstrate change or *be* changed by interventions. It is said that the behavioural interventions used with young people in confinement are fuelled by the aim of preventing re-offending. However, even the creators of cognitive behaviourism have raised questions about the role that such programmes play in effecting change in the absence of activities aimed at educational and personal enrichment (Duguid, 2000: 200). Having scrutinised young people's experiences of programmes aimed at expanding their 'will' and agency, this article challenges the notion that agency can be fully exercised by 'doing programme.'

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**Acknowledgements:** Many thanks to Dwayne Betts, Nico Carbellano, Elsie Chandler, Loraine Gelsthorpe, Terence Gilheany, Caroline Lanskey, Fergus McNeill, Shaun Ossei-Owusu, Michael Tan, the Anonymous reviewers and to Ben Crewe and Yvonne Jewkes for their exceptionally helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

<sup>i</sup> This article is based on research from an American State where young people under the age of 21 can spend time in secure residential 'facilities' or in prisons, depending on the age at which they are arrested. In American public discourse, residential facilities for young people are often described as juvenile 'prisons.' In the UK, young people are not sent to prisons until they turn 21, and the term 'imprisonment' is arguably less commonly used to describe the custodial experiences of young offenders.

<sup>ii</sup> Some scholars have pointed to the 'totality' of the coercive nature of imprisonment, e.g. Scraton *et al.* (1991), and have questioned whether it is indeed possible to, as English prison commissioner Alexander Paterson stated, 'prepare men for freedom in conditions of captivity.' These issues are germane to the research discussed here.

<sup>iii</sup> Pseudonyms are used throughout this article.

<sup>iv</sup> Focus groups, individual interviews, and observational fieldwork were conducted in the residential facilities.

<sup>v</sup> I gained access to the residential facilities through the State's research bureau, and presented myself to staff and young people as a student researcher. I told staff and young people that I did not work for the State, which was important for some staff in the context of systemic reforms during which relations between staff and the central administration were fractious. I conveyed to the young people that I was interested in hearing about their experiences, and that I was not a psychologist evaluating their behaviour.

<sup>vi</sup> A father of a participant echoed this sentiment when he described his time in prison. He said, of the Corrections Officers: 'You in his fucking house. You are not going to win in there. The best thing you can do is get out, and try to change things when you get out.'

<sup>vii</sup> Young people in this research described their 'government' names as those given them at birth and many preferred to use their 'street' names. The genealogy of this term likely stems from the rejection by African-Americans of their given names, which could be traced to slave owners.

<sup>viii</sup> It is also possible that some young people, in an effort to win favour with staff, echoed their sentiments about the need for restraints. While it is difficult to accurately assess whether this is the case, it is notable that the young people would often employ staff members' logic about the utility of restraints.

<sup>ix</sup> In Olympia, where African-American adolescents are nearly five times more likely to be given custody than their white counterparts, Hartman's ideas about racialised forms of domination have particular salience.