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## Juvenile Offenders' Perceptions of the Counseling Relationship

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**JUVENILE OFFENDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
THE COUNSELING RELATIONSHIP**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
The Counselor Education Program

by

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B.A., Southeastern Louisiana University, 1988  
M.A., Our Lady of Holy Cross College, 1994

May 2003

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have walked the path less traveled, and that has made all the difference

-Robert Frost

As I begin to close another chapter in the book that is my life, I reflect on those who have inspired and strengthened me to choose the path less traveled. From my barefoot childhood shrouded with curiosity until today, there are not enough pages to thank the multitude of “angels” that have helped me in both minute and enormous ways. I thank each of you for your part in shaping who I am today.

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For my best friend, lover, fervent supporter, and wife, Cindy, words alone are not enough to express my love and gratitude for your untiring support. Through sleepless nights and seemingly endless days, you were always there for me. I love you.

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persevering in the face of adversity. I will never forget your courage and the calmness you demonstrate each day.

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To the participants of this study who volunteered so that the voices of juvenile offenders could be heard for all who listen, your words are a memorial of your

experiences in the juvenile justice system. May you know the impact your words will have on those who follow in your footsteps.

Finally, to those who may read this, know that your journey will be successful only if you rely on those who extend their hands and their hearts. Persevere!

I conclude these acknowledgments with a quote that has provided me with decades of encouragement and strength to strive for all life has to offer:

What you can do, or dream you can, begin it,  
Boldness has genius, power, and genius in it.

-Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to explore juvenile offenders' perceptions of the counseling relationship. Eight juvenile offenders who were on probation under the jurisdiction of a juvenile court participated in the study. Using a phenomenological methodology, two interviews with each participant were conducted in order to obtain participants' full descriptions of the phenomenon of the counseling relationship. The main research question was: *What are juvenile offenders' perceptions of the counseling relationship?* Sub-questions were: (a) *What are the themes and qualities that account for how feelings and thoughts connected to the counseling relationship are aroused?*, (b) *What are the underlying conditions that account for juvenile offenders' perceptions of the counseling relationship?*, (c) *What are the universal structures (e.g. time, space, bodily concerns, physical substance, causality, relation to self or others ) that precipitate feelings and thoughts about the experience of the counseling relationship?*, and (d) *What are the unique qualities of the experience that facilitate a description of the "counseling relationship" as it is experienced by juvenile offenders?*

Participants' descriptions provided a range of descriptions that were summarized in three thematic categories: Themes Related to Participants, Themes Related to Counselors, and Themes Related to the Process of Counseling Relationships. In addition, a composite textural-structural description of participants' experiences provided a holistic

description of the phenomenon as lived by participants. Participants' experiences provided a greater depth of understanding of the counseling relationship with this challenging population from the perspective of juvenile offenders. Implications for juvenile offender counselors and counselor educators are discussed. Implications for phenomenological methodology are also discussed.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

“Man dwells apart, though not alone,  
He walks among his peers unread;  
The best of thoughts, which he hath known,  
For lack of listeners, are not said.”  
-Jean Inglow (1820-1897)

### *Overview*

The purpose of this research was to capture the meanings and experiences that juvenile offenders ascribe to the counseling relationship. In recent decades, the topic of juveniles in general and juvenile offenders in specific has been the central theme of innumerable studies, articles, and publications aimed at illuminating the most effective way to either prevent or treat the societal ailment of juvenile crime (Albanese, 1993; Baker, 1991; Gendreau, 1999; Kvaraceus, 1959; Rojek & Jensen, 1996). The need for this study is demonstrated by national studies that have identified the critical need for effective interventions with this population (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2001; Snyder & Sickmund, 1995). These studies have identified critical needs for the welfare of children in the United States but none of these studies consider the relationship between the juvenile offender and the counselor as a factor in determining success of rehabilitation. As a whole, in 2000, there were 70.4 million children under the age of 18 in the United States (Federal

Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2001). Of these, sixteen percent lived below the poverty threshold. Twenty-five percent lived with only one parent, usually a mother. Thirty-three percent of all births were to unmarried women. The implication of these statistics is that children are facing increasingly tougher familial environments. These statistics are presented because they illustrate factors known to be associated with the development of children at risk for delinquency.

The extent of the juvenile offender problem has been well documented. According to the 1995 Juvenile Offenders and Victims National Report (Snyder & Sickmund, 1995), victims attributed about one in four personal crimes to juvenile offenders in 1991, and juveniles were responsible for 1 in 5 violent crimes. Arrest statistics show that in 1991 police arrested 230,800 children under the age of 12 – a statistic that represents future adolescent delinquents (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention [OJJDP], 2001). In 1999, the serious violent juvenile crime-offending rate was 26 crimes per 1,000 juveniles ages 12-17 years old. Today, the United States has more boys and young men incarcerated in juvenile halls, jails, boot camps, psychiatric hospitals, recovery hospitals, youth corrections, and adult prisons than any other nation (Kipnis, 1999, p. ix). In fact, according to Snyder and Sickmund, in 1991 there were 19,000 juveniles in detention centers. These juvenile crime statistics pale when compared to the fact that most juveniles have broken the law but have not come into contact with the judicial system (Baker, 1991; Harris, 1998; Snyder & Sickmund). For example, many juveniles smoke cigarettes illegally, smoke marijuana, and violate curfew statutes.



The criminal justice system's answer to the problem of delinquency has been rehabilitation—a term that is often vague and ambiguous (Tittle, 1974). The word often implies the correction of certain *defects* that characterize offenders. In the criminal justice system rehabilitation is used synonymously with therapy, treatment, and counseling. The philosophy that underlies rehabilitative treatment of offenders is that the basic cause of misbehavior lies within the personality of the individual. Elimination of these defects will eliminate the individual's need to engage in delinquent behavior (Cavan, 1962).

Historically, the effectiveness of juvenile delinquency treatment has been described as uncertain. From the shocking conclusion by Robert Martinson in 1975 that “nothing works” with the rehabilitation of criminals (Baker, 1991; Martinson, 1982; Rauschenberg, 1999), a surge of programs to refute his conclusion has blossomed. Subsequent studies on these programs contributed to the knowledge of treatment programs that support this claim or, at best, have produced mixed results (Richards & Sullivan, 1996). For example, a meta-analysis of 200 studies involving juvenile offenders by Lipsey and Wilson (1997) found that several types of treatment have small or no treatment outcome effects. Those programs included wilderness programs, drug abstinence programs, early release (parole) programs, shock treatment (“Scared Straight”), milieu programs, and vocational acquisition programs. In spite of the political popularity of these programs, they have not demonstrated positive treatment outcomes with this population. In fact, some of these programs actually promote recidivism. An example of this paradoxical effect, “Scared Straight” programs actually produced a six percent *increase* in recidivism (Gendreau, 1999). From these results, it would appear that

Martinson's initial assessment of juvenile offender programming has some degree of validity.

Most treatment programs for offenders focus on recidivism as the measure of treatment effectiveness (Kadish, Glaser, Calhoun, & Risler, 1999; Little, Robinson, & Burnette, 1998). Recidivism refers to a repeated relapse into crime (Barnhart, 1968). However, Gendreau and Goggin (1997) noted that across all evaluation studies, regardless of their approach, a majority of juvenile offender treatment programs reported an average 10 percent reduction in recidivism. Conversely, a different view of this concept is that, across a majority of offender treatment programs, an average of 90 percent of juvenile offenders recidivated. As such, current treatment programs have demonstrated the inability to effectively address the dynamic factors relating to delinquency.

### *The Counseling Relationship*

One factor that has received little attention in juvenile offender treatment literature has been the counseling relationship. Although the counseling relationship is crucial to the success of therapeutic progress (Hazler & Barwick, 2001; Schofield, 1967), literature has discounted the effectiveness of traditionally relationship-oriented approaches (Andrews, 1994; Gendreau, 1996). However, as Braswell (1989) stated, "To be part of a justice system that is more humane for both the community at large and for the offender, correctional treatment will need to refocus on the power of relationship as a priority for positive change" (p.59). Further, Gendreau and Goggin (1997) asserted that further decreases in the average recidivism could occur if focus is given toward "optimal

therapeutic integrity.” Such integrity involves the exploration of the role of the relationship between juvenile offender and counselor.

Although the relationship has been neglected as a factor that is conducive to reducing recidivism, the counseling relationship has been discussed elsewhere. Most studies investigating relationships focus on observable behaviors of the relationship (Aspy, Aspy, Russel, & Wedel, 2000; Carkhuff & Berenson, 1977; Fielder, 1953; Motti, 1986). Further, Gardner (1967) noted that studies have difficulty in consistently defining characteristics of a good relationship, which indicates that characteristics of a good relationship are not easily captured solely by observations. Crittenden (1988) asserted that relationships have no physical manifestations; they are not accessible to direct observation. As a result, prior studies that attempt to ascertain characteristics and processes of counseling relationships fall short of their goal.

#### *Phenomenological Method*

An alternative to identifying observable characteristics and processes of a relationship can be found in the phenomenon of the relationship from the perspective of the client. Rogers (1961) described the first element of positive relationships as the ability to understand the client’s meanings and feelings. The key to understanding is unlocking the clients’ subjective experience. Oiler (1982) stated that subjectivity means being in the client’s world - subjectivity grounds reality. Prior efforts to research the counseling relationship, particularly with juvenile offenders, lack any such subjective approach.

One methodology specifically aimed at discovering meanings and experiences of clients is phenomenological research. Phenomenological research is ideally suited for

understanding and delineating the phenomenon of the counseling relationship as subjectively experienced by juvenile offenders (Lee, 1999). Oiler (1982) further stated that qualitative research enables researchers to discover meanings of concepts that are difficult to define, such as guilt, anger, courage and hope. These concepts can be clarified only by attending to them as human experiences. With regard to juvenile offenders, only one qualitative study has been found that addresses the experiences of juvenile offenders in counseling (Blanchard, 2000).

As a result of the shortcomings of the research on the counseling relationship and the paucity of qualitative research focusing on juvenile offenders, the phenomenon of the counseling relationship with juvenile offenders has yet to be discovered. In particular, the absence of qualitative research methodology with the juvenile offender population demonstrates our lack of understanding of phenomenon related to this population. It is imperative to our understanding of juvenile offenders that we explore the subjective meanings and experiences of counseling relationships with this population. Only through such understanding will we be able to fully comprehend the complex and dynamic factors and processes involved in the counseling relationship with juvenile offenders.

#### *Personal Experience*

Having worked with juvenile offenders for six years, I have often reflected on the meanings of “effective treatment” and counselor characteristics that contribute to juvenile offenders improving their decisions. As I began counseling juvenile offenders, I was struck by their ability to respond to my genuineness and empathy regardless of whether they were charged as first-time offenders or serious habitual offenders. Most juvenile offenders showed less defensiveness and communicated about problematic intrapersonal

issues. These responses are atypical for adolescents, in general, but are more rare in the juvenile offender population. Through my employment, I was introduced to several programs that produced empirical results reducing recidivism. Each program was founded on current concepts that had been demonstrated to reduce recidivism-a commonly used criteria for effective treatment.

As I continued to work with this population, I found that using recidivism as a criterion for “effective treatment” meant that those juveniles who were sent to juvenile prison were considered “failures”-a concept incongruent with the counseling philosophy of treating clients across life’s obstacles. As such, I began to conceptualize failure in broader terms. Objective orientations utilize pre-determined criteria for what constitutes “failure” and what does not. I began to conceptualize “failure” as the point at which juvenile offenders permanently lose the ability to progress in life.

I also noted that some clients returned to me after they returned from juvenile prison. I could not consider these juvenile offenders as “failures” because they had, in fact, made significant changes in their previous lifestyles. I began to wonder what it was about the dynamics of the relationship between these offenders and me that motivated them to return to discuss their successes. As I sought to answer this question, I noticed that this was a common occurrence with other juvenile offender counselors also. Each of us had a story about someone we had worked with who returned to tell the rest of his or her story.

It occurred to me that the reasons lie in the dynamic, elusive characteristics and processes of the relationship between the counselor and juvenile offender - characteristics

that could not be explained by observers, but needed to be explained by juvenile offenders themselves.

### *Assumptions*

The first assumption of this proposal is that a relationship exists between juvenile offenders and their counselors. Within the context of the counseling relationship, a quality exists that contributes to the success of the therapy. This success, in turn, contributes to the progress of the juvenile.

The second assumption is that most juvenile offenders are capable of participating in a counseling relationship. The ability of juveniles to appropriately express his/her perceptions of the relationship comes into question.

The third, and final, assumption is that, prior to this study, juvenile offenders were seldom asked about their perceptions of the relationship with their counselors. They have been viewed as objects identified as “juvenile offenders” rather than adolescents who have broken the law. As such, they have been viewed as observable objects rather than co-participants.

### *Research Questions*

Most research involving this population attempts to elucidate factors that contribute to delinquency and to reducing recidivism. Rarely does research involve the use of juvenile offenders’ opinions and perceptions. This research sought to understand the relationship between juvenile offenders and counselors from the perspectives of juvenile offenders so that their voices will be heard. The main research question was: *What are juvenile offenders’ perceptions of the counseling relationship?* Stemming from this are several sub-questions which will be explored: (a) *What are juveniles’*

*experiences in their counseling relationships?, (b) What essential elements emerge from juvenile offenders' perceptions of the counseling relationship?, (c) What characteristics and processes of a relationship are meaningful for juvenile offenders?, and (d) How does the counseling relationship contribute to improvements in juvenile offenders' behaviors?*

### *Significance of the Study*

Currently in both the literature on juvenile offender treatment and the counseling literature, little exists regarding the importance of the relationship between juvenile offenders and their counselors. A majority of literature involving juvenile offenders is dominated by those not grounded in counseling philosophy, namely criminologists, psychologists, and sociologists (Lipsey & Wilson, 1997). In addition, little exists in counseling literature about court-ordered clients (Riordan & Martin, 1993). The paucity of research involving juvenile offenders and counseling stresses the significance of this research. As previously noted, counseling is a field that is ideally suited for the dynamic inter- and intra-personal and environmental issues inherent in the juvenile offender population. This study integrated counseling philosophy into juvenile offender treatment. It also provided impetus for further research regarding the efficacy of counseling with this challenging population. Finally, and most importantly, this study allowed the voices of the juvenile offenders to be heard.

### *Implications for Counselors and Counselor Educators*

For counselors, development of a therapeutic relationship is an important part of the therapeutic process (Corey, 1991). This study provides counselors with a basis for understanding counseling relationships through the subjective experiences of juvenile offenders. With this information, counselors are able to develop more meaningful

relationships and more effective therapeutic processes with this challenging population. In addition, it is important for counselors to meet clients where they are (Rogers, 1961). Understanding the meanings of the relationships that counselors develop with offenders is crucial for successful therapeutic interventions. Finally, counselors can benefit from inculcating the ideal that learning functional behavior is a lifelong process. This process does not end with a singular event, such as incarceration.

For counselor educators, the implications are two-fold. First, inclusion of juvenile offender counseling as a content area for counselor training programs has been minimal although this is an area of critical need throughout the nation. This study highlighted the importance of applying the counseling philosophy to this population and including it as an employment option for newly ordained counselors entering the field. As such, counselor educators should include this specialty area as a selection for specialization within graduate programs. Second, this study demonstrated the need for further studies involving juvenile offenders and counselors. The complexities of the counseling relationship are magnified when viewed from both the perspective of the researcher and the perspective of the research participants.

#### *Design of the Study*

In order to discover the experiences and meanings of the relationship between juvenile offenders and their counselors, the phenomenological approach was used. Robertson (2000) asserted that the criterion that determines the use of any research is determined by the first purpose of that research. According to Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989), “phenomenological research is holistic and seeks to relate descriptions of specific experiences to each other and to the overall context of the life-world” (p. 137).



As such, phenomenological research is the most appropriate research design for understanding the subjective experiences of juvenile offenders' counseling relationships. Phenomenological approaches are good at making voices heard (Lester, 2002). Further, as noted by Souza and Do (1999), counselors believe "that the experience of our clients transcend any positivistic explanations from a scientific and objective perspective" (p.3). This philosophy reflects counselors' need to understand clients from the clients' perspective rather than from the positivist perspective. The client is more than the sum of his/her observable parts. This philosophical perspective is congruent with my own personal philosophy regarding understanding clients from a broader view rather than merely culminations of their observed behaviors and actions.

#### *Limitations*

According to Gay (1987), limitations refer to those factors that may negatively affect the generalizability of the results over which the researcher has no control. However, phenomenological research seeks to identify the phenomena of human experience rather than to generalize findings (Hycner, 1985). The first step in the process of analyzing phenomenological data is "bracketing" one's pre-assumptions (Oiler, 1981). This process allows the researcher to become aware of and attempt to place aside their pre-conceptions regarding the phenomena under study, particularly when the researcher knows a great deal about the topic. Limitations to this study included a bracketing process that would allow some of the researcher's pre-assumptions to enter into the thematic interpretation of the interview data.

Another limitation related to the communication ability of the population. That is, the researcher chose participants who were able to express their experiences regarding

their counseling relationship in a manner that facilitates understanding. This type of purposive sampling biased the sample by eliminating those offenders who were not able to vocalize their thoughts, experiences, and meanings appropriately.

### *Definition of Terms*

The following definitions apply to terms that are used within this proposal:

#### Criminal Justice system

The criminal justice system refers to a broad range of programs established and administered by law enforcement, juvenile court, and corrections entities for the purposes of holding offenders accountable and ensuring public safety.

#### Delinquency

Within the context of this study, delinquency refers to behaviors committed by adolescents that are unlawful. Although many juveniles commit delinquent acts, most do not enter into the juvenile justice system. Participants in this study were involved in the juvenile justice system.

#### Juvenile offender

A juvenile offender is a juvenile between the ages of 12 and 17 who has been adjudicated delinquent by a juvenile court. Characteristics of juvenile offenders are discussed in Chapter 2.

#### Phenomenological research

Mott (2002) described phenomenological research as “a specific research methodology that strives to portray phenomena from the personal and contextual perspectives of those who experience them” (p.2). The unique quality of this research

paradigm is its ability to express the experiences of those who have lived the phenomenon.

### Protective Factors

Protective factors are those factors that, collectively, reduce delinquent behaviors in juveniles (Howell, 1995). Protective factors counterbalance risk factors and overcome risk factors' influence in the development and maintenance of delinquent behaviors.

### Recidivism

As discussed by Rutter and Giller (1983), recidivism refers to a repeat offense where a juvenile offender commits a subsequent delinquent act after having been involved in the criminal justice system. In contrast, a first-time offender that does not re-offend is not a recidivist.

### Rehabilitative Treatment

Rehabilitation refers to the use of therapeutic interventions to encourage behavioral change in offenders so that offenders can become law-abiding citizens (Snarr, 1987). Snarr also noted that the term rehabilitation is a term associated with the medical model of delinquency. The medical model is based on examining the offender, making a diagnosis, performing treatment, and re-examining. For the purpose of this study, rehabilitation can be substituted with habilitation since many juvenile offenders did not learn appropriate, law-abiding behaviors at all.

### Risk Factors

Risk factors are factors that increase the likelihood that a juvenile will engage in delinquent behaviors (Howell, 1995). Multiple risk factors result in cumulative impacts that combine to create juveniles that are at a high risk to recidivate.

### *Organization of Dissertation*

This dissertation is not a traditional dissertation in that it contains six chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of the problem and a basis for implementation of the study. It also provides brief overviews of the assumptions, research question, significance of the study, implications for counselors and counselor educators, design of the study, and limitations.

Chapter 2 discusses a review of past and current literature regarding the characteristics of juvenile offenders, components of the relationship, and previous phenomenological research.

Chapter 3 presents the rationale for using the phenomenological research method, sampling procedures, research procedures, data collection and analysis, and any special considerations.

Chapter 4 presents brief detailed descriptions of the study participants and results of data collection and analysis.

Chapter 5 presents implications of the results including implications for counselors and counselor educators.

Chapter 6 provides a synopsis of the research and results for submission for publication.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

“I walk with delinquents, and, not surprisingly,  
I also run into myself constantly.”-William Ayers

As a preface to this literature review, two points must be made regarding methodological considerations of literature reviews. First, the purpose of a literature review is to demonstrate the contribution of the research topic to the current body of literature and to provide readers with a context based on related literature (Maxwell, 1996). As such, the literature review presents a context for the research thereby establishing theoretical groundwork for the study. Secondly, the proposed methodology for this research is the phenomenological method. A central tenant of phenomenological research is the process of discovering unknown aspects of a research phenomenon. In an effort to reduce contamination of the discovery process, it is recommended that researchers should set aside their assumptions about the events under study. To this end, Oiler (1982) recommended that the literature review be delayed until data has been collected.

However, in an effort to provide a contextual basis and applicability of this research methodology for the research question, this literature review provides information on aspects of juvenile offenders, the counseling relationship, and phenomenological research. As previously noted, the purpose of this research was to

capture the meanings and experiences juvenile offenders ascribe to the counseling relationship. The current body of knowledge concerning this specialized population focuses on pre-determined, objective measures of the quality of the counseling relationship. Further, counseling relationship outcomes are measured in terms of recidivism rather than on progress of the offender. The current research provides insight into the perceptions of juvenile offenders thereby allowing their voices to be heard above the din of juvenile justice professionals that focus solely on “rehabilitation”.

### *Historical Perspective*

Policies affecting juvenile offenders have dated as far back as 2270 B.C. when the Code of Hammurabi noted specific types of misconduct relating to youth (Cavan, 1962). Much later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the first legal definition of juvenile delinquency was formulated and the first juvenile court was established in Illinois in 1899. The first juvenile delinquency law, passed by the State of Illinois in 1899, specifies many exact kinds of delinquency in addition to the offenses covered by criminal laws (Cavan, 1962; Siegel & Senna, 2000). Development of the juvenile justice system was fueled by child reformers who believed it was the states’ responsibility to exercise guardianship over wayward youth (Albanese, 1993). In spite of the altruistic intentions of state courts in dealing with juvenile delinquency, Schwartz (1989) noted that in its ninety-nine year history juvenile court has demonstrated that “it is a highly idiosyncratic institution that is unable to guarantee that children receive adequate due process and procedural protections” (p. 164).

The division of responsibility between state and the federal governments has been clearly delineated. States typically have their own juvenile code governing juvenile

justice matters. The federal government's role is that of funding source and standards setter. It provides funding, in the form of grants aimed at addressing juvenile offender issues, and providing technical assistance (Legal Information Institute, 2002). For example, in 1968 Congress passed the Juvenile Delinquency Prevention and Control Act. This Act was later revised in 1972 and renamed the Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Act. The purpose of the Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Act is to assist states in providing preventative services to juveniles at risk of becoming delinquent, to help train individuals in occupations providing such services, and to provide technical assistance in the field of juvenile justice (Legal Information Institute). Further, the Juvenile Delinquency Act under the Code of Federal Regulations (2002) specifies the following:

The Congress hereby finds that-

(1) Juveniles account for almost half of the arrests for serious crimes in the United States in 1974 and for less than one-third of such arrests in 1983;...

(8) States and local communities which experience directly the devastating failures of the juvenile justice system do not presently have the sufficient technical expertise or adequate resources to deal comprehensively with the problems of juvenile delinquency;...

(12)(b) Congress finds further that the high incidence of delinquency in the United States today results in enormous annual cost and immeasurable loss of human life, personal security, and wasted human resources and that juvenile delinquency constitutes a growing threat to the national welfare requiring immediate and comprehensive action by the Federal Government to reduce and prevent delinquency.

Through its creation, evolution, and focus, the main goal of the juvenile justice system has philosophically been to rehabilitate youth rather than punish (Kadish, Glaser, Calhoun, & Risler, 1999). Critics of the juvenile justice system, however, assert that juvenile delinquency programming tends to follow the political zeitgeist rather than programs that have demonstrated efficacy. As a result, a large portion of tax dollars used to support juvenile justice is wasted (Schwartz, 1989).

Interactive and dynamic characteristics of juvenile offending have made this area prime ground for competing philosophical perspectives. In an effort to establish the etiology of juvenile delinquency, various disciplines have targeted their efforts at determining causal factors relating to delinquent behavior. Using a meta-analysis of 200 studies involving juvenile offenders, researchers found a majority of the studies were conducted by criminologists, psychologists, and sociologists (Lipsey & Wilson, 1997). Philosophical differences range from individual-based approaches to environmental-based approaches. The first noted attempt to discover the causes of criminal behavior was by an Italian physician named Cesare Lombroso in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Lombroso attempted to attribute anomalies on offenders' skulls with criminal behavior. He is also credited with being the patriarch of modern scientific criminology. For many years, criminologists have sought one factor in the individual's body or mind that would singularly account for delinquency and crime (Cavan, 1962; McCaghy & Capron, 1994). However, modern criminologists assert that most delinquents are not emotionally maladjusted. Conversely, it is estimated that merely 25 percent have emotional deficits (Kvaraceus, 1959). Social and cultural factors cause delinquent behavior in the remaining 75 % of juvenile delinquents (Cavan, 1962; Rutter & Giller, 1983). Although criminologists have varied in their theoretical approaches to the etiology of criminal behavior throughout the years, they are seldom involved in the hands-on treatment of this population.

Another discipline concerned with delinquent behavior is psychiatry. Similar to the philosophy of criminology, the underlying philosophy of psychiatry is that delinquency and other non-normal behavior is regarded as a symptom of the underlying



maladjustment within the individual (Cavan, 1962; Meissner, 1980). Medical approaches to delinquency focus on diagnosing and treating individuals and do not account for the social influences affecting delinquent behavior (Conrad, 1996). It has been further noted by Conrad that by defining behavior as a medical problem or illness, the medical profession can mandate and license the medical profession to provide treatment for it. The medical community isolates the problem where they restrict those who can “treat” it. As related to delinquency, Kipnis (1999) noted two-thirds of all juvenile psychiatric hospital inpatients today are committed for conduct disorder or oppositional-defiant disorder (ODD). Once in treatment, however, many of these ODD boys do not exhibit the behaviors for which they were admitted. Another criticism of labeling juvenile offenders is that too often therapists use the latest treatment technique for the assessed the “disorder” without considering the juvenile’s perception of the problem (Edgette, 1999). This myopic view diminishes the importance of the client’s subjective experience in therapy. Kipnis added that the dramatic increase in labeling boys as mentally ill is due largely to mental health professionals attempting to make more money. Whether due to medical isolationism or fiduciary gain, it is clear that psychiatry fails to focus on both developmental and environmental factors.

Clinical psychology entered the field of delinquency as focus shifted from mental defectiveness to biologically based personality disorders as a single cause for delinquent behavior (Cavan, 1962; McCaghy & Capron, 1994). Forensic psychology is the field of psychology that interfaces with the law (Franklin, 2001). Forensic services involve providing psychological evaluations and consultations to the legal system. In contrast to the psychological philosophy of delinquent behavior, standardized testing determined that

more than half of delinquents do not have pathological or maladjusted personalities (Baker, 1991; Cavan, 1962). Ballie (2001) noted that psychologists are “trained to critically evaluate information and research. This ability to look at and evaluate data and information is a central tenet of psychology. This skill is learned and applied to the understanding of human behavior.”

With juvenile offenders, however, in addition to individual behaviors, parental factors and socialization play pivotal roles in juvenile delinquency (Quinn, Sutphen, Michaels, & Gale, 1994). Focusing on merely observable behaviors without investigating the impact of other influences restricts the understanding of delinquency.

A growing discipline in the field of juvenile delinquency is criminal social work. Saleebey (1992) stressed the importance of social workers focusing on clinical practice based on treatment of problems and deficits. In addition, social workers focus on interaction with society as reciprocal causes for delinquency (van Wormer, 1999). Educationally, most social work curricula focus on the adverse affects of environmental conditions on clients (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2002). As an illustration of the underlying philosophy of social work, a study by Wakefield, Kirk, Pottick, and Hsieh (1999) revealed that most social work students judged that youths’ behavior was attributed to problematic environmental conditions rather than a mental health disorder. Thus, it appears the philosophical constructs of social work tend to place responsibility for delinquent behavior on poor environmental conditions and personality deficits – conditions that externalize client responsibility.

An alternative to this approach is the holistic philosophy used by counseling programs. According to the ACA (2002), counselor education programs focus “entirely

on the knowledge and skills needed to engage in an effective counseling relationship with individuals and groups.”

A newly emerging philosophical approach is entering the field of juvenile delinquency – juvenile offender counseling. Although little exists in counseling literature about court-ordered clients (Riordan & Martin, 1993), counseling philosophy is ideally suited to the treatment of juvenile offenders because it espouses a professional obligation to society and individuals to facilitate the development of character, virtue, and integrity (Dokecki, 1996). Contrary to medical models, problem/deficit orientations, and environment-based deficits, counseling philosophy encompasses individual characteristics and societal influences. Further, a major objective of a counseling program for delinquent youth is to encourage the development of a satisfying sense of identity and the ability to function effectively in interpersonal relationships (Lewis, 1989). Counseling philosophy represents a greater emphasis on a holistic approach in conceptualizing juvenile delinquency.

#### *Characteristics of Juvenile Offenders*

In a majority of the literature, juvenile offenders have been conceptualized as a deviant subculture of adolescent society. As a result, juvenile offenders have become a marginalized part of an already marginal population. Juvenile offenders represent a very small subset of the adolescent population. Statistically, juvenile offenders represent only 5% of the adolescent population (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1993). However, they have shown to have significant character differences from “normal” adolescents.

Research has attempted to illuminate the causes and correlates of delinquency in hopes that delinquency development and continuation can be reduced. Generally, the

literature (e.g. Goldstein & Huff, 1993; Siegal & Senna, 2000; Rutter & Giller, 1983) shows that juvenile offenders differ from normal adolescents in a variety of characteristics. To facilitate understanding of these characteristics, they are categorized as family, neighborhood, peers, school, intrapersonal characteristics, and mental illness domains.

### *Family*

The family is often considered to be a prime area for exercising social control over adolescents (Nye, 1994). Within the context of the family, parents are viewed as having the responsibility to develop children's self-concept, values, personality, social skills, and appreciation for themselves (Rojek & Jensen, 1996). The family is also where children mirror their parents' behaviors, and seek and receive nurturance (Cavan, 1962; van Voorhis, Braswell, & Lester, 1997). As an illustration, poor parenting skills were found to be related to higher levels of delinquency and drug use (Rojek & Jensen).

Family instability has also been found to be a characteristic of families of delinquent youth. Thornberry, Smith, Rivera, Huizinga, and Stouthamer-Loeber (1999) found a consistent relationship between a greater number of family transitions (family instability) and a higher level of delinquency and drug use. Further, delinquents were found to come from a higher proportion of single-parent households than non-delinquents (Cavan, 1962; Siegel & Senna, 2000).

Not only does the family impact delinquent behavior, delinquent behavior weighs heavily on the family. Ambert (1999) found that delinquent adolescent behavior is linked to complications and stressors in parental lives. This demonstrates the inverse impact of delinquent behavior on the family.

### *Peers*

Juvenile offenders tend to gravitate to negative peers. In a meta-analysis of longitudinal studies on the development of anti-social behavior, involvement with antisocial peers was found to be one of the strongest predictors of adolescent offending (Lipsey & Derzon, 1997). Rosenberger (1990) found that juvenile offenders tend to utilize peer relationships to form quasi-parental couples. He speculated that the purpose of these relationships were to compensate for the lack of the parental relationship. Further, in a challenge to traditional thought about child and adolescent personality development, Harris (1998) asserted that peer influences account for most of personality development in youth, including the development of criminal behaviors. Regarding delinquency, Harris stated, "Delinquency is not, by and large, something kids do on their own: it is something they do with their friends" (p. 294). This point illustrates the inherent strength of peer influences on the development and maintenance of delinquent behaviors in adolescence.

### *School*

Although some research has noted that school problems are not specifically indicative of delinquent behavior (Huizinga, Loeber, Thornberry, & Cothorn, 2000), the percent of juveniles with educational difficulties is four to five times greater in juvenile delinquents than in adolescents in general (Siegel & Sienna, 2000; Wood, 1987). In fact, school failure is a stronger predictor of delinquency than interpersonal variables (Siegel & Sienna).

### *Intrapersonal*

Intrapersonal characteristics of juvenile offenders are those factors inside of the offender that are related to delinquent behavior. A number of studies have demonstrated an array of intrapersonal characteristics of juvenile offenders. Hyperactivity, attention deficits, concentration problems, risk taking, restlessness, and aggressiveness were all found to be characteristics of juvenile offenders (Glueck & Glueck, in Rojek & Jensen, 1982; Hawkins, Herrenkohl, Farrington, Brewer, Catalano, Harachi, & Cothorn, 2000). Although Lewis (1989) asserted that delinquents suffer from low self-esteem, low self-esteem does not increase either associations with delinquent peers or delinquent behavior (Jang & Thornberry, 1998).

### *Mental Illness*

In addition to the host of other characteristics, literature has shown a connection between delinquency and mental illness. According to Coccozza and Skowyra (2000), most youth in the juvenile justice system qualify for at least one diagnosis. Two of the most common diagnoses of childhood are oppositional-defiant disorder and conduct disorder. Oppositional-defiant disorder and conduct disorder are strong indicators of difficulty with those in authority (Cavanaugh, Licamele, Ovide, & Star, 1997). According to the American Psychiatric Association ([APA], 1994), oppositional-defiant disorder is typically a precursor for the development of conduct disorder. Further, children diagnosed with conduct disorder frequently develop antisocial personality disorder as adults (APA, 1994; Little & Robinson, 1997).

Regarding emotional disorders, a study by Pliszka, Sherman, Barrow, and Irick (2000) found that 20% of children in a juvenile detention center met criteria for an

affective disorder. Pliszka, et al. found that juveniles who were previously hospitalized for an affective disorder were more likely to have criminal records than matched control groups.

Discussion of these characteristics merely provides a snapshot of juvenile offender characteristics. It is important to note, however, that no single characteristic has been identified as a predictor of delinquency (Quinn, Sutphen, Michaels, & Gale, 1994). It is the cumulative effect of these characteristics on juveniles significantly impacts their ability to follow a straight course.

Several attempts have been made to develop in-depth profiles of juvenile offenders. For example, Quinn, et al. (1994) found that delinquency is caused by a combination of social characteristics, poor child-rearing practices and parental supervision. In a meta-analysis Lipsey and Derzon (1997) extracted several factors associated with delinquent behavior. These factors, male gender, low family socioeconomic status, antisocial parents, aggressive behaviors, school attitudes and performance, various psychological conditions, parent-child relations, and physical violence can predict behaviors according to Lipsey and Derzon. Similarly, in an attempt to create a profile of typical juvenile offenders, Cottle (1998) built a profile of Massachusetts delinquents as being 16 years old, white, school dropout, 5<sup>th</sup> grade literacy, alcohol user, marijuana user, and a history of some type of abuse. These attempts to establish profiles of juvenile offenders provide a macro-view of this population. However, the subtle aspects of juvenile offender characteristics remain elusive.

From this literature review, it is clear that the characteristics of juvenile offenders are difficult, at best, to define. Factors associated with juvenile offending are interactive and cumulative. As a result, juvenile justice professionals have attempted to delineate a conceptual approach to juvenile delinquency that uses these factors to predict the likelihood of delinquent behavior in adolescents. In the next section, I discuss components known to be significant predictors of juvenile delinquency.

### *Risk and Protective Factors*

Over the last three decades, research has identified factors that are precursors of delinquent behavior, known as risk factors, and factors that lessen the effects of risk and reduce the development of delinquent behaviors, known as protective factors (Howell, 1995). The importance of these factors is that they allow counselors to develop both prevention and treatment programs that facilitate early identification and treatment of potential career juvenile offenders. For the purpose of this literature review, delineation of these factors serves to establish a continuum of adolescents whereby adolescent offenders are seen as one aspect of a spectrum of adolescent problem behaviors.

According to Kazdin (1996), risk factors are those factors that increase adolescents' likelihood to engage in delinquent behavior. Compas, Hinden, and Gerhardt (1995) defined risk factors as, "characteristics of a person or environment associated with an increased probability of developing maladaptive outcomes." (p 274) In addition, the combined impact of multiple risk factors becomes greater and increases juveniles' risk for delinquency (Farrington, Loeber, & Van Kammen, 1990; Howell, 1995). According to Howell, risk factors are divided into four areas; community factors, family factors, school factors, and individual/peer factors.



Community risk factors are risk factors in communities. They include availability of drugs, availability of firearms, community norms toward illegal behavior, media portrayal of violence, and community instability.

Family risk factors include family history of illegal behaviors, family conflict, family instability, and parental attitudes favorable toward illegal behaviors.

Factors in the school risk factor category are early and persistent acting out in school, early academic failure, poor commitment to school including truancy and excessive tardiness.

Individual/peer risk factors include rebelliousness, difficulty with authority figures, association with delinquent peers, antisocial attitudes, early development of delinquent behaviors, and interpersonal factors that cause delinquent peers to gravitate toward each other and engage in delinquent activities.

Conversely, protective factors insulate juvenile offenders from engaging in delinquent behaviors. These factors counteract the forces of risk factors and reduce the impact of risk factors (Compas, et al., 1995). Protective factors can be placed into three categories: individual protective factors, interpersonal risk factors, and institutional protective factors (Steinberg, 1991).

Individual protective factors include female gender, positive performance in school, a positive orientation toward others, an ability to relate well to others, good problem-solving skills, and a resilient approach to problem situations. Interpersonal protective factors include the ability to form positive relationships with others, having at least one significant relationship with another person, and bonding with family members, association with positive peer groups, and involvement and attachment to one's

community. Institutional protective factors include a sense of bonding to schools, communities, and other social institutions, and acceptance of societal values and expectations of behavior.

The forces of risk and protective factors work simultaneously to either increase or decrease adolescents' propensity toward delinquency. The effects of multiple risk factors increase the level of juveniles' risk (Howell, 1995). For those adolescents who engage in delinquent behavior, the cumulative negative effect of risk factors outweighs the positive effect of protective factors. The result is that juveniles become more susceptible to the forces that pull them toward delinquent behaviors.

In discussing risk and protective factors, it is important to note that a majority of risk and protective factors relate to the ability to develop and maintain positive relationships with others, with school, and with society. The importance of relationships is certain - the lack of significant relationships and the inability to develop such relationships is strongly linked to future delinquent behaviors (Rutter & Giller, 1983). Application of this concept in counseling juvenile offenders means that counselors must build adolescents' abilities to develop positive relationships and build strong bonds to families, communities, and schools as some of the most effective ways to reduce risk (Howell, 1995).

### *Cognitive Development*

Cognitive development differs between juvenile offenders and the general adolescent population. The importance of discussing cognitive differences within the scope of this literature review is that any qualitative research involving juvenile offenders requires special attention to the subjects' ability to comprehend and communicate

abstract concepts of the interviews. As a framework for discussing cognitive development of adolescents, a brief overview of Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development is presented.

As adapted from Rogers (1982), Piaget's theory proposed four stages. These stages are presented below:

Stage 1: Sensorimotor stage. This stage encompasses birth to two years of age. It involves six sub-stages that outline infants' development of sensory development and motor coordination.

Stage 2: Preoperational stage. This stage extends from two to seven years of age. It involves two sub-stages: the preconceptual stage (age 2 to 4) and the intuitive stage (age 4 to 7). In these stages, children are self-centered, egocentric, and limited in their abilities to related to the reality of the world. Inanimate objects are given human qualities and children begin to reorganize their previous ways of looking at the world.

Stage 3: Concrete operations: This stage covers ages 7 to 11 and involves children's ability to apply classifications to objects and events. Children are able to classify objects but have difficulty in thinking about them in abstract ways. They are able to use logic and reasoning in a very elementary way.

Stage 4: Formal operations: Children in this stage are between the ages of 11 and 15. Characteristics of this stage are that children use abstract thinking and conceptualization. They are able to consider the governance of laws and how to abstractly manipulate objects.

Not only is Piaget's theory important to the understanding of adolescent behavior, it is critical to understanding juvenile offenders. As a whole, juvenile offenders operate

in the concrete operations stage of cognitive development. Their thinking tends to be concrete and, they often have difficulty grasping universal concepts such as laws, societal norms, contingency planning, and alternative development and critical thinking.

Environmental stimulation has a significant impact on cognitive development. As an interesting testament to the impact of the environment on juvenile offender cognitive development, Lester and van Voorhis (1997) stated,

If our learning environment affords the experience to make such developmental progressions, we could be considered 'more skilled' than one who continues to engage in absolute, concrete forms of reasoning, where answers are either yes or no, problems are viewed from single rather than multiple perspectives, one's capacity to understand the perspectives of others is seriously constrained, and where moral decisions depend solely on concerns for external rewards or punishments. (p. 178)

It is due to this lack of development that many adolescents become juvenile offenders.

Further, juvenile offenders develop and maintain cognitive distortions (Gibbs, 1993).

These cognitive distortions are product of egocentric cognitions and coping mechanisms developed to deal with challenging environmental and interpersonal stressors.

#### *Ability to Form Relationships*

As discussed in the previous section on risk factors, juvenile offenders have difficulty establishing and maintaining relationships. Similarly, juvenile offenders have difficulties in establishing and maintaining counseling relationships. As a result, juvenile offender counselors are faced with a daunting challenge to develop relationships with clients that have historically had problems developing interpersonal relationships. The difficulty is magnified by the lack of current literature on juvenile offenders and relationships.

Researchers (Goodman, 1991; Hirschi, 1994; Horne, 1993, Lerman, 1968; & Lewis, 1989) who have attempted to ascertain the etiology of poor relationship skills in juvenile offenders have identified a common thread-the family. One such theory, known as Attachment Theory, postulated that offenders' difficulty in establishing relationships is rooted in early infancy. As noted by Hirschi, the process of alienation from others begins with a lack of attachment to a parental figure. He hypothesized that attachment begins in infancy and is rooted in positive relationships with parents. Hirschi also stated, "Insofar as the child respects (loves and fears) his parents, and adults in general, he will accept their rules. Conversely, insofar as this respect is undermined, the rules will tend to lose their obligatory character" (p. 260). This theory supports the connection between delinquent behavior (non-acceptance of societal rules) and the lack of attachment to parents.

Goodman (1991) noted that the parents of sociopaths have a tendency to be cold toward their children. Goodman described coldness as non-nurturing, non-accepting, distant, and uncaring. As a result of growing up with no significant relationships, children learn to have distant relationships. This extends into the relationship with society in general.

From a social learning perspective, children who are raised in such non-nurturing families do not learn adequate social skills (Lewis, 1989). Lewis contended that children are raised in families where they are not taught acceptable ways of getting their basic physiological and psychological needs met. Psychological needs are described as love, consistency, predictability, structure, and the need for new experiences. The impact of the family is crucial to the development of relationship skills.

As children age become adolescents, they gravitate toward peers that share common values (Lerman, 1968). In his study of elements of a delinquent subculture, Lerman found that youth's who are attracted to deviant values are more likely to seek out peers who share the attraction. Similarly, Horne (1993) posited that children who have poor bonding with parents and engage in delinquent behaviors fail to develop appropriate social skills. The result is rejection by appropriate non-delinquent peers and acceptance by delinquent peers. Thus, the connection between early childhood development within the context of the family, rejection by non-delinquent peers, and acceptance by delinquent peers becomes clear.

### *Therapeutic Interventions*

Juvenile delinquency has been the focus of a variety of therapeutic interventions. Treatment interventions have attempted to address the causative factors of delinquency. In addition to the traditional therapeutic approaches such as psychoanalysis, behavioral, social-learning, and cognitive therapies, and various combinations of these, treatment of juvenile offenders has evolved into specialized treatment approaches. These approaches are research-based and account for offenders' unique needs and characteristics. The most prominent interventions are discussed further below.

The most current effective treatment interventions for juvenile offenders involve cognitive-behavioral and behavioral based approaches. These include Reasoning and Rehabilitation (R&R), Aggression Replacement Training (ART), Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT), and Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST).

The Reasoning and Rehabilitation Program (Ross & Fabiano, 1985) is a cognitive-based program that is multi-modal in its approach. This skills-acquisition

intervention focused on social skills, problem solving, alternative thinking, anger management, and critical thinking. Research has shown effectiveness in reducing recidivism with both adult offenders (Ross, Fabiano, & Ewles, 1988) and juveniles (Ross, Fabiano, & Diemer-Ewles, 1986). Reasoning and Rehabilitation does not include an affective component and, therefore, does not consider the development of a relationship as a primary goal of the intervention. This program is designed to be administered by anyone who receives training on the R&R model.

Aggression Replacement Training (Glick & Goldstein, 1987) uses both cognitive-behavioral and behavioral interventions. In recognition of the risk factors associated with juvenile delinquency, interventions address deficits in social, problem solving, and anger control. In addition, ART recognizes the low level of moral development among adolescent offenders and, as a result, provide moral education as part of the intervention model. Although treatment outcomes have shown to improve with ART, variance was found between offenders with lesser offenses and those with more serious offenses (Glick & Goldstein) in Goldstein and Huff (1993).

Another cognitive-behavioral intervention model, Moral Reconciliation Therapy, was initially developed for drug-using clients at federal prisons. The design of this approach is to encourage participants to progress through sequential stages of self-development. The stages reflect levels of moral development while addressing resistance, defense mechanisms, identity issues, peer acceptance, and self-assessment. Research has demonstrated the applicability of MRT in both institutional settings (Little & Robinson, 1989) and teenage drinkers (Little, Robinson, & Burnette, 1990). It was also found to reduce recidivism of juvenile offenders (Lasater & Robinson, 2001).

However, a central tenant of MRT is that juveniles selected for participation must have a serious legal history or propensity for serious legal history. As a result, this intervention is not effective with lower to moderate level juvenile offenders.

The Multi-Systemic Therapy model (Henggeler & Borduin, 1990) is a cognitive-behavioral skills training intervention that focuses on the social-ecological view of delinquent behavior (Blanchard, 2000). Treatment interventions are tailored to the individual needs of the client. Interventions involve multiple disciplines and multiple entities engaged in the process of rehabilitating the juvenile offender. The key to the effectiveness of MST is the focus on individualized interventions involving multiple environmental settings. MST has demonstrated effectiveness with at-risk populations through empirical research (Borduin, Mann, Cone, Henggeler, Fucci, Blaske, & Williams, 1995).

These interventions are cognitive-behavioral and multiple-focused approaches. Empirical research has demonstrated their effectiveness at reducing recidivism. An interesting point to mention is that none of these approaches focus on the effectiveness of the therapeutic relationship as a means at reducing recidivism. In fact, Gendreau (1996) noted characteristics of ineffective juvenile offender treatment as programs that emphasize: (1) “talking” cures, (2) good relationship with the client as a primary goal, (3) gaining insight, (4) fostering positive self-regard, (5) self-actualization through self-discovery, (6) externalizing blame to parents, society, and (7) ventilating anger. Although contrary to the notion that the central component of counseling is the relationship, it appears that the successes of these treatment models support Gendreau’s assertion.



In spite of conclusions obtained by empirical evidence regarding juvenile offender treatment, the therapeutic relationship has been the central component of several widely used therapeutic models. Models such as Choice Theory (Glasser, 1998), Reality therapy (Wubbolding & Brickell, 1999), and Filial Therapy (Ginsberg, 1997) are examples of approaches that have documented evidence of the effectiveness of the therapeutic relationship. These results provide an interesting challenge to cognitive-behavioral models that deny the inherent power of the therapeutic relationship.

A possible explanation for the outcome differences between cognitive-behavioral models and therapeutic relationship models may lie in the choice of outcome measures. While most juvenile offender treatment focuses on recidivism as the outcome variable, effectiveness of other models of therapy is measured in terms of interactions with others and interpersonal improvements. Implications of this for juvenile offender counseling is that recidivism as an outcome measure may be inappropriate. It may be more appropriate to measure juvenile offenders' movement toward non-delinquent characteristics rather than whether the juvenile was rearrested. To this end, the measure of effectiveness would not be recidivism, but rather the ability of the juvenile to develop and maintain effective social relationships.

In summary, cognitive-behavioral treatment interventions for juvenile offenders have empirically demonstrated effectiveness. In contrast to therapeutic approaches for non-delinquents, these approaches deny the importance of the therapeutic relationship. However, current juvenile offender treatment may lack an appropriate measurement criterion. As a result, programs that actually change the lives of offenders, but do not significantly reduce recidivism are viewed as ineffective.

*Counseling Relationship*

The term “relationship” is often difficult to define. Crittenden (1988) stated that a relationship is a common construct that occurs in a series of interactions between people. Relationships have no physical characteristics and, therefore, are not able to be observed. He asserted the importance of distinguishing between behaviors specific to an interaction and aspects of the interaction that are part of the relationship between the people involved. The implication of Crittenden’s assertion is that quantitative studies that attempt to define characteristics of the relationship may miss important qualities of the relationship.

With respect to therapeutic relationships, Rogers (1961) defined the helping relationship as one in which at least one of the individuals in the relationship has the goal of recognizing, developing, and using hidden inner resources of one the individuals. This view reflects the abstract qualities in the previous definition. Carkhuff and Berenson (1977) also discussed the utility of the dimensions of human relationships using a variety of theoretical approaches: client centered, existential, psychoanalytic, trait-and-factor, and behavior modification. The inherent power of the relationship was an essential component in each approach discussed.

The counseling relationship has been the foundation on which therapists build effective interventions with clients. As van Wormer (1999) noted, the treatment relationship is extremely powerful for changing thoughts and behaviors and is the center of potential change in clients. As a result of the critical effect of the therapeutic relationship, those engaging in therapeutic relationships with clients benefit from knowing the conditions in which therapeutic change occurs (Crittenden, 1988).

Further, the father of client-centered therapy, Carl Rogers (1961) discussed the importance of the therapeutic relationship as central for change in clients. Rogers asserted that regardless of the therapeutic method used, in his experience, these methods were inadequate because they did not focus on relationships. Further, Rogers noted, “change appears to come about through experience in a relationship.” (p. 33) As I discuss below, this research was aimed at discovering the experience of the therapeutic relationship.

Development of an effective therapeutic relationship consists simply of interactions between a counselor and a client. According to Carkhuff (1969) characteristics of effective therapeutic relationships can be divided into two aspects- counselor characteristics and client characteristics. As an illustration of these two aspects, Carkhuff developed a model of the therapeutic relationship. This model, known as Human Technology, objectified the nebulous characteristics of the therapeutic relationship. A central tenant of this model is that therapeutic relationships consist of a helper, the counselor, and a helpee, the client. The helper assists the helpee move through exploration, understanding, and action (Aspy, et al., 2000). Carkhuff’s model focused on specific training for helpers to facilitate a climate conducive to an effective therapeutic relationship. Training for helpers included developing skill areas (attending and observing, developing and maintaining a facilitative environment, listening, responding, understanding and action). Carkhuff demonstrated the importance of the counselor in the development, facilitation, and maintenance of the therapeutic relationship.

According to the Carkhuff model, the other component of the therapeutic relationship is the client. Clients possess characteristics that affect the timbre of the therapeutic relationship. In general, client characteristics conducive to a therapeutic relationship are that they accept the therapist, agree with the therapist on a common goal for therapy, and believe in therapeutic change. One characteristic, though not specifically noted by the literature on client characteristics, is the ability to bond with others in significant ways. Proponents of Attachment Theory assert that the key to relationships is the ability to bond with significant other. Bonding occurs in the early stages of childhood, usually in infancy. Fraiberg (1979) categorized the lack of opportunities for emotional bonding in infancy as a disorder of attachment. Results of attachment deprivation are retarded development in interpersonal relationships, cognitive functioning, impulse control, and aggression regulation. Each of these results is known to be linked with the development of juvenile delinquency. Further, authors (Cavan, 1962; Siegel & Senna, 2000) supported the importance of family relationships by pointing out that parental attitudes such as neglect, indifference, hostility and rejection are closely associated with delinquent behavior. Along the same vein, the Carnegie Council for Adolescent Development (1995) noted that many adolescents live in areas of concentrated poverty and within these areas there is a crucial lack of a close relationship with a dependable adult. As a result these adolescents become at-risk for the development of problem behaviors.

Another concern regarding lack of bonding, as noted by Nye (1994), is that children do not accept the teachings of their parents if there is no significant bond with

them. Hence, there is a lack of conscience formation, which is a characteristic most commonly associated with delinquent behavior.

The impact of conscience formation on delinquent behavior was demonstrated in a study by Nye (1994). Nye performed case studies in an attempt to demonstrate the effect of social control on college students. Nye found that students' affection for their parents played a major role in their control of deviant behaviors. In specific, college students stated that they did not engage in delinquent behavior because they did not want to embarrass or disappoint their parents. Such decision-making illustrates the importance of an affectional bond in the development of young adults' consciences.

Another client characteristic affecting the therapeutic relationship relates to juvenile offenders. Counseling that focuses on the therapeutic relationship presents a unique paradox. Juvenile offenders typically enter counseling as part of a court-mandated agreement. The development of a therapeutic relationship within the context of legally mandated attendance can be challenging (van Wormer, 1999). Commonly used tenants of therapeutic relationship development apply in a limited way. As a result, establishment of a therapeutic relationship may involve atypical approaches.

In spite of the simplistic approach used by Carkhuff (1969) that described components of the therapeutic relationship as consisting of counselor characteristics and client characteristics, another component of the counseling relationship exists – the process of the counseling relationship. The process involved in the counseling relationship has received little attention in the literature. The proposed research is aimed at describing the process involved in the counseling relationship.

The effective establishment of the therapeutic relationship involves characteristics of both the counselor and counselee and the processes involved in the development and maintenance of the counseling relationship. For juvenile offenders, the therapeutic effectiveness of the relationship is affected by the counselors' ability to engage the juvenile in a therapeutic relationship and the juveniles' ability to form such a relationship. In spite of these assertions, there have been mixed views regarding the effectiveness of the therapeutic relationship with juvenile offenders.

Several authors asserted that relationship-based, client-centered, individualized approach treatment programs for juvenile offenders have shown to be ineffective (Brestan & Eyberg, 1998; Gendreau & Goggin, 1997; Lipsey & Wilson, 1997). Conversely, Gelso and Carter (1985) countered these assertions by stating that the client-counselor relationship plays a vital role in treatment. In support of Gelso and Carter, numerous studies have identified the link between positive client-counselor relationships and positive outcomes for juvenile offenders. Florsheim, Shotorbani, Guest-Warnick, Barratt, & Hwang (2000) found a positive relationship between a positive therapeutic working alliance and lower recidivism. In a study by Richards and Sullivan (1996), results showed that psychotherapy was effective in producing positive attitudinal changes including interpersonal perception, self-observation, and consideration for others. Furthermore, a review of literature by Gendreau (1996) in Koons, Burrow, Morash, and Bynum (1997), revealed that one of the principles of effective interventions with offenders is "relationships between therapist and offenders that are interpersonally responsive and constructive" (p. 516). With respect to female delinquents, Peters (2001) noted that the development and support of positive relationships with female delinquents

is a critical role for those in the juvenile justice system. Further, Peters asserted that counselors working with delinquent youth serve as role models for developing healthy relationships. Finally, in support of the ability of the therapist to affect real change in delinquent clients, Edgette (1999), supported by Rogers (1961), stated,

I've found that the most effective therapeutic approach with teenagers is neither authoritarianism nor spinelessness, but rather a no-strings-attached, robust platform of concern that allows us to influence our adolescent clients via the only real power we have-our authenticity. (p. 56)

With regard to research that views counseling relationships from perspectives of clients, the study most closely related to the current study was performed by Heine (1950). Heine studied individuals who had undergone therapy with therapists of various clinical orientations. Regardless of the type of orientation of the therapist, clients reported common elements of trust, understanding, and the ability to make choices and decisions. In effect, a central theme in their progress was the quality of the relationship with the therapist.

Another issue relating to the counseling relationship relates to the ability to effectively measure the counseling relationship. Several authors (Crittenden, 1988; Gardner, 1967; Rojek & Jensen, 1996) have cited the difficulty of measuring relationships. Gardner, in Carkhuff and Berenson, (1977, p. 288) noted the absence of precise definitions of relationships makes it difficult to ascertain what a "good relationship" is. Crittenden asserted that relationships are best assessed in dyadic situations to eliminate environmental influences and variations and the need to consider qualitative differences in relationships as opposed to the strength of the relationship.

In spite of these difficulties, however, various studies (Carkhuff, 1969; Gelso & Carter, 1994) have attempted to define characteristics of relationships through the use of

empirical, quantitative research. Gelso and Carter discussed three components of the therapeutic relationship; working alliance, transference configuration, and the real relationship. They noted the real relationship is the most neglected and least understood of the three components. With respect to measurement, Gelso and Carter questioned the possibility of empirically discriminating one element from another as they are interrelated and operate simultaneously.

Carkhuff (1969) developed a five-point scale used to assess the core dimensions for counseling relationships relating to both the helper (counselor) and the helpee (client). Carkhuff noted that counseling is a highly subjective experience. Development of these scales is based on an attempt to assess the levels relationship dimensions. Helper dimensions are empathy, genuineness, respect, and concreteness; helpee dimensions are exploration, understanding, and action. However, these dimensions are based on quantitative, observable behaviors rather than qualitative aspects of a therapeutic relationship.

Another difficulty in defining relationship components is that relationships are often difficult to define and are contextually based. For example, Henderson (1981) discussed measurement difficulties with families. Henderson observed that families interact at different levels simultaneously; observable acts, that can be recorded by the outsider, and continuing relationships among members, including emotions, affective bonds, expectations, and the interpretations they make of each others' behaviors. The result of these simultaneous levels of interaction, relationships between members of a family are difficult to observe and quantify. Further, the difficulty in quantifying human



behavior is that it is “clouded in web of complex social relationships that produces blurred images and endless measurement errors” (Rojek & Jensen, 1996, p. 99).

As a result of the difficulties in assessing aspects of relationships, Crittenden (1988) stressed the need to investigate additional ways in which relationships can be assessed especially with special populations.

### *Phenomenological Research*

The quantitative-based attempts of researchers to assess the elusive characteristics of the therapeutic relationship led to the use of alternative methodologies. Qualitative-based methodologies offer the best approaches in identifying the subjective aspects of the relationship (Lester, 2002). In particular, the phenomenological approach is uniquely qualified to assess these difficult-to-define characteristics through the experiences and meanings which clients assign (Moustakas, 1994).

Souza and Do (1999) defined phenomenology as, “the study of the world as we immediately experience it; pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it”. As such, phenomenological methods provide an unbiased view of relationships. This is particularly helpful when utilized to discover meanings and experiences of the marginalized population of juvenile offenders—a population that carries the weight of misconceptions and preconceived notions.

From an epistemological point of view, phenomenological approaches focus on participants’ interpretation of events and allow researchers to gain insight into participants’ motivation and actions (Lester, 2002). As applied to the population of juvenile offenders, use of the phenomenological approach can create an understanding of the counseling relationship from the perspective of the juvenile offender rather than from

the perspective of others looking in. In effect, the phenomenological research methodology allowed the voices of juvenile offenders to be heard (Lester, 2002).

### *Previous Research*

Qualitative studies, in general, have facilitated an understanding of juveniles, juvenile offenders, and the importance of counseling relationships. Qualitative studies have been performed assessing students' assessment of teachers (Teenage Research Unlimited, 1999), the decision-making of adolescent drug users (Boys, Fountain, Griffiths, Stillwell, & Strang, 1999), and dating relationships and aggression (Lavoie, Robitaille, & Hebert, 2000).

Specific to adolescent offenders, recent qualitative studies have focused on juvenile offenders' attitudes toward police (Guarino-Ghezzi & Carr, 1996), juvenile offenders' perceptions of their delinquent behaviors (Lopez & Emmer, 2000), relationships between difficult adolescents and their parents (Ambert, 1997b) as cited in Stern and Smith, (1999), the relationship between delinquent girls and their mothers (Smith & Kerpelman, 2002). In addition, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) sponsored qualitative research on female offenders' relationships with themselves, their families, peers, and teachers (OJJDP, 2001).

Phenomenological research, in specific, has grown in popularity in various fields of research (Kerlin, 2000). These studies have demonstrated the value of qualitative designs, particularly phenomenological studies. Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of phenomenology in discovering meanings and experiences of specialized populations.

The following studies demonstrate the effectiveness of phenomenological research methodology in reaching into participants' experiences and meanings. Findings obtained reach beyond those obtained by quantitative methodologies by providing a depth of experiences. However, participant groups in these studies did not include juvenile offenders.

Conceicao-Runlee (2001) performed a phenomenological study exploring the online teaching experiences of college faculty in the absence of a physical presence. The findings of the research showed the faculty perceived the work to be intensive, yet rewarding.

Lee (1999) performed a phenomenological study on the role of cultural values in interpreting significant life experiences as perceived by Taiwanese Chinese. Findings involved cultural values affecting interpretation, the process involved in interpreting life experiences, and the role of cultural value in the process of interpretation. Lee noted that a phenomenological study design was considered the most suitable for this study because it not only allowed the researcher to explore and understand the meaning that people make out of their own experiences.

In an attempt to understand the meaning of experiences of teachers in technology training, Blodgett-McDeavitt (2002) performed a phenomenological study. In this research, Blodgett-McDeavitt found a range of emotions within the teachers' experience. Also found were the teachers' expectations that the training would benefit them in their educational setting and the importance of appropriate instructional strategies that respect their capabilities.

In a phenomenological study exploring the meaning and experience within the natural workplace, Deems (1998) focused on an under-researched area. Her research highlighted the *experience* of work rather than the *perception* of work. Her findings expanded understanding of the experience of work as perceived by the participants. These findings included the experience of being at work, structures and processes of work, how work is conducted, comparing and contrasting past work experiences, learning and knowing, trust and responsibility, leadership, dark side of work, and meaning in work.

Finally, Quay, Dickson, and Nettleton (2000) used a mixed-methods approach to study relationships between students. Using a questionnaire and interviews to elucidate students' experiences, the researchers found that student felt supported by their peers. The significance of this study is that it provides a basis for using qualitative research with adolescents.

In the realm of juvenile offenders, qualitative research in general, and phenomenological research, in specific, has provided understandings of the processes and meanings of subjects' experiences that cannot be quantified by objective or behavioral means.

Baines and Alder (1996) performed a qualitative study on youth workers' experiences working with female juvenile offenders. The relatively small number of young women made findings difficult to determine; however, results suggested that both youth workers and female delinquents lose out in the process of working together. Although not specifically targeted for juvenile offenders, this finding has implications for

juvenile justice treatment processes in that the perceptions of youth workers give important clues for ineffective female juvenile offender programming.

In a series of studies by Ambert (1997 a, b), the relationship between parents and difficult adolescents was studied. Findings suggested that parents were negatively affected by their children's involvement in the judicial system. In particular, parents expressed their declining health and having to deal with the shame associated with their children's behavior.

Qualitative research studies involving adolescent offenders as participants were small in number. Only one study was found to involve this specialized population (Blanchard, 2000). Blanchard used a grounded theory methodology to explore the experiences of violent juvenile re-offenders' experiences in counseling. The findings which emerged centered around the counselor's role, client expectations, the client's role, and counseling outcomes. This research differs from the current research proposal in that the current research proposal seeks to discover, from a phenomenological perspective, juvenile offenders perceptions of the counseling relationship. Whereas Blanchard's study began with a theoretical framework from which to work, phenomenological approaches have no such restrictions.

Further, perspectives of adolescent male offenders were examined to determine how they define, interpret, and justify their delinquent behaviors (Lopez & Emmer, 2000). Using grounded theory methodology, researchers examined cognitive, affective, moral, sociocultural, and situational components that influence how and why adolescents commit crime. Findings supported the emergence of a theory of crime contexts.

Another qualitative research design with juvenile offenders as the focus is a proposed qualitative research project. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2000), a qualitative study was proposed using a qualitative design. The proposal involved an evaluation study by the University of Georgia involving delinquent females. This study used qualitative observational data to evaluate a project aimed at addressing problems associated with delinquency in females

In summary, the popularity of qualitative research has grown over the past decade. The growth is due, in no small part, to the ability of qualitative research methodologies to assess qualities not delineated by quantitative methods.

Phenomenology, in particular, has been used with diverse populations. Since little phenomenological research has been performed specifically on juvenile offenders, there is little known about the experiences and meaning that juvenile offenders possess toward any part of their experiences in the juvenile justice system. As a result, those operating within the discipline of the juvenile justice system operate without a complete and comprehensive understanding from both an objective and subjective viewpoint.

Particularly, little is known about juvenile offenders' perceptions of the counseling relationship. For these reasons, this research enabled the discovery of experiences and meanings inherent to this relationship.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

“When I am thus able to be in process, it is clear there can be no closed system of beliefs, no unchanging set of principles which I hold. Life is guided by a changing understanding of and interpretation of my experience.” – Carl R. Rogers

#### *Rationale for This Study*

The purpose of this study was to explore juvenile offenders’ perceptions of the counseling relationship. Using a phenomenological methodology, this study provided a conduit for the voice of juvenile offenders to be heard. Much of the literature on juvenile offenders discusses this population as objects. From preventive paradigms to rehabilitation programs, research has focused predominantly on juvenile offenders as uninvolved subjects of discussion. The proposed methodology enabled the perspectives of juvenile offenders to be included in the search to understand characteristics and processes involved in the counseling relationship with juvenile offenders.

According to Kerlin (2000), research methodologies are determined by the question being asked. The research question of this study stems from several issues. First, there is a paucity of research aimed at counseling juvenile offenders. Second, research that focuses on relationships has largely been aimed at identification of specific, objective components of counseling relationships (Gelso & Carter, 1985, 1994; Robertson, 2000). Lastly, the issue of epistemology is an important component in the

current research. The issue of how relationships are understood is central to this research. Heretofore, relationships between counselors and individuals have typically been identified by positivistic means. That is, through observation, components of relationships have been identified and measured in order that relationships can be defined. Also, current views of the counseling relationship lack an understanding of the process of counseling relationships. The result is that current views of counseling relationships, in general, lack any consideration from the point of view of those experiencing the relationship. In essence, the voices of clients are not heard.

Recently, authors have begun to use a broader range of methods to understand juvenile offenders as a whole, and the importance of the counseling relationship in particular. Such methods are both non-research based and research based. Non-research based methods include case studies and ethnographies. As an example of case studies, the Justice Policy Institute (1999) compiled accounts of former juvenile offenders who grew into successful adults. Throughout the stories, former juvenile offenders recount stories of difficult circumstances, mechanistic school and juvenile justice systems, and multiple failures. However, a common theme each recognized as critical to the juvenile offenders' successes was a positive relationship with a youth worker (Keynes, 1999). Although anecdotal, positive relationships with youth workers was the critical element that contributed to successful transformation into adulthood.

Further, two examples of ethnographic studies illustrate the plight of juveniles who are at-risk of entering the juvenile justice system or who are already involved. In an ethnographic study aimed at discovering the unique qualities of adolescents as a unique sub-culture, Hersch (1998) followed school students through the turmoil and confusion of



adolescence. As a postscript on her work Hersch stressed, “We have to reconnect the adolescent community to ours. It is not so hard. We just need to reach out and embrace them and take the time to get to know them-one by one, as individuals, not a tribe” (p. 372). Another ethnography studied the experiences of female gang members (Sikes, 1993). Sikes entered the world of gangs in three separate geographical locations around the United States. Her detailed descriptions of these experiences provided in-depth understanding of the phenomena of female gang members. As a final comment, Sikes asserted, “The message our kids are sending is chillingly clear: society has failed to provide nurturing, attention, safety, discipline, and positive role models. We’ve left behind a generation of children to choose from a set of increasingly bleak options” (p. 271). Although these non-research based studies have provided valuable information for understanding the experiences of adolescents and adolescent offenders, they lack methodological rigor. As a result, personal biases and interpretation errors may have influenced the information provided.

Current research provides only a portion of the picture of the dynamics of counseling relationships with juvenile offenders. The perspective of the juvenile offender has largely been ignored. Perspectives of juvenile offenders are essential to holistic understanding of the counseling relationship. With the use of qualitative methodology, perspectives of the juvenile offenders can be integrated into current knowledge about the counseling relationship. Qualitative approaches have been used in a variety of ways to assess those aspects of phenomenon that are invisible to quantitative approaches. Qualitative methods have been effectively employed to develop further understanding of adolescent phenomenon.

*Rationale for Using Qualitative Methodology*

In addition to the benefits of expanding knowledge of the counseling relationship with juvenile offenders, the basis for choosing a qualitative approach in this research was rooted in both my professional and personal beliefs. As a professional counselor, I aim to look beyond obvious behaviors and attitudes presented by my clients. To me, these are but observations of underlying motivations and experiences that shape clients.

Qualitative approaches enable the discovery of underlying motivations and themes that cannot be assessed by quantitative methods. Qualitative approaches provide the means by which these core aspects can be discovered. Moustakas (1994, p. 21) stated qualitative approaches (a) are able to study human *experiences*, (b) focus on the wholeness of experiences rather than the parts, (c) search for meanings of experiences rather than explanations, (d) obtain descriptions of experience from those who experience it, (e) use data of experience to understand human behavior, and, (f) involve the personal interest and involvement of the researcher in formulation of the research problem.

Personally, I believe there is more to the counseling relationship that can be captured by quantitative means. My experience with juvenile offenders has sparked a desire to understand the qualities and processes of counseling relationships and their effect on juvenile offenders' lives. As someone who believes in the personal power inherent in all individuals, I believe that juvenile offenders hold the key to explaining the salience of the counseling relationship in improving their lives.

From a philosophical viewpoint, the differences between quantitative and qualitative methodology are based on how the process of understanding is viewed. Quantitative approaches are based on positivistic, natural science methods. Zaruba,

Toma, and Stark (1996) noted, “positivist researchers assume that a single reality exists and believe that they can predict and control it as objective researchers” (p. 436). As such they believe in reality and objectivity. This view intentionally omits subjective experience as an aspect of understanding. On the contrary, qualitative philosophy is rooted in a different view of understanding. A forefather of this view is Wilhelm Dilthey. As cited by Mallery, Hurwitz, and Duffy (1987), Dilthey (1976) developed a method for social sciences that he believed could produce objective knowledge by interpreting the meanings of verbalizations and actions. As such, his philosophical approach spurred the development of qualitative methodologies. It is through this philosophical perspective that the holistic understanding of the relationship between counselor and juvenile offender can be understood.

#### *Rationale for Using Phenomenology*

The development of the phenomenological method is based on the work of Edmund Husserl. Husserl, like Dilthey, disagreed with natural science methods and believed that truth lies in the interpretation of subjective experiences. Husserl criticized positivists’ conceptualization of the world as objective fact. A key principle of Husserl’s phenomenology was the examination and suspension of all assumptions about the nature of all reality (Mott, 2002). As such, the understanding of a phenomenon would not be distorted by one’s personal assumptions. Phenomenological approaches are based on a paradigm of subjectivity and emphasize interpretation of lived experiences (Lester, 2002; Souza & Do, 1999). Further, Mott stated phenomenology is, “a specific research methodology that strives to portray phenomena from the personal and contextual perspectives of those who experience them.” (par. 3). Oiler (1982) supported this view

by asserting that only the person experiencing the phenomenon knows his/her own experience. Philosophically, this method is congruent with my own beliefs about life, research, and the population of juvenile offenders.

Another advantage to using phenomenology is that this method is effective in the development of understandings of experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspective (Lester, 2002). This method is based on a client-centered approach that holistically accounts for subjective experiences of research participants. Creswell (1998) stated that, “a phenomenological study describes the meaning of lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (p. 51). As such, participants are viewed as experts of the experience whose knowledge is not represented by a set of de-contextualized edicts (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989).

Another rationale for using a phenomenological approach is that it shares a common philosophical approach to counseling. The client-centered approach of phenomenology parallels the counseling philosophy of client-centered interventions. Souza and Do (1999) posited that counselors focus on clients’ experiences rather than objective, observable aspects of behavior. Souza and Do drew further connections between counseling and phenomenological research. They asserted that in both counseling and phenomenological research, a specific theory or counselors’ own conceptualizations are not used to understand lived experiences of participants/clients. As a result, a holistic understanding ensues free from biases or assumptions. The essences of experiences can be more fully understood in much the same way counselors develop a cohesive framework of clients.

Finally, with respect to the fit between the phenomenological method and juvenile offenders, this approach is ideally suited for use with this population. Phenomenological approaches are good at surfacing deep issues and making voices heard (Lester, 2002) which is necessary with the often-overlooked population of juvenile offenders. Also, as previously noted in Chapter 2, juvenile offenders are more often viewed as objects rather than subjects. The phenomenological method shifts focus to participants rather than to researchers.

### *Research Question*

The research question presented reflects the phenomenological nature of this study. As noted by Oiler (1982), phenomenological research questions differ from quantitative research questions in that they are very general and give minimum direction. With regard to comparison to qualitative research questions, phenomenological research questions maintain a similar interpretive demeanor; however, phenomenological research questions focus on experiences described by participants. For example, in a phenomenological study on participants' experiences in technology training, Blodgett-McDeavitt (2002) used a research question that was simply stated and defined the context of each of the key elements. Other aspects of qualitative research questions are that they reflect researchers' interests in a certain topic and, the problem is focused by the researchers' personal experiences with the topic (Moustakas, 1994).

Therefore, the main research question of this study proposal was: *What are juvenile offenders' perceptions of the counseling relationship?* In addition, using procedures suggested by Moustakas (1994), several sub-questions were developed that closely follow Moustakas' data analysis procedures. The sub-questions listed below are

adaptations from these procedures and reflected my interest in understanding juvenile offenders' perceptions of the counseling relationship: (a) *What are the themes and qualities that account for how feelings and thoughts connected to the counseling relationship are aroused?*, (b) *What are the underlying conditions that account for juvenile offenders' perceptions of the counseling relationship?*, (c) *What are the universal structures (e.g. time, space, bodily concerns, physical substance, causality, relation to self or others) that precipitate feelings and thoughts about the experience of the counseling relationship?*, and (d) *What are the unique qualities of the experience that facilitate a description of the "counseling relationship" as it is experienced by juvenile offenders?*

#### *Researcher Assumptions*

I have worked in the field of juvenile offender counseling for over eight years. I have worked in a variety of settings including a residential group home facility, a program for serious, habitual offenders, a program for first-time juvenile offenders, and a juvenile probation department. My counseling roles have involved the use of individual, family, and group therapy with juvenile offenders that range from low to high risk to recidivate. Through my experiences, I have developed professional and personal beliefs and values about juvenile offenders and the counseling relationship that influence and guide how I view relationships. As such, these beliefs and values influence the way I interpret interview data.

Professionally, several values may affect my interpretation of the data. I hold a Masters degree in Marriage and Family Therapy. My program of study was based on a systemic theoretical orientation. As such, my therapeutic training involved the

acknowledgement that relationships are at the center of therapeutic efforts.

Philosophically, my systemic beliefs contribute to my assumption that relationships hold the key to effective counseling interventions. As a counselor for a residential group home, I began to work with juvenile offenders. I identified with their adolescent struggle to find meaning in relationships as I reflected on my own adolescent experiences. I found that those juveniles that showed the most improvement were the ones that I had a stronger relationship with. From this I developed a belief in the power of the counseling relationship. This belief has been challenged and supported through years of working with this population. Further, I believe that most juveniles have the ability to form relationships because relationships fill a void in their lives. I believe the best way of providing effective counseling interventions is to develop a counseling relationship. This belief may cause me to focus too closely on identifying components of a relationship while not attending to the process and meanings of the relationship as perceived by the participants. Another belief I have is that, often times, juvenile offenders are not given the opportunity to tell others what they believe is good for them. My experience with this population has taught me that juvenile offenders either do not have the ability to speak for themselves or are not given the chance to do so. I have witnessed transactions between juvenile offenders and juvenile courts, probation officers, and mental health providers. In each of these settings juvenile offenders are *spoken to* rather than *listened to*. As a result, I have a bias that the voices of juvenile offenders need to be heard. My bias may influence my data analysis and may give more weight to statements than is necessary.

Personally, I believe there is more to our world than we can see. For me, reality is different for each person. Reality consists of individual perceptions of things rather than a concrete description accepted by everyone. As such, I believe in the ability of qualitative research to provide the academic community a holistic picture of juvenile offenders' perceptions of their counseling relationships. This belief may have caused me to strive too much to obtain a description when one did not emerge from the data.

### *Bracketing Researcher Subjectivity*

A central tenant of phenomenological philosophy is based upon researchers suspending their assumptions about the phenomenon. As noted by Mott (2002), Husserl's concept of phenomenological inquiry began with three critical components that allowed researchers to better grasp the nature of the reality of the experience. The concepts were epoche, reduction (sometimes referred to as transcendental-phenomenological reduction [Moustakas, 1994]), and bracketing. Epoche refers to the process of discovering assumptions to truly understand a phenomenon, which is the rationale for this section. Reduction is the basic consideration of the elements of an inquiry without concern for trivial occurrences. Each experience is considered as it stands alone, in its singularity. Bracketing is the on-going process of setting aside a portion of the inquiry to look at the whole. In addition, Polkinghorn (1989) noted that Epoche is the process of bracketing presumptions. It is important to note here that bracketing cannot completely remove biases from the data collection and analysis; however, bracketing allows the researcher to be more aware of the influences of biases and preconceptions.



Bracketing involves the researcher exploring their assumptions and biases and making attempts to set aside assumptions about the phenomenon under study. In order to set assumptions aside, researchers must explicate their assumptions (Valle, King & Halling, 1989). As such, in order for me to obtain a full description of the experience of the relationship as perceived by juvenile offenders, I engaged in the process of bracketing. For me, engaging in the process of bracketing was performed throughout data collection and analysis. Since I am professionally and personally connected to both juvenile offenders and counseling, my assumptions would steer my attention toward values, stereotypes, and preconceptions I have developed through years of experiences. However, through identifying those assumptions by self-reflection and journaling, I was able to bracket them and remove, inasmuch as possible, their influence on my ability to understand the themes and qualities of participants' experiences. More specifically, prior to each interview and each time data was analyzed I found a quiet place in which I reflected on my current thoughts, feelings, and preconceptions regarding the experience (Moustakas, 1994). I wrote these thoughts in a journal to provide a visual reference. During the interviews and data analysis, I was mindful of the influences and attempt to remove these influences from my interview questions and data interpretation. For example, during an interview when a participant said counseling was a waste of time I was mindful of my personal beliefs about the inherent power of counseling. My awareness of this conflict was bracketed in journaling after interviews so that I could be mindful of my preconception's influence on my ability to experience the data as experienced by the participant. Another method used to bracket my subjectivity was peer consultation, which occurred on a weekly basis throughout data collection and analysis.

Peer consultation provided an unbiased approach and facilitated understanding of my own biases and presumptions regarding the data collection and analysis.

### *Researcher's Role*

An essential component and central tenant of qualitative research is the involvement of the researcher in the process of data collection. As cited in Creswell (1998, p. 53), Husserl conceptualized reality as being the researcher's perception of the experience. That is, reality involves both subjects and objects, and meanings of objects stem from both the object and one's perception (consciousness) of that object. This concept contrasts with quantitative approaches that assert reality is only what can be observed. As such, qualitative research represents a differing epistemological viewpoint than quantitative methods.

It is through this epistemological viewpoint that the role of qualitative researchers becomes central to data collection. Qualitative researchers are not only data collectors, but also become involved in the description of the phenomenon. The benefit of this involvement is that qualitative researchers use this awareness to access a diverse range of data collection modalities (Oiler, 1982). This technique is also known as participant-observer technique. This technique involves the researcher entering the world of the participants before attempting to interpret the experience under investigation. Further, Moustakas (1994) stated,

In phenomenological studies, the investigator abstains from making suppositions, focuses on a specific topic freshly and naively, constructs a question or problem to guide the study, and derives findings that will provide the basis for further research and reflection. In phenomenological science a relationship always exists between the external perception of natural objects and internal perceptions, memories, and judgments. (p. 47)

Another role of the researcher involves an awareness of the participants' perception of the researcher (Reinharz, 1997). In essence, the researcher, as the primary data collection, brings into participants' experiences various levels of self. For example, Reinharz described the researcher-self, the brought-self, and the situationally created self. Each of these selves has differing meanings to participants and contributes to how the researcher is perceived. The influences of these various selves can affect the information collected during the research. Thus, a subtle, yet vital interaction occurs between researchers and participants.

However, one of the common criticisms of phenomenological methodology is the subjective influence of the researcher (Hycner, 1985). Hycner discussed two defenses for this criticism. First, phenomenological research is based on a different scientific orientation than natural sciences. The difference is based, in part, on the epistemological issue regarding understanding reality. Phenomenologists assert that being involved in the research increases objectivity because they are able to understand the phenomena from a holistic perspective. Second, it is beneficial to build into the data analysis a method by which data can be viewed by independent evaluators to explain data from a different viewpoint. In order to address the second criticism, this research project used peer debriefing and member checks. These are discussed further in the section on Trustworthiness.

### *Sampling*

#### *Rationale for Purposeful Sampling*

Sampling in qualitative research differs from quantitative methods in that research participants were chosen for their having experienced the phenomenon and ability to

relate the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). In an article advocating for the applicability of phenomenological methods with nursing research, Oiler (1982) stated, “Only the patient knows his own pain as an experience” (p. 178). As related to the current study, the phenomenon was the relationship between counselors and juvenile offenders. Participants most suitable to explain the counseling relationship are juvenile offenders. As a result, participants in this study were juvenile offenders. Based on this rationale, the chosen sampling method was purposeful sampling (Moustakas, 1994).

In order to grasp the meaning of the experience from a variety of juvenile offenders, this study used juvenile offenders with varying degrees of involvement in the juvenile justice system. The definition of juvenile offenders varies from legal definitions to dictionary definitions (Cavan, 1962). However, for the purpose of this study, a juvenile offender was defined as anyone under the age of 18 who had committed either a delinquent act and had been formally charged or adjudicated (found guilty). It is this population from which participants in this study were chosen. Also, the rationale for using juvenile offenders was that my experience as a juvenile offender counselor has given me the ability to establish rapport and empathy with this challenging population. Lester (2002) stressed the importance of empathy and rapport by asserting that this ability is critical to gaining depth of information from research participants.

With regard to the number of participants, phenomenological studies have varied in the number of participants; Deems (1998) used 20 in her research on experience in the natural workplace, Lee (1999) studied 11 participants in an investigation of cultural values and significant life experiences, Conceicao-Runlee (2001) used 10 participants in a study of college faculty experiences, and, finally, Lamberty (2000) used 9 participants

in his study of the process of recovery for African-American men. Creswell (1998) recommended ten participants as a reasonable number of participants in a phenomenological research study. The initial number of participants in this study was 10, however, due to difficulties obtaining potential participants, 8 participants comprised the study cohort.

### *Identifying Participants*

Potential participants were selected based on two factors related to the research question. First, the participants were required to be juvenile offenders as described previously. Second, the participants needed to be engaged in a therapeutic relationship with a counselor. Polkinghorne (1989) noted the two requirements for choosing participants are, first, subjects need to have had the experience under investigation and, second, subjects need to have the capacity to provide full descriptions of the experience. The limited number of counselors providing mental health counseling to juvenile offenders limited the access to the participants.

Participants were selected from juvenile offenders under the supervision of the Jefferson Parish Department of Juvenile Services. Participants had to complete at least eight individual therapy sessions with a professional counselor. A list of individuals meeting these criteria was obtained from the Probation Department. Probation officers were asked about the ability of the juveniles to provide full descriptions of the experience of the counseling relationship and to communicate abstract concepts, such as feelings and thoughts. Using probation officers' input, a list of juvenile offenders that were thought to have the ability to communicate their perceptions of the counseling relationship was generated from the previous list. Once this list of participants was generated,

parents/guardians and juveniles were contacted via letter and phone requesting participation in the research project. A copy of the contact letter is contained in Appendix A.

### *Confidentiality*

Confidentiality is an issue common to research projects as a means of protecting participants. However, the importance of confidentiality is greater when using juvenile research participants. In order to protect the rights and confidentiality of the participants, several methods were employed (as adapted from Lamberty, 2000). First, the research conformed to the ethical research guidelines established by the American Counseling Association and the guidelines established by the University of New Orleans Review Board for Research with Human Subjects (Creswell, 1998). A copy of the Human Subjects Review Protocol is contained in Appendix B and a copy of the Human Subjects Review approval is contained in Appendix C. A consent form (see Appendix D) was used to (a) describe the purpose of the study, (b) explain procedures used to protect confidentiality, (c) explain potential benefits and known risks for participants, (d) explain methods to protect participants, and (e) to obtain their consent and the consent of their parent or guardian.

### *Gaining Entry*

The process of gaining entry has been a task for many researchers (Lamberty; 2000; Rousell, 2000) and is typically negotiated with one or few individuals known as gatekeepers (Glesne, 1999). For the purpose of accessing the participants for this study, there was one gatekeeper who was the director of the Jefferson Parish Department of Juvenile Services (DJS), Mr. Roy Juncker, Jr. DJS employs and contracts with

professional counselors to provide therapeutic services for juvenile offenders. Through the initial contact with Mr. Juncker, I explained the research purpose and requested access to interview juvenile offenders and counselors. I obtained written permission to proceed with the research project from the director (Appendix E). After permission was granted, I selected the sample using the established criteria and method discussed earlier. All of the program participants and their parents/guardians were contacted via letter and/or phone call to request their participation and receive approval. The next step was to meet with the participant and parent/guardian to explain the purpose of the study and obtain a signed consent form. The consent form is included in Appendix D. Once a participant and his/her parent/guardian signed the consent form, the individual interview was held. The second rounds of interviews were held with participants after their initial data analysis was performed.

#### *Data Collection*

The primary method of data collection in phenomenology is the interview. As previously noted, the researcher is an instrument and participant in the collection of data. Moustakas (1994) noted that the phenomenological interview is informal, interactive and uses questions designed to elicit descriptions of experiences.

Data was collected through taped individual interviews lasting 60 to 90 minutes. As noted by Oiler (1982), the phenomenological method holds that truth (reality) is a composite of subjective realities involving both the researcher and participants. Therefore, data consisted of that which is observed and perceived in interviews. Polkinghorne (1989) stated that the purpose of data collection is to collect naïve descriptions of the experience; therefore, the sole data collection method was the

interview. As such, this study considered primary data collection as data from interviews including verbatim transcripts and researcher notes. Data was collected through an extensive interview lasting approximately 60 minutes with each participant. I used a semi-structured interview format. Although Polkinghorne recommended unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews facilitated a greater depth of discussion with the juvenile population. A similar format was used by Blanchard (2000). Follow-up interviews were used to perform member checks as a means of verifying meanings and gathering additional information.

For the purpose of this study, I used an interview guide (see Appendix F). Moustakas (1994) asserted that the research interview is informal and interactive. Further, he stated that interview guides are developed as a series of questions aimed at evoking an accurate account of the phenomenon. These interview guides are, “varied, altered, or not used at all when the co-researcher shares the full story of his or her experience of the bracketed question” (p. 114). Within the framework of this study, the interview guide focused on juvenile offenders’ perceptions of the counseling relationship. The format of the interview guide is adapted from Creswell (1998). According to Creswell, this interview format enables researchers to take notes during the interview. Specific questions on the interview guide were adaptations from Moustakas’ procedures. Questions were designed to guide and facilitate a discussion of the themes, qualities, and process of the counseling relationship as experienced by juvenile offenders. In addition, the interview questions closely followed data analysis steps as outlined by Moustakas.



*Phenomenological Data Analysis*

Data was analyzed using a modified version of the phenomenological data analysis method outlined by Moustakas (1994). Moustakas' seven-step data analysis method has been used in previous phenomenological studies (Bloodgett-McDeavitt, 2002; Conceicao-Runlee, 2001; Deems, 1998; Lamberty, 2000). In order to facilitate a visual understanding of phenomenological data analysis, a case example is provided in the Appendix as annotated under each data analysis step. In addition, the rationale for presenting examples of each step was rooted in my personal experience in performing phenomenological data analysis. In spite of numerous studies that used Moustakas' data analysis method, none of these studies provided complete examples of the data analysis steps. As a result, the sole resource for examples of data analysis was in Moustakas' text. In an effort to provide examples for future phenomenological researchers, I included case examples for each step in the Appendix.

The first step in data analysis was to carefully read interview transcripts to gain a whole understanding of the interview. Individual transcripts were read a second time to create a list of expressions that were relevant to the experience. Expressions were given equal value to provide a holistic view of the experience. This process is known as horizontalization (See Appendix G).

The second step in the data analysis was to examine the horizontal statements to determine elements that were necessary and sufficient statements for understanding the experience. These statements, known as constituents, are meaning units that are contextually-based (Giorgi, 1985). Contextually-based statements are statements that have meaning based on the context in which they are stated. These statements were then

screened to determine if, first, a particular label could be attached to them and, second, if statements could be abstracted into salient components. If the statements met both criteria, they were considered horizons of the experience. Horizons are components of the experience that provide increasingly clearer portrayals of the phenomena under investigation (Moustakas, 1994). Statements were reviewed and those statements that were repetitive, vague, or overlapped were incorporated into other statements or eliminated from the list. The resulting non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements are called invariant constituents of the experience (See Appendix H).

The third step in the data analysis was to identify themes from the statements and place statements into clusters around each theme. Themes served as labels for each cluster and represented core components of the experience. Themes were then compared to the transcript to determine if they were accurate reflections of the experience. Themes that were not accurate reflections of the experience were eliminated. This process contributed to the validity of the remaining statements (See Appendix I).

The fourth step involved forming individual textural descriptions. That is, themes and statements were combined with quotes from the individual transcript to create a description of the meanings of the experience (See Appendix J). According to Moustakas (1994), individual textural descriptions use textural language to describe both the external object as it is seen and the internal experience of the object as it is described by an individual. Textural language includes physical qualities such as size, texture, appearance, colors, and time references. Textural descriptions provided a means for describing qualities that have varying degrees of intensity. These qualities provided a depth of understanding of the physical qualities of the phenomenon.

The fifth step involved using individual textural descriptions and the researcher's reflections on the underlying and precipitating factors that account for offenders' experiences to form individual structural descriptions. As the researcher, I used the process known as Imaginative Variation (Moustakas, 1994) in which I varied possible meanings, causes, and processes in order to achieve an accurate view of the experience as experienced by research participants (See Appendix K). The resulting individual structural descriptions provided descriptions of the precursory and causative factors that accounted for what was experienced.

In the sixth and final step of data analysis, individual textural and structural descriptions of participants' experiences were combined to form composite textural and structural narratives that encompassed experiences of all participants. In this composite description, common and divergent themes, characteristics, and processes were included to provide a clear understanding of the counseling relationship as experienced by juvenile offenders (See Appendix L).

### *Trustworthiness*

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is the methodological equivalent to validity in quantitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). According to Babbie (1998), qualitative research provides more valid measures than quantitative research. Babbie stated, "Being there is a powerful technique for gaining insights into the nature of human affairs" (p. 303). Validity in phenomenological research stems from four levels of validation (Hycner, 1985) - the participants, the researcher, current literature, and the scientific community. Each level validates the findings of the research to ensure trustworthiness. In an effort to establish criteria for validity in qualitative research,

Lincoln and Guba (1985) delineated four categories that refer to validity in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The concept of credibility refers to the ability of the findings to accurately reflect the meanings of the experience under investigation. As such, I assured credibility of research findings by performing member checks. Member checks were utilized throughout data analysis by meeting with each participant individually after an individual structural description was formed. The process involved presenting the findings of the data analysis to individual participants and asking if there were any changes or suggestions necessary. Maxwell (1996) asserted that member checks are the most important way of reducing misinterpretation of meanings. Member checks were performed on 7 of the 8 participants. Results of the member checks were validation of previous interviews. In two member checks, however, initial interview data was supplemented by additional information. None of the member checks provided data that was discrepant to initial interviews. As an example, a member check with participant P1 provided validation of data collected during the initial interview:

It's everything I said the last time. It's exactly everything that happened. There's nothing else to add to it-that's exactly how it was. I told you everything how it went. That's exactly how everything went. She was all rude and everything...she never wanted to give me a chance...she always wanted to talk to somebody else when it was time for my family to come to talk...she wouldn't write down half the stuff that I told her...

Transferability refers to the ability of this research to generalize to other areas. However, as noted by Hycner (1985), results of phenomenological research, by nature, only apply to the participants interviewed. However, through the process of investigating the phenomenon, researchers can learn about the phenomenology of humans in general. This view is supported by Lester (2002) who stated, "phenomenological research can be

robust in indicating the presence of factors and their effects in individual cases, but must be tentative in suggesting their extent in relations to the population from which the participants or cases were drawn” (Par. 4). Consequently, the results of this study apply directly only to those who participated in this study. However, findings provided detailed accounts of juvenile offenders’ experiences in counseling, which provide readers with the opportunity to apply findings where they see fit.

Dependability of research is established by ensuring the data is collected through a consistent process that was stable throughout the study. Dependability of this research was demonstrated through the use of member checks, peer reviews, and an interview guide to ensure consistency of interviews and data collection across all participants.

The concept of confirmability refers to a means for ensuring that transcribed data provide support for and confirm the findings of the study. Methods used to ensure confirmability included peer debriefing. This method involved the use of impartial peers to discuss data analysis and findings. Spall (1998) stated, “peer debriefing contributes to confirming that the findings and the interpretations are worthy, honest, and believable” (p. 280). In the study, peer debriefing was implemented by meeting with a fellow doctoral student who was familiar with qualitative methodology. Meetings were scheduled once per week until data were analyzed so that data analyses and findings could be presented and discussed. In each meeting, I presented transcripts and findings to the peer debriefer. We discussed the applicability and fit of the findings to the transcripts and the phenomenon of juvenile offenders and counseling relationships. Peer debriefings added to the validity of the findings by confirming the applicability of the thematic categories and fit of the horizontalized statements into the categories.

*Summary*

The research methodology was centered on the inability of current research to provide a comprehensive picture of the counseling relationship with juvenile offenders. Phenomenology was best suited for describing the phenomena of the counseling relationship from the perspective of juvenile offenders. Data collection techniques were employed to take advantage of available resources. Data analysis involved procedures commonly used by phenomenological researchers. Through the rigorous process of data collection and analysis, juvenile offenders' perceptions provided information not accessed through previous research methods.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Presentation of the Data

“We will not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive at where we started  
And know the place for the first time.”  
– T. S. Eliot, Four Quartets

#### *Introduction*

Chapter four is organized in three sections. Each section provides information on the data collected in this phenomenological study. Phenomenological methodology provided a canvas on which the counseling experiences of juvenile offenders were painted. The purpose of this study was to describe juvenile offenders' perceptions of the counseling relationship. The first section provides demographic information and brief descriptions of participants. The second section provides themes and sub-themes that categorize aspects of participants' experiences on counseling, including participants' perceptions of the process of the counseling relationship. Consistent with Moustakas' (1994) data analysis procedures, the third section presents the composite textural-structural description of participants' experiences in counseling.

#### *Participants*

Participants were selected based upon the qualifications stated in Chapter 3. In review, the participants needed to have (a) experienced the phenomenon of the

counseling relationship, (b) the capacity to provide full descriptions of their experiences, and (c) had at least 8 individual sessions with a professional counselor. Participants were selected from a list derived from probation officers' input. Participants ranged from 13 to 17 years of age. Of the eight participants, six were male and two were female. The racial makeup of participants was four Caucasian, three African-American, and one Hispanic-American. Regarding their reasons for being on probation, four participants were charged with only criminal charges, two were charged with offenses only applicable to juveniles, known as status offenses, and two were charged with combined criminal and status offenses (See Table 1).

Table 1: Profile of Participants

	Age	Gender	Race	Legal Charge
P1	14	Male	African-American	Disturbing the Peace
P2	13	Male	Caucasian	Status: Ungovernable
P3	17	Male	African-American	Simple Battery and Status: Ungovernable
P4	14	Female	African-American	Disturbing the Peace and Status: Ungovernable
P5	15	Male	Caucasian	Theft of Goods
P6	17	Male	Hispanic-American	Criminal Mischief
P7	15	Male	African-American	Theft of Goods and Simple Battery
P8	16	Female	Caucasian	Status: Ungovernable and Runaway



The variety of participants' legal charges demonstrated that a majority of participants (n=6) were charged with offenses related to relationship difficulties. These offenses, both criminal and status, are Disturbing the Peace, Ungovernable, Simple Battery, and Runaway. Other offenses, such as Theft of Goods and Criminal Mischief, are classified as Property Offenses. The importance of this information is that most participants became involved with the juvenile justice system as a result of difficulties relating to relationships. This is a common characteristic of difficult adolescents as noted by Ambert (1997a, b). In order to provide greater depth of information regarding each participant, individual characteristics of each participant are provided. Included in these descriptions are excerpts from transcripts that provide some insight into participants' experiences and excerpts from notes collected throughout data collection and analysis. Participants were identified as P1, P2, and P3...etc., to protect confidentiality and to alleviate biases about fictitious names that may occur during reading these results.

#### *Participant P1*

Sometimes it's like that when I get mad, I just...I can still see my reaction, you know, but I just can't control my body. I can still see what I'm doing, but in some way I feel like I'm standing still like that and my body keeps going and I do something like that. It's weird. I can still see what I'm doing and I know what I'm doing and I can't help it.

P1 was a 14-year-old Caucasian male. He was on probation for a criminal charge of disturbing the peace. During interviews, P1 was talkative and expressive about his feelings toward the counseling relationship. He expected that the counseling relationship would provide a means for being listened to and understood. Contrary to his expectations, however, the counseling relationship fell short of his ideal and resulted in the accumulation of anger and frustration. P1 desired to be understood by others and

possessed a sense of loneliness. His anger emanated from feeling disrespected by others. Anger was difficult to control internally and was expressed as a personal struggle to maintain control externally. For P1, his struggle to control his anger characterized perceptions of the counseling relationship.

### *Participant P2*

That's the only reason I used to come (to counseling) every week-that's one person I would go to and talk to a lot. I like hanging around grown ups a lot. I don't got that many little friends. I only hang around grown ups.

P2 was a 13-year-old African-American male. He was on probation for a status offense relating to ungovernable behaviors. He spoke in a low monotone, yet he was talkative during interviews. He spoke of the counseling relationship with fondness and developed a close relationship with the counselor. He enjoyed the company of adults, which served to foster a relationship between himself and the counselor. He considered the counselor to be a "best friend." In spite of difficulty verbally expressing thoughts and emotions during interviews, his memories of the counseling relationship brought nonverbal expressions that demonstrated excitement and yearning to speak with his friend. As he described his relationship with the counselor, his lips reflected a smile and his eyes became brighter. It was clear in the interviews that the counseling relationship had been a positive experience for P2.

### *Participant P3*

I'd rather not get too close to them (counselors), I mean, I try not to open up too much, but I open up to enough where they'll get what they need to get so they can move on...try to do the best that I can to complete it.

P3 was a 17-year-old Caucasian male who was on probation for simple battery and a status offense of ungovernable behavior. P3's initial reticence to participate in the

interviews foreshadowed P3's views toward others. Prior to the interview, P3 was apprehensive about the interviews. He believed the interviews would be used to harm him. After explaining the project and ensuring confidentiality would be maintained, P3 reluctantly agreed. As noted in my post-interview observations, "Trust was a big concern of his. Only after I showed him the interview guide and explained the project did I receive consent from both him and his mother." Consistent with his initial caution about interviewing, P3 seemed to believe counseling was a requirement to be completed rather than a service to provide benefit. His distrust of counselors was based on previous experiences with counselors. This seemed to affect both his attitude toward counselors, in general, and toward his counseling relationship. After the initial interview, P3's parent stated, "the legal system rarely gives kids a chance to talk. Kids know what they need and will tell the legal system if given a chance."

#### *Participant P4*

At first I was feeling mad 'cause I thought I had to see my probation officer over something I did at school. Then, when my, um, the counselor started talking to me, I really started to get to meet her. I started to feel good about myself.

P4 was a 14-year-old African-American female. She was on probation for a criminal charge of disturbing the peace by fighting and a status charge of ungovernable behavior. During the interviews P4 was polite and charismatic. She maintained eye contact throughout the interview and was verbally expressive regarding her relationship with the counselor. Even though her communication skills were advanced, she had difficulty expressing feelings, in general. Post-interview notes highlighted her communication skills, "She seemed to have trouble identifying feelings. This is a common characteristic of adolescents and offenders. She could talk about anger, sadness,

madness, and fear; all negative or painful feelings, but she rarely mentioned positive feelings.” She expressed a positive relationship between herself and the counselor.

When discussing differences in the way she related to the counselor and teachers, P4 commented that she gets angry when other people get “in her face” and start yelling at her. She was able to respect others when they respected her.

#### *Participant P5*

He was the first counselor to actually talk about himself instead of talking to me. Like he said, ‘Well, you sign the paperwork and I got to know you a little bit. I’m going to tell you about me.’ I was like, you know, that’s cool because I thought I was going to go in there and I was going to have to talk about all kinds of stuff. But, he talked about his life.

P5 was a 15-year-old Caucasian male who was on probation for a charge of theft of goods. During the interviews he was talkative and expressive. He seemed to be initially cautious, which lessened as he became more familiar with the intent of the interview. In his description of the counseling relationship, P5 seemed to desire a mutual relationship rather than one characterized by one-sided conversations. He expressed loyalty and devotion to his mother, who supported him as a single parent. In spite of his anger toward his absent father, he felt the relationship with the male counselor was beneficial to him.

#### *Participant P6*

She (the counselor) was asking me how I got onto probation. I was telling her it was all an accident. I told her how it was. She agreed with me that it was something stupid to be on probation on. It was just, like, she was trying to see things the way I see them.

P6 was a 17-year-old Hispanic-American male. He was on probation for an offense of criminal mischief. My initial impression of P6 was described in this excerpt from post-interview notes; “He was pleasant to speak to. He had a desire to be liked by

others and was cognizant of how others viewed him. He seemed to pay a great deal of attention to whether he was being accepted or judged by others.” P6 used laughter and joking as barometers for determining how relaxed he could become with others. These indicators were included in his relationship with the counselor, so he was able to engage in a meaningful counseling relationship.

#### *Participant P7*

I felt that I finally had somebody that was down to earth to talk to. All the psychiatrists ain't good psychiatrists. I'm talking about, see all the other psychiatrists, they was, like, asking too many questions. She asked questions, but she didn't ask personal, personal questions where they get up into your business. That's why I really liked her.

P7 was a 15-year-old African-American male. He was on probation for two criminal charges, theft of goods and simple battery. P7's initial interview highlighted the impact the counseling relationship had on his life. An excerpt from my post-interview notes revealed, “P7 had a sense of independence yet seemed to feel the counselor was looking out for his best interests. He noted a ‘change of heart’ after meeting with the counselor as though being understood made a difference.” P7 expressed that his feelings changed as a result of the counseling relationship. P7 possessed an independent identity that spurred a desire to be talked *with* rather than interrogated. The counselor provided these interactions, which resulted in a positive counseling experience. In spite of admitting difficulty with recognizing emotions, “I never really had any emotions. I'm not emotional,” P7's interviews contained a number of emotions, such as anger, resistance, empathy, and hurt.

#### *Participant P8*

If I have a problem, I hold it in. But, like every week, I would go to (the counselor) and I would just let it all out and he understood me. He sat down and

tried to say well look, you can do this and you can do that, and I would walk out and would be like (sign of relief) 'cause I hold my emotions in.

P8 was a 16-year-old Caucasian female who was on probation for two status charges, ungovernable behavior and running away. During her initial interview, P8 was verbal and expressed a range of thoughts. She expressed a need to trust the counselor and how the effects of previous mental health providers impacted her in the current relationship. As described in a post-interview note, "She seemed distrustful at first, but when she realized the project and I intended no harm, she became more relaxed." Despite her eye contact and appropriate tone, she spoke with many hand gestures and facial movements. She was reminded during the interview to put these non-verbal actions into words, which she did. The counseling relationship centered on a tug-of-war between her reluctance to develop trust and her interpretations of the counselor's actions. As the counseling relationship ended, however, she recalled having overcome her reluctance to trust the counselor. For her, this occurred, in large part, as a result of the congruence between the counselor's words and actions.

The presentation of brief descriptions of each participant provides insight into the interviews and the participants. These descriptions are not intended to provide a full description of participants' experiences. They do, however, establish a baseline of information to understand underlying dynamics of participants in this study. Throughout the interviews, participants began to express similar qualities in their counseling relationships. These qualities were divided into themes to facilitate explication. Consistent with phenomenological method, it is important to note that these themes were generated from participants' experiences. Philosophical foundations of

phenomenological method stress the importance of discovery rather than interpretation. These themes are organized to foster discovery across all aspects of the counseling relationship. The following section provides information on themes that emerged.

### *Themes*

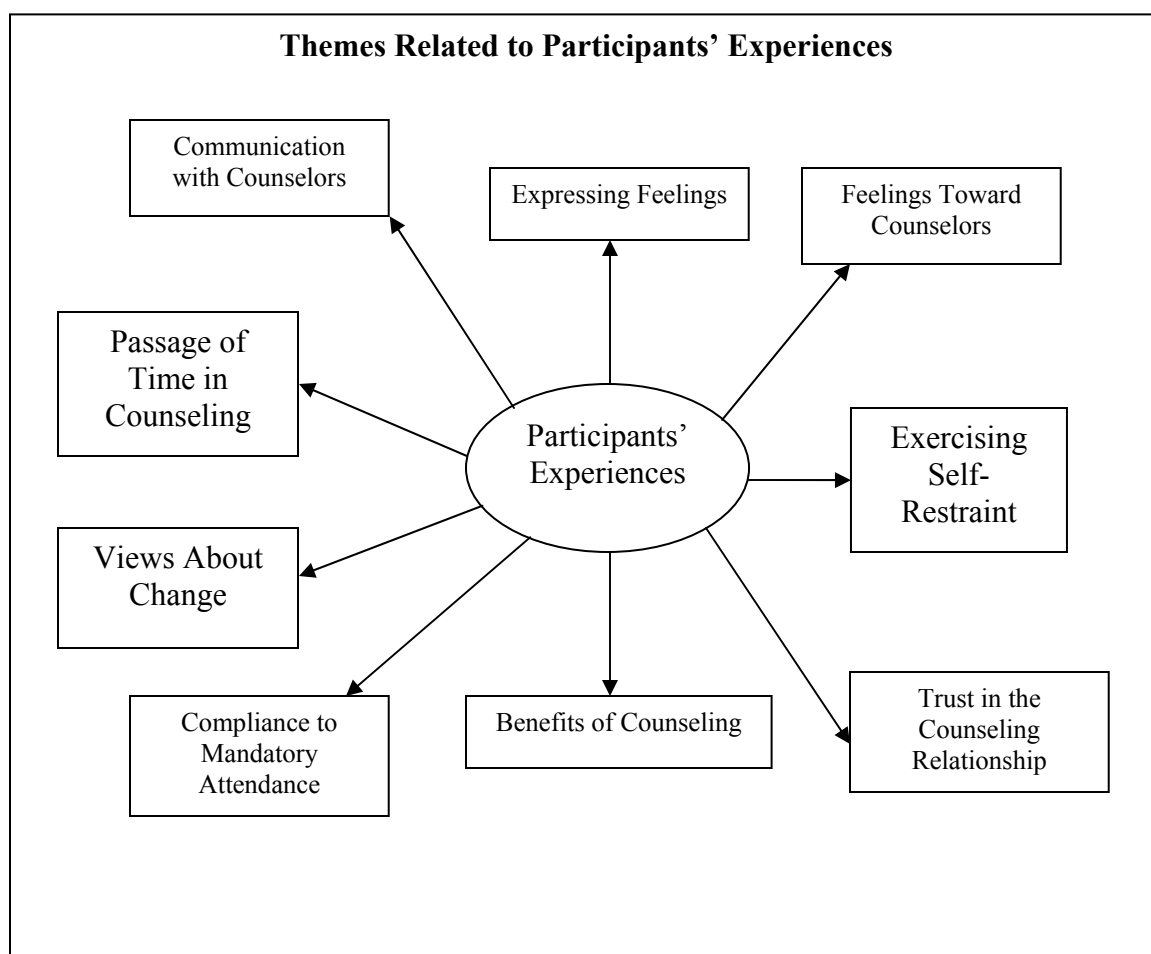
The themes represented in the participants' experiences were divided into three categories; themes related to participants' experiences, themes related to counselors, and themes related to the process of the counseling relationship. These themes categorize characteristics of participants' experiences that provide answers to the research question and sub-questions. To recap, the research question was, *What are juvenile offenders' perceptions of the counseling relationship?* Related sub-questions were: (a) *What are the themes and qualities that account for how feelings and thoughts connected to the counseling relationship are aroused?*, (b) *What are the underlying conditions that account for juvenile offenders' perceptions of the counseling relationship?*, (c) *What are the universal structures (e.g. time, space, bodily concerns, physical substance, causality, relation to self or others) that precipitate feelings and thoughts about the experience of the counseling relationship?*, and (d) *What are the unique qualities of the experience that facilitate a description of the "counseling relationship" as it is experienced by juvenile offenders?*

#### *Themes Related to Participants' Experiences*

Themes related to participants are arranged from the most frequently occurring thematic categories to least frequently occurring. It is important to note that a central tenant of phenomenological methodology is the importance of all information pertaining to the phenomenon of the counseling relationship as experienced by the participants. As

a result, each component of each thematic category is a necessary component to understanding the experience as it is lived by the participants. These themes are visually represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Themes Related to Participants' Experiences



### *Communicating with counselors*

The task of communicating with the counselor was a central component of each participant's experience. Aspects of communication appeared throughout participants' descriptions. However, this theme contains explication of participant experiences that relate to the participants' thoughts and feelings regarding their ability to communicate



with the counselor. For participants, communication was a central component of the counseling relationship. Communication was the key that unlocked the door to the relationship. For most participants, the door opened completely, for one, not at all.

Communication with the counselor was described by one participant as being a mutual exchange of stories, “I’d have a story and she’d have a story. We’d just talk back an forth.” The mutual exchange reflected the quality of the relationship as both counselor and client engaged in expressing themselves, feeling understood, and feeling accepted. One participant preferred the personal nature of the individual session to group sessions. He stated, “if I would have had a group, I couldn’t talk to her ‘cause I’d feel strange talking around other people.” The individual attention allowed him to engage in increased interpersonal sharing by providing an environment that he could feel comfortable doing so.

One participant of the eight interviewed expressed a failure of communication with the counselor. For this participant, two-sided communication was essential for the relationship to develop. Rather than feeling heard, he felt the counselor was only interested in asking questions and getting answers rather than listening to him. “I’m not being listened to.” In spite of several attempts to be heard and understood by the counselor, the participant became frustrated and angry. Subsequently, his experience in the counseling relationship was enveloped by an overpowering sense of helplessness. “It’s like trying to hold on to your life to make sure it does not get sucked into outer space from a space ship. That’s how I was.” The failed communication continued throughout the counseling relationship. The result for the participant was an unforgettable experience of a counseling relationship that had no positive impact.

As previously noted, communication was key to the development of the counseling relationship. Participants either described communication as facilitating or constricting. For participants that described communication as facilitating, the counseling relationship bloomed into a beneficial experience. For the participant that described communication as constricting, anger and frustration was the only product of the counseling relationship.

### *Expressing feelings*

The expression of feelings for participants involved characteristic qualities of adolescent emotional development. For many participants, expressing emotions was a difficult task. Two participants directly expressed their inability to recognize their emotions, “I really never had any emotions. I’m not emotional,” and “Some things you just can’t say, you just know how it feels, its just natural, normal, and regular.” The inability to recognize feelings spawned the use of emotional descriptions like, “good”, “cool”, and “real.” Substitution of adolescent vernacular for emotional qualities was a common theme in participants’ experiences. Understanding the emotional contexts of clients’ vocabulary was essential for understanding their descriptions of emotions in the counseling relationship. Taken one step further, such understanding of the language of adolescents is imperative for counselors to understand the life world of this population.

Other participants were able to express negative emotions easier than positive emotions. Paradoxically, participants would express anger, hurt, and frustration in their experiences, yet they would not discuss joy, happiness, or excitement. Negative emotions seemed to be easier to describe than positive emotions. For example, one participant described talking with the counselor as, “I was feeling good knowing that I

got to talk and express my feelings to my counselor.” The inability to express positive emotions demonstrated a lack of familiarity with the spectrum of emotions. Also, since children learn what they live, the inability to express positive emotions demonstrated that these participants were not exposed to expressing positive emotions.

For these participants, the expression of emotions was restricted. For some, the expression of emotions brought descriptions of descriptors, such as good, all right, and okay. For others, emotions were limited to emotions with negative connotations such as anger, fear, and sad. Yet for others, positive emotions were not verbalized, as such, rather, they were expressed through animation.

#### *Feelings toward counselors*

In a similar vein as communication, the participants’ feelings toward the counselor significantly impacted the quality of the counseling relationship. The strength of the counseling relationship hinged upon the participants’ feelings toward the counselor. Most of the participants expressed positive feelings toward the counselor. Some described counselors as “a cool person” and “real”, while others felt the counselor was like their “best friend.” Some participants longed for the relationship to continue, “I wish he was still here and wish he was still helping me.” Longing reflected participants’ connections counselors. There was a sense of loss and need fulfillment provided by counselors that could not be fulfilled outside of the relationship. (Further description of the loss of the counseling relationship is provided under the Process of the Relationship theme). Other aspects of participants’ feelings were the development of loyalty to the counselor, “I didn’t want to have sessions with anybody else,” and appreciation of the counselor’s understanding, “I can’t really explain it or tell you more about it, but all I can

really say is she felt where I was coming from.” These descriptions characterize the counseling relationship for participants in that, for most participants, the strength of the counseling relationship relied on the participants’ feeling positively towards the counselor.

In contrast to general perceptions of juvenile offenders, most participants expressed positive feelings toward their counselors. Development of a bond within the relationship contradicts the notion that juvenile offenders have difficulty establishing relationships. Participants’ descriptions challenge current viewpoints regarding the ineffectiveness of counseling juvenile offenders.

#### *Trust in the counseling relationship*

Trust in the counseling relationship was an intricate component that varied across participants. Trust was both an essential component to the counseling relationship and a closely guarded treasure protected by participants. Participants’ previous experiences affected their ability to trust in the counseling relationship, “some counselors will tell you just about anything so that you will tell them and they might run back and tell, and personal questions that will harm you.” Thoughts of being harmed coexisted with the recognition that trust is necessary, “That’s the type of stuff that you need-just people to be real (straightforward)-like they ain’t gonna lie to you.” For one participant, trust was an essential precursor to more intimate communication, “You gotta have trust. If I cannot trust him (the counselor), then I cannot open up to him.” With another participant, a struggle between trust and mistrust preoccupied her thoughts during the counseling relationship. “At first, I was kind of like, ‘I don’t know you, so I’m not going to really open up.’” As the relationship continued, the counselor’s genuineness and

straightforward approach fostered trust in the relationship and led to the participant describing the relationship as, “we pretty much got a trust thing.” For each participant, trust began, or failed to begin, with initial conversations. The crucial impact of initial conversations established a baseline of interactions throughout the counseling relationship. As I discuss later in the section on the Process of the Relationship, the impact of the initial session on effective communication and trust building is significant.

For these participants, trust was the foundation on which the counseling relationship was built. Participants who had difficulty establishing trust described less beneficial relationships than participants who experienced trust. For the participant that felt misunderstood, communication difficulties precluded the development of trust.

#### *Benefits of counseling*

As mentioned in Chapter 2, benefits of counseling relationships with juvenile offenders are often viewed as objective measures of treatment effectiveness. However, the salience of phenomenological method is that the benefits of counseling can be understood from the perspective of the juveniles themselves. Benefits of the counseling relationship were described in the experiences of seven of the eight participants.

Many participants expressed that the counseling relationship helped them improve relationships with family members. “He helped me get along with my sister,” and “me and my Mom’s relationship is a whole lot better because of him (the counselor).” An interesting note is that improved relationships with family members paralleled the relationship with the counselor. Improved family relationships extended into other areas of home life. Participants experienced fewer arguments with parents and siblings,

increased completion of chores, and staying home more. Family stability increased as participants improved communication with family members.

Similarly, many participants expressed a decrease in conflicts with others, “now when I want to fight somebody, I talk it out.” Conflicts with peers in the neighborhood, with peers at school, and with school staff decreased. In addition, the counseling relationship provided participants a means for dealing with anger by allowing them to discuss alternatives to conflict while in sessions, “After I started getting deeper into the relationship with her, she started telling me how to deal with situations accordingly, so I just learned.” The strength of the counseling relationship provided the basis for discussing alternative behaviors. Such behaviors were increased school attendance, improved study habits, and improved school discipline. The counseling relationship served as the testing ground for interactions with others. Counselors would suggest alternative behaviors and participants would try the behaviors. Consequently, participants described enhancements to many facets of their lives.

The counseling relationship provided participants with a means to relieve stress. For several participants, counseling provided a relief valve for emotions and thoughts that pervaded their daily lives. “It felt great just to let everything out.” “I’d go to him and I could actually get everything off my chest and he’d help me out.” Freedom to release the pressures of thoughts, feelings, and anxieties was provided by the counseling relationship. Although participants had difficulty with *expressing* emotions, the release provided by the counseling relationship allowed them to *feel better*. “I’ll go to him (the counselor) and I’ll feel mad or upset and talk to him or feel down and they’ll try to cheer you up or make you feel better.” This aspect of the participants’ experiences belies the

reality that although adolescents have difficulty expressing emotions, they nonetheless, experience a range of feelings.

Two participants were unable to identify specific benefits of the counseling relationship. One was doubtful the counseling relationship had any benefit, yet later remarked about how going to counseling made him “feel better.” The other was sure the counseling relationship affected him, but was unable to say exactly what that benefit was when he was asked. Similar to the first participant, however, he was able to identify a benefit of receiving vocational information from the counselor.

Three participants described benefits of counseling as a transformation of their former selves. “I had a change of heart. I used to have a lot of hate in my heart so, it’s like somebody turned me around.” The expression of this benefit was both obvious and covert. The obvious benefit was the changes in specific behaviors that occurred over the course of the counseling relationship. The covert benefit was the recognition that a transformation took place in their lives. Adolescence is a dynamic developmental period (Thomas, 1990). Ever-changing physical, mental, and social expectations are characteristic. Participants’ recognition that the counseling relationship created a change in their lives is significant. Contrary to assertions that individual therapy with juvenile offenders is ineffective, participants described positive outcomes from their counseling experiences. The counseling relationship had a personal impact that reached beyond measurable behaviors. There was a recognizable reflection of the counseling relationship on participants’ personalities by participants and peers. “All my friends say that I’m a totally different person. The people that knew me before, like when I was bad are, like, ‘you’re a totally different person,’ and I really think I am. I’m not bad anymore.”

Participants described a range of benefits stemming from counseling. Participants described behavioral, emotional, social, and cognitive benefits of counseling. Even participants that were unable to recall specific benefits of counseling were able to describe a benefit of counseling. However, as a testament to the strength of the counseling relationship, the one participant that described a difficult relationship with the counselor did not describe any benefits. This contrast seems to highlight the critical nature of the counseling relationship in the extension of benefits from counseling.

#### *Passage of time in counseling*

Understanding the underlying universal structure of time in participants' experiences involved the use of participants' expressions related to time and describing the passage of time in the section entitled, Themes Related to the Process of the Relationship. For two participants, however, the passage of time involved both rigidity and flexibility. For one participant, the counselor failed to conform to the time constraints of the allotted session. This participant experienced a negative counseling relationship was characterized by not feeling understood, anger, and frustration. For this participant, the counselor going over the allotted time increased his frustration, "she kept me over time and I didn't want to talk because she got me real mad." For this participant, his frustration was fueled by the violation of time constraints. For the other participant, time seemed to dissolve into the interactions between him and the counselor. The interactions between them captured his awareness of time so that time passed quickly, "I didn't realize time was going so fast because we'd just be talking." For both participants, the passage of time served as either jailer or liberator, depending on the quality of the counseling relationship and the perceived benefit from the relationship.



*Exercising self-restraint*

A common characteristic of juvenile offenders is difficulty controlling impulsive behaviors (Glueck & Glueck, 1982). Only one of the eight participants expressed thoughts about controlling impulsive behaviors. This participant expressed frustration over not being heard brought internal conversations of what he thought about telling the counselor, “As soon as she shuts the hell up, maybe I can say something,’ that ‘s what I be thinking the whole time. I could hear myself talking in my mind.” Internal conversations between embattled sides struggled to find ways to cope with frustrations. His desires to act out his frustrations wrestled with trying to maintain control. This participant attempted verbal and behavioral actions to be heard, but was unsuccessful. The result was overwhelming frustration and feeling trapped. For this participant, the struggle was a battle between his internal desire to be heard and holding back his anger.

In regard to the counseling relationship, this participant’s experience reflects the necessity for counselors to ensure juvenile offenders are listened to and understood. Through listening and understanding, most participants described the development of a positive relationship with counselors. However, as experienced by one participant, the absence of these qualities resulted in dissatisfaction and discontentment.

*Compliance to mandatory attendance*

Juvenile offenders are often court mandated to attend counseling sessions. Compliance to mandatory counseling has been a challenging aspect of counseling this population (Rutter & Giller, 1983). In spite of each participant being mandated to attend counseling, only one of the eight participants expressed views regarding being mandated to attend counseling. For him, participation in counseling required compliance, not

acceptance. He would, “just tell them what they want to hear. Basically, that’s it.”

Rather than using counseling as a means to improve, this participant complied with the probation requirement for counseling by attending and minimally engaging in the counseling relationship. In contrast to his isolationistic approach, he later commented that he was glad the counselor made him look for a job even though, “it was not his (the counselor’s) place.” The participant expressed that he benefited from the counseling relationship even though he was skeptical about receiving any benefits from counseling.

#### *Views about change*

One participant expressed his views about how change occurs in adolescents. He was self-reliant and independent, “I got my own mind. I like to do things my way and what I want to do. That’s just me.” This participant was clear that he did not need anybody’s help. Change was believed to be a product of a person’s desire to change and of the passage of time. Characteristic of his independent approach to life, this participant believed that change did not involve intervening by other people. Consequently, his independent stance challenged him throughout the counseling relationship. While he felt change was internally motivated, he admitted the counseling relationship had some minimal impact on his life.

#### *Summary*

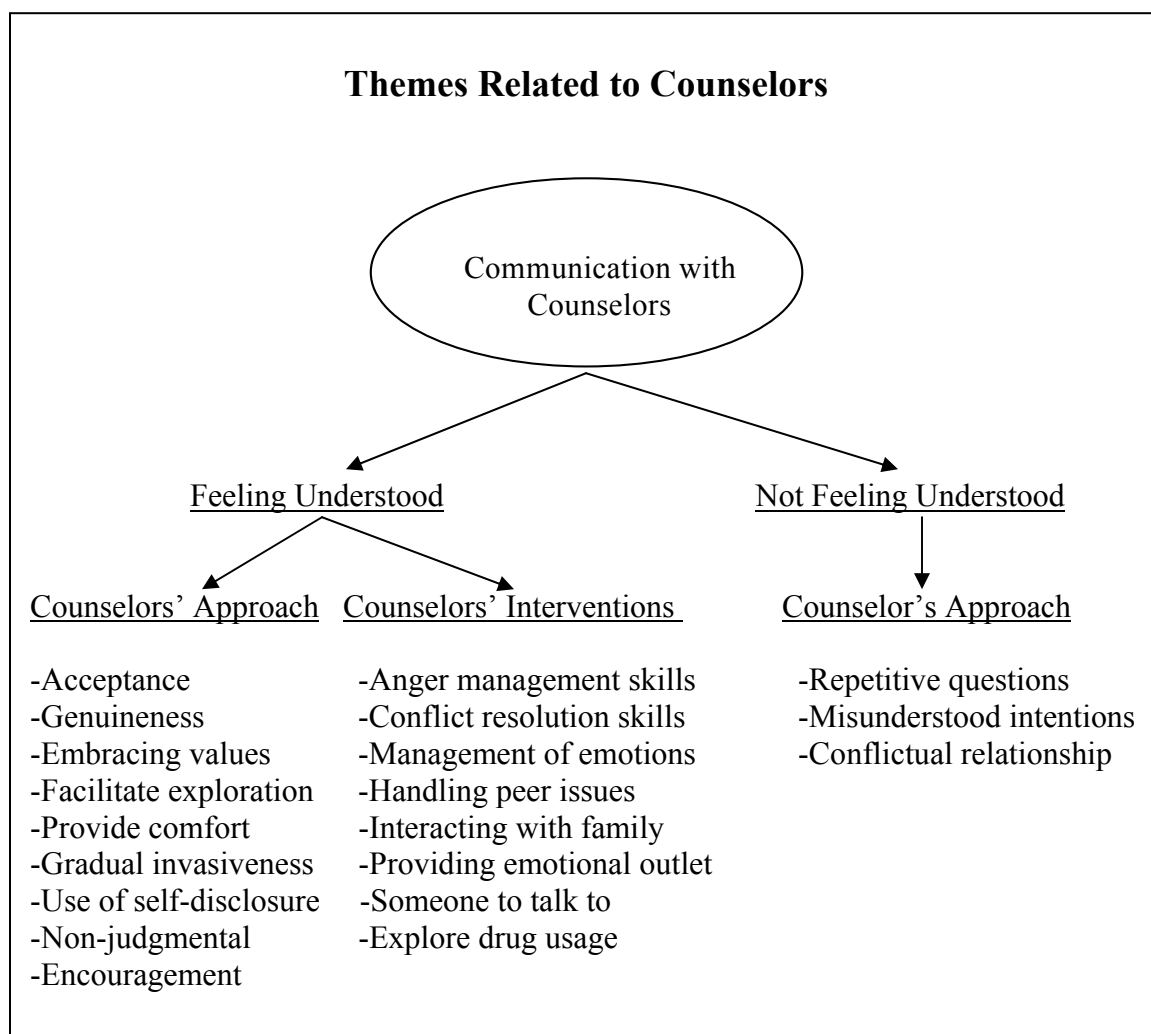
Themes related to participants demonstrate a complex mixture of characteristics and qualities that affect the quality of the counseling relationship. Sub-themes challenge preconceptions about juvenile offenders’ abilities to develop counseling relationships. Experiences expressed by the participants provide insight into the inner lives of juvenile offenders. Thoughts and feelings related to the counseling relationship provide

knowledge of the conditions that facilitate effective counseling relationships. In the next section, I discuss themes related to counselors.

### *Themes Related to Counselors*

Themes related to counselors contain aspects of participants' experiences that pertain to the counselors. Included in these sub-themes are the conditions that contribute to participants' experiences in the counseling relationship. Also, the conditions that facilitate a description of the "counseling relationship" are provided. A visual representation of these themes is provided in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Themes Related to Counselors



*Communication with counselors*

This sub-theme contains descriptions of participants' experiences related to the counselors' behaviors that facilitate communication. This sub-theme differs from the sub-theme under the same name presented previously in that it relates communication qualities of the counselor rather than participants. Participants' experiences provided insight into both ineffective and effective qualities of counselors as related to communication. Participants' experiences reflected that communication with the counselor was a precursor to the quality of the counseling relationship.

One participant, frustrated with the counseling relationship, provided a description of counselor behaviors as ineffective. For him, the counselor focused on obtaining the answer to one question repeatedly. Her persistent questioning on the same topic angered him; "She kept asking me the same thing so I didn't say nothing. She kept asking me and she aggravated me so I said, 'Bob, okay?'" His inability to negotiate the terms of communication led to frustration and counterfeit compliance by giving an incorrect answer. Rather than attempting to resolve the conflict between them, this participant provided the counselor with an answer merely to comply with her requests.

Another participant, however, described the counselor's ability to communicate as more facilitative. For him, the counselor "didn't talk to me like a counselor. He talked to me like a friend and I respected him." Although the participant was unable to describe specific behaviors of the counselor, he was able to identify delineation between how a counselor and client communicate and how friends communicate. The polarized viewpoints expressed by these two participants demonstrate the impact of counselors' behaviors on establishing effective two-way communication with juvenile offenders.

*Counselors' approach*

The counselors' approach refers to the manner in which the counselor established an environment conducive to the development of the counseling relationship.

Descriptions provided in this sub-theme related to traits of counselors that established rapport and developed the counseling relationship. As an overarching theme, the types of interactions between participants and counselors mirrored the quality of the counseling relationships. The participant who described his counseling experience as negative also described incongruent interactions with the counselor. For example, "She (the counselor) don't like me at all. She says she tries to help me." Not only were the interactions incongruent, they were paradoxical. The participant described the counselor's behaviors as positive behaviors yet believed the intentions behind these behaviors were negative. The participant stated, "She (the counselor) keeps aggravating me and I think she knows she's aggravating me, too, 'cause every time she says something she has a little giggle or something right behind." This participant's experience illustrates the necessity for counselors to focus on both congruency and shared effort between the counselor and the juvenile offender.

Most participants described the counseling experience as positive. For these participants descriptions of their interactions with the counselor were congruent. "She (the counselor) was trying to see things the way I see them." In addition, interactions with counselors involved respect, "I think she's trying to give me respect so I give her respect," encouragement, "She was just trying to fill it in my head, trying to let me know that it's real-that it can happen," and empathy, "Sometimes I had my real bad days where

I didn't want to be bothered and she (the counselor) kind of related to it. She knew what I was talking about, she knew what I was feeling, she knew how I was feeling."

Several participants expressed that counselors were non-judgmental in their approach to the participant, "she didn't think I was a bad person so it (talking to her) felt alright." This non-judgmental approach set the stage for counselors to embrace and facilitate exploration of participants' values. Similarly, one participant commented that the counselor's approach enabled him to be comfortable. The counselor accomplished this by engaging in laughter and not showing an angry demeanor to the participant. As a consequence of the approachable demeanor, the participant became increasingly comfortable with the counselor. Another participant commented that communication was easier with the counselor because the counselor did not raise her voice to the participant. For this participant, communication with others was ineffective when people spoke to her in a disrespectful tone.

Two additional qualities of the counselor were mentioned by participants as facilitating the counseling relationship. The first was self-disclosure. For three participants, counselors shared information about themselves. During initial and subsequent sessions counselors shared information about themselves that enabled participants to feel comfortable with talking to the counselor. Counselors engaging in two-way conversations challenged participants' views that counseling is one-sided. Consequently, participants felt the relationship as an interaction between two people rather than an interrogation. "He (the counselor) would tell me stuff about him like back in his days. I'd tell him about mine. We had a lot in common." The second quality was that counselors allowed the maintenance of an intimate sense of self. Several participants

believed that a goal of counseling was to pry into the deep intimacies of their experiences and personalities. Two participants, however, noted that the counselor allowed them to disclose at their own pace, which fostered the counseling relationship. “She (the counselor) asked questions, but she didn’t ask personal personal questions where they get up into your business. That’s why I really liked her.” Allowing participants the freedom to express themselves provided a sense of safety and enhanced participants’ willingness to communicate with the counselor.

#### *Counselors’ interventions*

Counselors’ interventions contain qualities of the counseling relationship that pertain to specific interventions experienced by participants. Most participants described counselors’ interventions as involving discussions and playing games. With the exception of playing board games, such as Monopoly, discussions reflected traditional talk therapy and impacted participants in differing ways. For three participants, discussions focused on appropriate ways of handling conflict with teachers, parents, and peers. Other discussions focused on appropriate ways of dealing with emotions, “she told me sometimes to express my feelings, I could write it down on a piece of paper,” including anger, “when I get mad I be ready to hit somebody, and she told me hitting somebody is not always the way to solve it.”

Counselors’ interventions also focused on relationships with family members, “instead of fighting with your mom, just go into your room, just sit there, and just think about it,” and peers, “She said, ‘you got to choose better friends.’” Interventions also focused on using the counseling relationship as means for participants to reflect on alternative behaviors. One participant recalled, “If I would come in upset and she (the

counselor) would be like, ‘What’s the matter?’ or something, and I might tell her what’s wrong and she would tell me how to solve that answer if something’s wrong.” Another participant stated, “He (the counselor) understood me. He said, ‘Look you can do this or you can do that...’ and I would walk out and would be like (sign of relief) ‘cause I hold my emotions in.” Finally, one participant commented that the counselor frequently discussed drug usage in their counseling sessions.

### *Summary*

These themes demonstrate the importance of the counselor’s approach and interventions in the counseling relationship. From these participants’ experiences, it is particularly noteworthy that the ability to communicate with the counselor was paramount to the development of an effective counseling relationship. For participants that felt they were understood by the counselor, counselors’ approaches were described as accepting, genuine, embracing values, facilitating exploration, providing comfort, gradual invasiveness, self-disclosing, non-judgmental, and encouraging. Similarly, participants who felt understood by counselors described counselors’ interventions as focusing on anger management skills, conflict resolution skills, management of emotions, handling peer issues, interacting with families, providing emotional outlet, providing someone to talk to, and exploring drug use. However, for the participant that did not feel understood by the counselor, the counselor’s approach was described as asking repetitive questions, having misunderstood intentions, and having a conflictual relationship with the participant. Participant descriptions of counselors’ interactions are consistent with characteristics noted by Braswell (1997). Braswell asserted that counselors need to be nonjudgmental, trustworthy, open-minded, and to listen. Through these qualities,



juvenile offender counselors can establish a basis for effective communication.

Participants' experiences reflect these qualities and lend support to the necessity of effective communication.

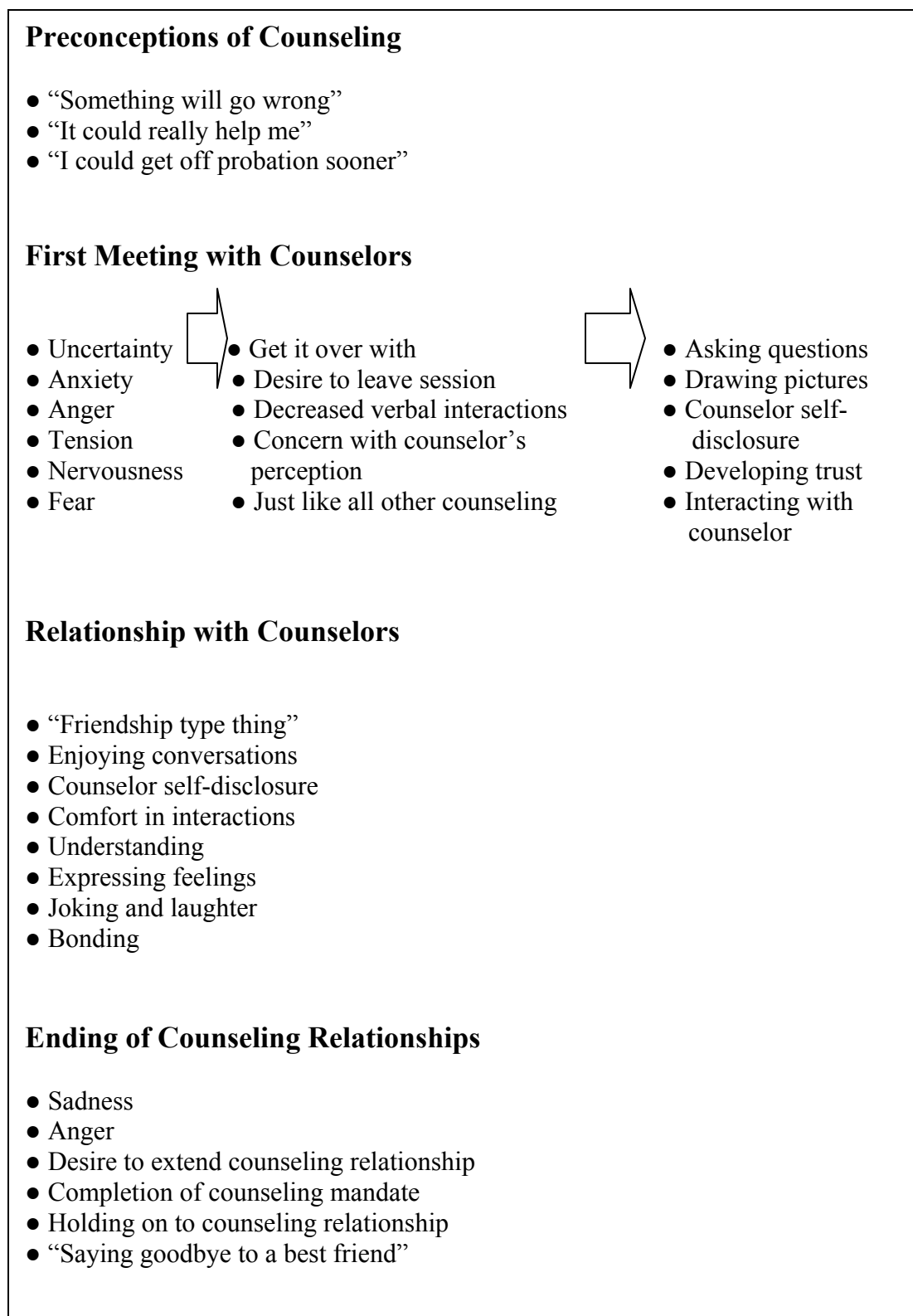
### *Themes Related to the Process of Counseling Relationships*

Themes related to the process of the counseling relationships contained descriptions of participants' experiences that related to the universal structures of time and causality. Descriptions depicted transformation of the counseling relationship over time and demonstrated the dynamic quality and timbre of the counseling relationship. These themes are visually represented in Figure 3 and facilitated understanding of the interrelation between the sub-themes.

#### *Preconceptions of counseling*

As previously mentioned, the beginning of the counseling relationship is crucial to the development of a meaningful and effective relationship. For three participants, thoughts about counseling guided their perceptions of what counseling would be. For one, he felt, "I always think when I meet with a counselor that something is going to go wrong." For another participant, attendance to counseling would provide a means to get off probation sooner. Yet another believed that only crazy people went to see counselors and for him, "I'm only crazy when I have to be," craziness was a choice to be made when he felt it was appropriate. For each of these participants, thoughts about the uses and benefits of counseling led them to begin the counseling relationship with certain expectations. These expectations influenced their interactions with the counselor during the first meeting with the counselor.

Figure 3: Themes Related to the Process of Counseling Relationship



*First meeting with counselors*

The first meeting with the counselor was a time of uncertainty and confusion. For three participants, the reason for their attendance was unknown. One participant thought he was getting locked up, another thought she was going to see her probation officer for a probation violation, and another didn't know why he was there. Participants seemed confused about the reason for the meeting. To them, the purpose of the meeting was unclear whether due to their inability to understand or the failure of the juvenile justice system to adequately prepare them for the meeting. Confusion contributed to their apprehension about meeting with the counselor. Through understanding participants' comprehension of the reasons for their meeting with the counselor, juvenile offender counselors can gain a better understanding of dynamic factors contributing to resistant clients.

While some participants expressed confusion over the reason for their attendance, others expressed a plethora of emotions during the first session. Some were angry because they had to attend counseling, "my anger was about different things, like, not wanting to cooperate, like just really not wanting to be there," while other participants were scared, nervous, and tense. "When I first got there I was nervous, I mean, like some people when they do new things they nervous." Some participants showed these emotions by "not talking too much" and tapping an ink pen. Initial feelings of anxiety and uncertainty produced a desire to leave sessions to relieve the discomfort of not knowing what to do or what was expected. One participant commented, "The first session I really just wanted to get it over with. I wanted to hurry up and go home 'cause I didn't know what she was trying to do."

In spite of the turmoil created by the swirling of thoughts, emotions, and desires to leave the discomfort, participants began to communicate with counselors. Counselors typically initiated conversations by engaging participants in low-level conversation that focused on participants' families, school statuses, reasons for probation, and providing information about expectations of counseling. Participants' descriptions conveyed a transition from anxieties in the beginning of the session to the development of a working relationship with the counselor. For several participants the transition occurred with the realization that the purpose of counseling was for their benefit and that the counselor was on their side. "When I got to know her (the counselor) and she really started talking to me, I wanted to be there. I wasn't scared no more." Others became more relaxed when they knew what the expectations of counseling were. Once participants were comfortable with the reasons for counseling and the counselor, they were able to begin developing a working relationship with the counselor.

#### *Relationship with counselors*

A mixture of emotions and uncertainties characterized early stages of development of the counseling relationship. From these early stages counseling relationships began to develop for most participants. For one participant, however, the counseling relationship did not progress into a working relationship. Difficulties in communication became the cornerstone of this relationship. Another participant interacted with the counselor only to the extent that met minimal requirements. For six other participants, the counseling relationship evolved into a relationship characterized by mutual sharing and interpersonal growth. Participants described relationships with their counselors in similar descriptions as friendships. "As time passed, we went from shaking

hands to dapping off,” “I don’t got a lot of friends, but he (the counselor) could be an associate,” “It was just like somebody I was talking to, like when you’re hanging out with somebody familiar,” and “we created that bond.” Descriptions challenged current views on juvenile offenders’ abilities to form relationships and provide insight into the perceptions of *adolescent offenders* engaged in *mandatory* counseling. Of particular note, these descriptions highlighted the development of a bond between counselors and participants that served as the basis for the counseling relationship. Rutter and Giller (1983) noted that juvenile offenders are more likely to have relationship difficulties than non-delinquent youth. In contrast, participants’ descriptions challenge this notion and suggest a qualitative difference between the juvenile offender population, as a whole, regarding abilities to form relationships.

Interactions between counselors and participants were often described as counselors making participants comfortable by “asking questions on the slick, but having a good time doing it,” and “we would always joke around.” Such interactions fostered the development of loyalty to the counselor. One participant stated, “he (the counselor) looked out for me in a way.” Another remarked, “All I needed was somebody for a little understanding. All I need was somebody to relate to. If I had to do it all over, that would be the only (counselor) I’d go to.” These statements reflected loyalty and fondness toward others-qualities often dismissed in descriptions of juvenile offenders.

#### *End of counseling relationships*

The qualities that characterized the end of the counseling relationship reflected the interpersonal involvement between counselors and participants. For two participants, terminating sessions brought anger because they did not want sessions to end. Another

expressed, “it’s hurtful, but you can get through it.” Yet others expressed the desire to continue the counseling relationship. The sense of loss created by the ending of the counseling relationship was, “like saying good-bye to a best friend.” Loss of the relationship brought with it the consequence that there would be no one to talk with. Five participants expressed the desire to continue the counseling relationship. Their reactions to the loss involved bargaining with extended sessions and contacting the counselor in the future in case the need arose. Three participants conveyed the openness of their counselors to be available for future communication, although none reported making contact after the final session. For two participants, the ending of the counseling relationship marked the completion of probation requirements. For these participants, there was a sense of completion and one step closer to the end of probation.

The final counseling session was a culmination of counseling sessions. It contained summaries of what was learned by the participants and, in two cases, more relaxed sessions characterized by being let out early and informal discussions. After the end of the counseling relationship, one participant reflected on how the counselor thought about him, “I just wonder what she thinks about me right now.” The effects of the counseling relationship, for this participant, extended outside the counseling relationship.

### *Summary*

In summary, participants’ descriptions of the counseling relationship identified distinct developmental stages. In the initial stage, counseling relationships were characterized by anxiety and uncertainty. Participants expressed a range of thoughts and emotions surrounding the start of the relationship. Through initial interactions with counselors, participants became more relaxed toward counseling and counselors.

Through this transition, bonds developed between most of the participants and their counselors. Relationships ensued that were characterized by mutual communication, development of alternative behaviors, and feelings that counselors were friends. The end of counseling relationships, like other losses, brought anger and hurtfulness for some participants. For others, the ending of counseling relationships brought satisfaction of completing probation requirements. Understanding the process of the counseling relationship with juvenile offenders is critical for working with this population. Descriptions suggest that juvenile offender counselors be aware of the challenges, pitfalls, and advantages of each stage to increase therapeutic effectiveness.

#### *Conclusion of Themes*

In conclusion, themes represented in participants' descriptions reflected their perceptions of the counseling relationship. Thematic categories represent the three major components of the counseling relationship; counselors' characteristics, participants' characteristics, and the process of counseling relationships. Through understanding the perception of participants' experiences of the counseling relationship, juvenile offender counselors can be better equipped to address the needs of this population. Although presentation of these themes provides a caption of specific components of the counseling relationship, it lacks a composite description of the entire phenomenon. Following is a description of the phenomenon that is consistent with phenomenological data analysis as described by Moustakas (1994).

#### *Composite Textural-Structural Description*

The significant contribution of phenomenological method is in both the data collection and data analysis. Data collection consists of experiences of counseling

relationships as lived by the participants. This highly subjective approach provides insight into the psyches of participants as they communicate important aspects of counseling relationships. Phenomenological data analysis seeks to identify every aspect of counseling relationships and make it a necessary component for understanding the whole phenomenon. As noted in Chapter 3, the culmination of data analysis is the composite textural-structural description. In addition, although the composite textural-structural description contains information contained in the previously presented section on themes, the description provides two advantages. First, the description is a composite of all individual descriptions represented in a continuous description. The composite description synthesizes of meanings and essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Second, the composite description provides a model for future researchers interested in phenomenological method. Although Moustakas recommends including the composite textural-structural description in the presentation of the data, no phenomenological-based research has provided this description. As a result, the only whole example of a textural-structural description is contained in Moustakas text.

The composite textural-structural description describes the essences and meanings of the counseling relationship for the group of participants as a whole. This description provides a broader understanding of juvenile offenders' perceptions as the participants experienced them. In order to facilitate descriptions of juvenile offenders' experiences, the description includes five major aspects of the phenomenon: a) juveniles' preconceptions of counseling relationships, b) the first session, c) transition of relationships, d) working relationships, and e) termination of counseling relationships.



Regarding preconceptions of counseling relationships, participants' previous experiences with mental health professionals foreshadowed the beginning of counseling relationships. A variety of presumptions influenced participants' feelings and thoughts about counseling. One participant expressed apathy towards counseling, "I don't want to hear it, like, everything you said I've heard before." For another, previous experiences with counselors led him to believe, "something is going to go wrong" when he meets with counselors. For yet another, previous experiences with a school counselor left him distrustful of counselors, in general; "some counselors will tell you just about anything so that you will tell them, and they might run back and tell." These presumptions affected how the participants viewed counselors, counseling relationships, and their ability to benefit from counseling.

First sessions were described as periods of intense emotions, confusion, uncertainty, and thoughts of evading discomfort. Initial moments of first counseling sessions were full of uncertainty, "I didn't know what to do," and anger, "I was mad 'cause I thought I had to see my probation officer," "(I) was mad that I had to come (to counseling)," and "I thought it was not right for me to go see no psychiatrist." Participants were confused over the reasons why they were in counseling, "I didn't know who he (the counselor) was," "I didn't know what to say," and "I thought I was going to get locked up." Anger and confusion created initial resistance to counselors and desires to remove themselves from the situation. One participant said he, "wanted to hurry up and go home 'cause I didn't know what to do," and another stated he wanted to "get it over with." Others desired to get the first session over so they could relieve the uncertainty of not knowing what to expect. One participant wanted to get the session

over with to “feel comfortable about it (counseling).” In spite of their desires to leave, participants continued sessions and started interacting with counselors. Many participants described that counselors initially engaged in relatively low intensity communication such as asking about school, probation status, family status, and other basic personal information (such as hobbies, activities, sports, etc.). Some counselors engaged in self-disclosure, which provided participants with feelings of safety to share their own personal information. One participant, however, felt “I’m not being listened to,” which was a consistent description throughout his counseling relationship. The first session, for each participant, was crucial for establishing the tone for the remainder of the sessions.

With the exception of one participant frustrated over his counselor not listening to him, participants experienced a transition from initial confusion to a working relationship. A major component of these transitions was the counselors’ demeanor. Counselors’ demeanors were characterized by participants as understanding, mutual sharing, genuineness, and empathy. These traits served to allay anxieties and provide participants with freedom to take risks and express themselves, “we kinda went from patient to counselor to friends.” Communication with counselors either strengthened the transition, “it (the counseling relationship) felt good just as long as nobody was yelling in my face,” and, “I could talk to her like a friend,” or weakened the relationship, “I’d tell her a few things, but right then she keeps asking me the same old thing, I’d get mad.” Trust was a common concern for participants during the transition. As one participant stated, “You gotta have trust. If you cannot trust (the counselor) then I cannot open up to (the counselor),” “we pretty much got a trust thing,” and, “people need to be real, like

they ain't gonna lie to you.” One participant struggled with whether the counselor was trustworthy in spite of the counselor's genuineness; “in the back of my mind” she wondered whether the counselor was violating the trust she had given him. As the relationship progressed, however, she found the counselor “was always on my side.”

Most participants described counseling relationships as having developed into relationships that were beneficial to them-working relationships. Having proceeded through a period of transition, participants described aspects of relationships related to counselors' approaches, participants' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, communication with counselors, effects of counseling relationships, and the passage of time. Counselors' approaches both initiated and maintained the counseling relationship. For one participant the counselor was, “playful and talkative;” for another, the counselor would, “try to help (me) out to benefit (me),” and tried, “to make me feel comfortable and do his job at the same time.” Another expressed comfort with the counselor's unconditional acceptance of him, “she didn't think I was a bad person so it (talking to her) felt alright.” Yet another expressed the development of a “bond” between them because the counselor “was down to earth.” Contrasted with the anxieties caused by initial experiences in counseling relationships, counselors' demeanors brought comfort to participants.

Participants' thoughts about counseling relationships in the working phase were that, “I started liking it,” “it felt great just to let everything out,” and “it was a good relationship.” On the contrary, one participant expressed his struggle to be heard, “I be thinking the whole time, ‘as soon as she shuts the hell up, maybe I can say something.’” Communication was a central component of participants' experiences. The dissonant description by one participant, “I tell her all I know and she asks the same thing, same

thing,” highlights the difficult communication between the participant and the counselor. Such difficult communication contrasted with other participants’ descriptions of supportive communication; “I just liked talking to him,” “(the counselor) would tell you things and mean what he said,” and, “I could talk to her just like being around one of my friends.” For several participants, the act of communicating was difficult; “(feelings are) not the type of stuff I would regularly talk about,” “you basically answer their questions (and) get it over with,” and “I don’t like talking to people.” Although there was a comfort with communicating with the counselor, there were issues too personal to discuss. Improved communication within the counseling relationship paralleled communication with relationships outside of counseling.

For many participants counseling relationships mirrored relationships with others. Participants described how prior to the counseling relationship they argued and fought with peers, family members, and teachers. However, after the counseling relationship, “me and my mom’s relationship is, like, a whole lot better because of him (the counselor),” “by her (the counselor) talking to me and we created that bond and I just started being real friendly with people,” and “(I would) talk it (conflict) out (with others), and...avoid talking back to teachers.” For most participants, the creation of a relaxed environment through laughter and joking helped participants become comfortable, “I just feel I can joke around with her (the counselor). You can’t joke around with people when you got to be tense with them-you’re not really having a good relationship,” “(the counselor would ask questions) while having a good time doing it,” “he was cool,” and “he was down to earth.”

Results from counseling relationships expressed by participants were both internal and external to the relationship. Development of a strong relationship with counselors enabled participants to “let everything out,” and to have a “change of heart,” and to “just like talking to him (the counselor) and just hanging around him.” Participants experienced friendships blooming from a counseling relationship that began with confusion and anxiety. Friendships served, on an intrapersonal level, to solidify participants’ values. One participant felt, “I already knew right from wrong...all she did was embrace it.” Another felt, “he’ll (the counselor) talk to me and give me some insight.” Participants described benefits of counseling relationships that extended outside counseling sessions. Many participants experienced a metamorphosis of their personalities. One participant explained that he had fewer fights in the neighborhood and stayed home more. Others remarked that they were better able to deal with anger by “talking it out” rather than impulsively fighting with peers. Participants described the changes as, “I just started being real friendly with people,” and “(my friends said I am) a totally different person.” Other participants experienced improvements in their school grades, increase in sharing with others, the ability to express emotions appropriately, and avoiding conflict with teachers.

Regarding the passage of time, one participant expressed he, “didn’t realize time was going by so fast.” Mutual sharing of personal information consumed time as the participant and counselor engaged in dialog. For the participant that did not feel he was being listened to, the passage of time was slow. His inability to negotiate the terms of their relationship was frustrating. Participants’ perceptions of the quality of the counseling relationship determined whether time was a jailer or liberator.

The end of counseling relationships was described in terms of feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, and the meaning of loss for participants. For the participant that did not feel he was being listened to, the counseling session could not end soon enough. He would, “start running when I close the door (to the counseling room).” For him, the counselor did not listen to him and he did not feel understood by the counselor. For other participants, termination was described as the loss of “a best friend.” Common feelings about relationship endings were described by most participants as, “sad and mad,” and “like saying goodbye to a best friend.” Some participants bargained with thoughts of seeing the counselor again, “you can probably get in touch with your best friend; with this friend, I probably won’t never see her again.” For others, the loss of the counseling relationship was bittersweet in that the ending of the relationship marked completion of a probation requirement, yet the loss created a longing for the relationship to continue. The loss of the relationship also created a sense of loneliness for participants in that they no longer had an outlet to express their emotions. Lasting impressions of the counseling relationship seemed to haunt participants, “at the end, I couldn’t get (seeing him) out of my mind,” and “I just wonder what she thinks about me now...I wonder if she thinks I’m not like other people, like, I’m not ignorant or going around starting trouble. I just hope she thinks I’m a good person.”

### *Summary*

These findings suggest that the counseling relationship is a dynamic interplay between participant characteristics, counselor characteristics, and the process of the counseling relationship. Participants’ perceptions of counseling relationships were based largely on the ability of the counselors to engage the participants in a genuine,

informative, and empathetic manner. Through the interactions between participants and counselors, counseling relationships blossomed into pseudo-friendships that benefited the participants. The one participant that expressed dissatisfaction with his relationship did not *perceive* these qualities to be present. This participant's description, while it was an outlier of sorts, provided evidence of what juvenile offender counselors should avoid. Also, experiences of this outlier gave credibility to the experiences of other participants.

As I interviewed the participants, it was apparent that each of them wanted to contribute to the project. Although initial meetings were at times tentative, once the participant understood the project intended no harm, they agreed to participate. My experiences in establishing rapport with these participants mirrored their experiences with counselors. Once participants were aware of my intentions, they became more relaxed and able to describe their experiences to me. Each participant wanted to be accepted, feel understood, and wanted to contribute to this meaningful project. These desires propelled them to reach deep inside of themselves and do something they had never done before. Through their stories, a greater understanding of the qualities of the experience of the counseling relationship was obtained.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Summary and Implications

These are the voices which we hear in solitude,  
but they grow faint and inaudible as we enter into the world.  
-Ralph Waldo Emerson

#### *Introduction*

This chapter is organized in accordance with the format provided by Moustakas' (1994). The chapter contains six sections that summarize the research and provide implications of the research. The first section summarizes the purpose, methodology, and findings of the research. The second section discusses the relevance of the findings to current literature. The third section provides suggestions for further studies emanating from this research. The fourth section provides a discussion of the limitations of the methodology and findings. The fifth section provides a discussion on the implications of the research findings. Finally, the sixth section provides a conclusion.

#### *Purpose of Research*

In chapter one, I presented an overview of the extensive impact of juvenile delinquency and the failure of current treatment approaches to adequately address issues related to juvenile delinquency. I discussed my personal experiences with juvenile offenders and how my experience with counseling relationships differed from the current approaches used with this population. Further, I discussed that the significance of the



study was to allow juvenile offenders voices to be heard. Implications for the study were described as the need to meet clients where they are, the need to train counselors in the field of juvenile offender counseling, and the need for counselor educators to advocate for juvenile offender counselors. Chapter one also set the stage to discuss the appropriateness of the phenomenological method and defined limitations and terms used throughout the study.

Chapter two provided a review of the literature and consisted of three distinct components of this study. First, juvenile offenders were investigated in order to provide a basis for understanding the macro and micro systems that affect this population. In particular, interpersonal and intrapersonal factors and current treatment approaches were discussed. This discussion provided insight into the shortcomings of current approaches to address the unique challenges faced by juvenile offenders. Second, current literature on relationships was investigated. In spite of literature that indicated that establishing relationships with juvenile offenders is ineffective, relationships were found to be an integral part of counseling relationships. Further, the literature on relationships with juvenile offenders contradicted the notion that relationships are ineffective when used with this population. Third, the applicability of phenomenological research was discussed. Due to the elusive nature of the counseling relationship and the fact that juvenile offenders are frequently misunderstood, the most appropriate methodological approach for this study was phenomenology. Studies were discussed that detailed previous phenomenological methods. These studies provided a baseline for understanding the significance of phenomenology with this current research.

Chapter three provided a discussion on the methodology for the study. This chapter provided rationales for qualitative approach and for phenomenological method. Further, the research plan was discussed along with the research question, and methodology. Steps in data collection were provided as well as a discussion on ensuring trustworthiness.

Chapter four presented the results of the study. Findings of the study were presented in two ways. First, a list of the themes identified by the participants was presented. These themes provided a range of descriptive statements that facilitate an understanding of the counseling relationship. Key elements of the counseling relationship discovered by thematic presentation were the importance of counseling relationships to successful outcomes, communication as a critical factor in the relationship, and the link between the key element of the working relationship and positive participant perceptions of the counselor. Second, the composite textural-structural description was presented to provide an integrated description of the scope of the counseling relationship. A key aspect of this description was the discovery of a process of the relationship that emanated from participants' experiences.

In chapter five, I summarize the relevance of the findings to the development of counseling relationships with juvenile offenders and to phenomenological methods. Further, I discuss suggestions for further research involving counseling relationships. I discuss limitations in the study related to both the methodology and the findings. Finally, I discuss implications of the findings for counselors, counselor educators, society, and for me as a researcher and a learner.

## *Discussion*

A discussion of the applicability of the research results to current literature is divided into two sections: relevance to juvenile offenders and the counseling relationship, and relevance to the phenomenological method. Current literature includes information on characteristics of juvenile offenders, the counseling relationship, and phenomenology. However, there have been few phenomenological studies that specifically address juvenile offenders.

### *Relevance to Counseling Juvenile Offenders*

Relevance of this research on the counseling relationship involves four areas- juvenile offenders, juvenile offender counselors, and the counseling relationship.

#### *Juvenile offenders*

Current literature on juvenile offenders provides a wealth of information regarding characteristics of juvenile offenders. These characteristics are discussed from the point of view of objective traits measured by outsiders looking in. The shortcoming of such information is that it lacks the ability to explicate meanings and motivations behind these characteristics. Literature on juvenile offenders' abilities to establish and maintain relationships indicates that this population typically has difficulty with this interpersonal task. However, findings of this study provide contrary evidence. The development of a relationship was a critical factor in the effectiveness of the counseling relationship for participants. Similarly, literature points to attachment difficulties as precursors for relationship difficulties. Participants in this study, however, seemed to be attracted to counselors who demonstrated genuineness, honesty, and trustworthiness.

In addition, findings suggest positive outcomes as experienced by participants whether they successfully completed probation or not. The current measure of treatment effectiveness, namely recidivism, is inappropriate and myopic because there are innumerable benefits stemming from counseling juvenile offenders. One such example is the spread of positive relationships from counseling to other areas of juveniles' lives. Findings of this study suggest that recidivism is only one of many measures to gauge effectiveness of treatment. Although recidivism is relatively simple to measure, treatment effectiveness extends far beyond a juvenile's ability to avoid incarceration. Rather than using recidivism as an objective measure for treatment effectiveness, a broader scope of objective measures should be used that encompass all facets of juvenile offender functioning.

#### *Juvenile offender counselors*

Regarding relevance of this research to current literature on juvenile offender counselors, findings support the importance of the counseling relationship. Philosophical underpinnings of counseling establish the development of an environment that is conducive to the development of a working relationship. Participants revealed such components as critical to the success of the counseling relationship. Traits of counselors were consistent with those discussed in counseling literature and described by participants as involving genuineness, honesty, understanding, trustworthiness, and empathy. These traits developed and nurtured the counseling relationship. An area not directly discussed by current literature is the need for juvenile offender counselors to understand the language of juvenile offenders. Most participants had difficulty expressing themselves and resorted to typical adolescent vernacular and colloquialisms.

It is important for juvenile offender counselors to understand the language of juvenile offenders in order to truly understand this often misunderstood population.

Further, most participants were involved with the juvenile justice system for charges relating to difficulty with relationships. As previously noted, relationship difficulties is a common characteristic for juvenile offenders. However, a majority of participants described relating to counselors in ways incongruent with this accepted characteristic. Such contrasting information illuminates a critical element of working with juvenile offenders-counselors' approaches. Although it is speculative to assume that previous relationship difficulties resulted from others' actions rather than the participants, juvenile offender counselors should understand that relationships are two-sided. That is, juvenile offender counselors can impact the quality of the counseling relationship by proactive communication that establishes fertile ground for the relationship to grow.

Finally, literature is replete with theories of delinquency and identification of characteristic traits of juvenile offenders. Conceptual approaches regarding juvenile offenders' characteristics range from Strain Theory (Carey & McAnany, 1984) to behavioral disorders (Nelson, Rutherford, & Wolford, 1987). However, much of the literature on juvenile offenders refers to incarcerated juveniles (e.g., Crespi, 1990; Pliszka, Sherman, Barrow, & Irick, 2000; Wierson & Forehand, 1995). Differences in findings across studies involving juvenile offenders may suggest the necessity to categorize juvenile offender characteristics in terms of their level of legal involvement. Categorization would facilitate understanding of the various levels of juvenile offenders and would further understanding of the distinct qualities of each group. Qualities of first-time offenders are distinctly different from incarcerated offenders.

*Process of counseling relationships*

Findings illuminated the process of counseling relationships. Participants described relationships that started devoid of any interpersonal connections with counselors. However, as relationships progressed more frequent and more meaningful communications with counselors led to trust which, in turn, led to beneficial outcomes. The discrepant description demonstrated that, in the absence of effective communication, there was no trust; without trust there was no relationship and no benefits.

Relevance of the findings to the counseling relationship relates to the nature of understanding the counseling relationship. Literature views the counseling relationship from the perspective of observable behaviors. Therefore, current understanding lacks a holistic view in that it does not include the perspective of the client. Findings from this study reveal the importance of clients' perspectives to provide both collaborative information for current knowledge or refuting information for current knowledge. Further, due to the ambiguous nature of counseling relationships, objective measures alone are insufficient for providing a complete understanding of counseling relationships. Critical components of counseling relationships are found in the meanings and essences ascribed to the counseling relationship by clients' descriptions of the experience. Similarly, findings suggest that there are aspects of counseling relationships that cannot be measured through quantitative means. Previous attempts to study relationships have been one-sided because they only illuminate the visual aspects of counseling relationships.

Regarding relevance of the findings to current "rehabilitation" programs, the findings provide a challenge to established programs that focus on juvenile offenders. As

noted in chapter two, current rehabilitation programs use a cognitive-behavioral approach that denies the importance of establishing a relationship with clients. The findings of this study, however, provide contrary evidence. Improvements in interpersonal relationships, decreases in school-related problems, and fewer peer conflicts resulted from counseling relationships that were described positively by participants.

#### *Relevance to Phenomenological Method.*

The uniqueness of phenomenological method, as contrasted with other qualitative methods, is that it is a process of discovery that, inasmuch as possible, is free from biases and presuppositions. Phenomenological method presents a pure essence of counseling relationships as perceived by participants. As such, experiences presented by participants are not guided by theoretical constructs. Rather, these experiences are pure essences and meanings of participants' experiences. Within the scope of this study, phenomenological method enabled the discovery of the meanings and process perceived by juvenile offenders. In addition, phenomenological method provided support for anecdotal evidence regarding the importance of relationships with juvenile offenders. Sikes (1993), Hersch (1998), and the Justice Policy Institute (1999) describe compelling stories of juvenile offenders looking for belonging, trust, and connections with positive adults. Through the rigors of phenomenological data analysis, empirical support for these anecdotal stories provides credibility to juveniles' experiences.

#### *Future Studies*

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, suggestions for future research relate to the application of the findings to further research in the area of juvenile offender counseling. First, future research should be directed at integrating phenomenological

method into outcome research of current juvenile offender treatment approaches to determine whether or not results remain consistent with quantitative methods alone. In specific, rather than investigating the effectiveness of treatment approaches using recidivism as a singular outcome measure, outcome studies should integrate qualitative methodologies as part of outcome measurements.

A second suggestion for future studies is to determine how the variance between participants occurred. That is, differences in the quality of the counseling relationship existed across participants' experiences. Further studies should be aimed at explicating the reasons for the differences between participants. One central question arising from the findings of the current study was, "what worked better for some participants and not others?" Due to the exploratory nature of this task, a qualitative method would be most appropriate. In particular, attention should be given to counselors' actions and the participants' thoughts and feelings about each action. From participants' descriptions, a rubric for working with juvenile offenders can be developed that includes information based on clients' experiences.

Lastly, the benefit of phenomenological studies is to discover meanings as perceived by participants. Expanding on the current study, which was aimed at discovering meanings and essences of the counseling relationship, a phenomenological study investigating the perspectives of juvenile offender counselors would be beneficial. The study would provide a basis for understanding counselors' perceptions of the counseling relationship with juvenile offenders. The results of this study would provide a deeper understanding of the counseling relationship as it relates to this population.



### *Limitations*

Several limitations existed in this study. First, of major concern was the ability to schedule appointments with potential participants. While scheduling initial interviews, 25 potential participants in three separate cohorts met criteria for selection and were mailed initial letters. Many participants declined participation initially via phone conversations. Other participants agreed to participate. Initial interviews were scheduled with the potential participants. Participants were reminded by phone of the interview the day before and the day of the interview. In several cases, I offered to hold interviews inside participants' homes due to transportation difficulties. In spite of this level of effort, fewer than half of the scheduled appointments attended the initial interviews. A common concern of members of the juvenile system is the difficult contacting and scheduling appointments with juveniles and their family members. Consequently, a limitation of working with this population is the amount of effort needed to compile an adequate group of participants. The characteristic difficulty contacting and setting appointments may be a limiting factor for research, in general, with this population. Much of the research on juvenile offenders is performed on juveniles in detention or incarceration due to the ease of availability of participants. Researchers interested in performing research with the population of non-incarcerated juvenile offenders should be aware of the difficulties obtaining access and be prepared to meet this challenge with patience and persistence.

The second limitation of the study was found in the nature of the participants selected. Participants were selected based on their probation officers' perception of the potential participants' ability to express abstract thoughts and ideas. Subsequently, the

selection process intentionally omitted participants that were not able to express themselves appropriately. Although participant selection benefited the study in that descriptions provided a depth of understanding, it also omitted the input of juveniles that were not able to express themselves. It would be interesting to know whether the experiences of the omitted potential participants would be qualitatively different from those participants that were selected.

The third limitation of the study related to gender differences between the participants. Six of the eight participants were males, while two were females. However, the female participants tended to be more expressive than their male counterparts. Also, there may be important gender differences that existed between same-gender and different-gender counseling relationships. The experiences provided by participants may have been different if their counselors were of different genders.

The fourth limitation relates to phenomenological method. Phenomenological data analysis included the crucial step of researcher bracketing. That is, through bracketing I engaged in setting aside my biases and presuppositions about the counseling relationship and juvenile offenders. The product of bracketing is the ability to understand the experience of the relationship as naively and freshly as possible (van Manen, 1990). As such, experiences can be understood in their entirety. However, one limitation is that it is impossible to bracket all biases and presuppositions. Rather, I engaged in the process of bracketing prior to each interview and data analysis (Polkinghorn, 1989). Through this process I wrote my thoughts and concerns in a journal. In order to reflect on my thoughts during data collection and analysis, I reviewed my journal to ensure my biases did not enter into the process. Another approach used to bracket my biases was to

meet with a peer debriefer once per week to discuss my biases and concerns. Finally, through the process of member checks, data analysis was confirmed or amended by second interviews with participants.

Lastly, phenomenological method is limited in the ability of the findings to be generalized to larger populations. As a common limitation of qualitative approaches, generalizability can only be applied to the cohort of participants in the study (Hycner, 1985). Although a sample size of eight is an adequate number of participants for qualitative research, it is a relatively small representation of the entire population of juvenile offenders.

### *Implications*

Implications of this study apply to counselors, counselor educators, society, and for me as a learner. First, implications for counselors involve both juvenile offender counselors and counselors, in general, who work with difficult adolescents. The findings of this study provided a basis for counselors to understand the subjective experience of juvenile offenders' counseling relationships. Through this understanding, counselors can develop more meaningful relationships and engage in more effective therapeutic processes with this challenging population. The findings provided counselors with a means to understand the essences ascribed to the counseling relationship. Further, counselors can develop a greater understanding of the unfolding process of the counseling relationship as juvenile offenders perceive it. With this information, counselors can tailor their approaches to develop effective counseling relationships with juvenile offenders.

Implications for counselor educators involved the need to implement juvenile offender counseling as part of the training curriculum for counselors. As a specialized population, juvenile offenders represent unique challenges to counselors. Participants' descriptions point to the need to train counselors in ways to break through initial resistance and to establish and maintain effective therapeutic relationships. Training curriculums should also include coursework that educates future counselors on the systemic challenges of the juvenile justice system. It is important to note that juvenile offender counseling is an employment option available to future counselors. Participant descriptions provide a linkage between humanistic counseling approaches and the needs of juvenile offenders. Lastly, this study demonstrated the need for further studies involving juvenile offenders and counselors by magnifying the counseling relationship from the viewpoint of the participants.

Implications for society involve the way in which society treats juvenile offenders. As noted in chapter one, juvenile offenders tend to be regarded as marginalized sub-culture. In many respects, juvenile offenders are considered to be outcasts of adolescence. The findings of this study challenged societal norms of ostracizing juvenile offenders. Findings revealed that these participants possess similar traits as their non-delinquent counterparts. Each one expressed needs to trust, to be understood, and to be heard. As a common thread among all adolescents, the participants enjoyed communicating with someone who was listening, and who provided more than just an ear-they provided unconditional positive regard. Accordingly, Thomas (1990) asserted,

a major task of adolescence becomes that of resolving the identity crisis, so that youths can enter adulthood with an increasingly secure set of values and a clearer

conception of their appearance, physical and mental abilities, interests, social relationships, potentials, ambitions for the future, and individuality. (p. 192)

Finally, implications for me as a person and as a learner were critical.

Throughout my professional development as a juvenile offender counselor I have been aware of the importance of the counseling relationship. However, many programs that purported to reduce recidivism seemed shallow and incomplete. Incongruities between my personal experiences and research-developed programs were disconcerting. As a result, I sought to explore an overlooked aspect of juvenile offender counseling - perceptions of juvenile offenders themselves. Participants' descriptions of the counseling relationship validated my thoughts and experiences with juvenile offenders. As a learner, this study enabled me to identify and bracket my assumptions while discovering the pure essences of the participants' experiences. The significance of this was that the findings of the study were products of the participants and not my own inclinations. As such, findings supported my personal experiences and provided me with validation of my own experiences.

### *Summary*

In conclusion, this study has provided much needed bridge between what is known about juvenile offenders and counseling relationships and what is not known. Literature has provided a plethora of information about characteristics of juvenile offenders, about characteristics of counseling relationships, and about treatment approaches designed to address juvenile offender recidivism. Within this knowledge there is a void of information that prevents a comprehensive understanding of this population. Absent from our understanding are the perceptions of juvenile offenders. Through data analysis, a composite textural-structural description was provided. The

description sought to view the essences and meanings of the counseling relationship as perceived by juvenile offenders. As a unique window into the minds of this obscure population, the description provided an array of thoughts and feelings. Data analysis also produced thematic groupings that withhold the keys to understanding the breadth and depth of the counseling relationship from the perspective of participants.

This study differed from any previous study in that it gave a voice to participants. Their voices rang out when given the chance to speak. The understanding that developed from their words can only be obtained by employing such a method. Although the study was not aimed at providing direction to counselors, it provided a discovery of possibilities for juvenile offender counselors to open their minds to the depth and breadth of juvenile offenders in counseling and provided a description of the process of the counseling relationship from juvenile offenders' perspectives.

This study was also unique in its approach and ability to identify the depth of the counseling relationship with juvenile offenders. Phenomenological method provided the most appropriate philosophical approach to discovering the hidden meanings withheld inside of juvenile offenders' psyches. Phenomenology fit the study in its philosophy, purpose, and method. The result of such a fit was a study that illuminated and discovered the elusive perceptions of juvenile offenders.

Regarding my future directions, this study represented both an ending and a beginning. While this study has come to a conclusion, my understanding of the dynamics of the counseling relationship with juvenile offenders has just started. My thirst for knowledge in the area of juvenile offender counseling remains insatiable. This study supported and illuminated my personal opinions regarding the necessity of the counseling

relationship. As such, the study represents a continuation of my personal and professional interest in enhancing understanding juvenile offenders. I close with an excerpt from Hersch (1998) that highlights the importance of understanding juvenile offenders,

We have to reconnect the adolescent community to ours. It is not so hard. We just need to reach out and embrace them and take time to get to know them – one by one, as individuals, not as a tribe. (p. 372)

## CHAPTER SIX

### Introduction

“Man dwells apart, though not alone,  
He walks among his peers unread;  
The best of thoughts, which he hath known,  
For lack of listeners, are not said.”  
-Jean Inglow (1820-1897)

In recent decades, the topic juvenile offenders has been the central theme of innumerable studies, articles, and publications aimed at illuminating the most effective way to either prevent or treat the societal ailment of juvenile crime (Albanese, 1993; Baker, 1991; Gendreau, 1999; Kvaraceus, 1959; Rojek & Jensen, 1996). National studies have identified the critical need for effective interventions with juvenile offenders (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2001; Snyder & Sickmund, 1995). However, none of these studies consider the relationship between the juvenile offender and the counselor as a factor in determining success of rehabilitation.

The effectiveness of juvenile delinquency treatment has been described as uncertain. From the shocking conclusion by Robert Martinson in 1975 that “nothing works” with the rehabilitation of criminals (Baker, 1991; Martinson, 1982; Rauschenberg, 1999), a surge of programs to refute his conclusion blossomed. Subsequent studies on these programs contributed to the knowledge of treatment



programs that support this claim or, at best, have produced mixed results (Richards & Sullivan, 1996). For example, a meta-analysis of 200 studies involving juvenile offenders by Lipsey and Wilson (1997) found that several types of treatment have small or no treatment outcome effects. From these results, it would appear that Martinson's initial assessment of juvenile offender programming has some degree of validity.

One factor, which has received little attention in juvenile offender treatment literature, has been the counseling relationship. Although the counseling relationship is crucial to the success of therapeutic progress (Hazler & Barwick, 2001; Schofield, 1967), literature has discounted the effectiveness of traditionally relationship-oriented approaches (Andrews, 1994; Gendreau, 1995). However, as Braswell (1989) stated, "To be part of a justice system that is more humane for both the community at large and for the offender, correctional treatment will need to refocus on the power of relationship as a priority for positive change" (p.59). Further, Gendreau and Goggin (1997) asserted that further decreases in the average recidivism can occur if focus is given toward "optimal therapeutic integrity." Such integrity involves the exploration of the role of the relationship between juvenile offender and counselor.

The purpose of this study was to explore juvenile offenders' perceptions of the counseling relationship. This research sought to understand the relationship between juvenile offenders and counselors from the perspectives of juvenile offenders so that their voices will be heard. Using a phenomenological approach described by Moustakas (1994), the main research question was: *What are juvenile offenders' perceptions of the counseling relationship?* Stemming from this were several sub-questions which were explored: (a) *What are juveniles' experiences in their counseling relationships?*, (b)

*What essential elements emerge from juvenile offenders' perceptions of the counseling relationship?, (c) What characteristics and processes of a relationship are meaningful for juvenile offenders?, and (d) How does the counseling relationship contribute to improvements in juvenile offenders' behaviors?*

### Method

One methodology specifically aimed at discovering meanings and experiences of clients is phenomenological research. Phenomenological research is ideally suited for understanding and delineating the phenomenon of the counseling relationship as subjectively experienced by juvenile offenders (Lee, 1999). With regard to juvenile offenders, only one qualitative study has been found that addresses the experiences of juvenile offenders in counseling (Blanchard, 2000). The absence of qualitative research methodology with the juvenile offender population demonstrates our lack of understanding of phenomenon related to this population

### *Participants*

Participants were selected from juvenile offenders who were placed on probation by a juvenile court. Participants were selected based upon several qualifications. Participants needed to have (a) experienced the phenomenon under study, (b) the capacity to provide full descriptions of their experiences, and (c) had at least 8 individual sessions with a counselor. Counselors needed to have a minimum of a Masters degree. Participants were selected from a list derived from probation officers' recommendations regarding participants' ability to describe abstract concepts. Participants ranged from 13 to 17 years of age. Of the eight participants, six were male and two were female. Regarding racial makeup of the participants, four were Caucasian, three were African-

American, and one was Hispanic-American. Regarding their reasons for being on probation, four participants were charged with only criminal charges, two were charged with offenses only applicable to juveniles, known as status offenses, and two were charged with combined criminal and status offenses (See Table 1).

Table 1: Profile of Participants

	Age	Gender	Race	Legal Charge
P1	14	Male	African-American	Disturbing the Peace
P2	13	Male	Caucasian	Status: Ungovernable
P3	17	Male	African-American	Simple Battery and Status: Ungovernable
P4	14	Female	African-American	Disturbing the Peace and Status: Ungovernable
P5	15	Male	Caucasian	Theft of Goods
P6	17	Male	Hispanic-American	Criminal Mischief
P7	15	Male	African-American	Theft of Goods and Simple Battery
P8	16	Female	Caucasian	Status: Ungovernable and Runaway

### *Data Collection*

The primary method of data collection in phenomenology is the interview. Moustakas (1994) noted that the phenomenological interview is informal, interactive and uses questions designed to elicit descriptions of experiences. Data was collected through taped individual interviews lasting 60 minutes. For the purpose of this study, I used an interview guide. Moustakas (1994) stated that interview guides are developed as a series

of questions aimed at evoking an accurate account of the phenomenon. Follow-up interviews were used to perform member checks as a means of verifying meanings and gathering additional information.

### *Phenomenological Data Analysis*

Data was analyzed using a modified version of the phenomenological data analysis method outlined by Moustakas (1994). These steps were as follows:

1. Entire transcripts were read to gain a whole understanding of the interview.

Individual transcripts were read a second time to create a list of expressions that were relevant to the experience. Expressions were given equal value to provide a holistic view of the experience. This process is known as horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994).

2. Horizontal statements were analyzed to determine elements that were necessary and sufficient statements for understanding the experience. These statements were then screened to determine if, first, a particular label could be attached to them and, second, if statements could be abstracted into salient components. Statements that met both criteria were classified as horizons of the experience. Horizons are components of the experience that provide increasingly clearer portrayals of the phenomena under investigation (Moustakas, 1994). Statements that were repetitive, vague, or overlapped were incorporated into other statements or eliminated from the list. The resulting non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements were invariant constituents of the experience.

3. Themes were then developed from the statements. Statements were placed into clusters around each theme. Themes served as labels for each cluster and

represent core components of the experience. Themes were compared to the transcript to determine if they were accurate reflections of the experience.

Themes that were not accurate reflections of the experience were eliminated.

This process contributes to the validity of the remaining statements.

4. Themes and statements were combined with quotes from the individual transcript to create individual textural descriptions of the experience.

5. Individual textural descriptions and the researcher's reflections on the underlying and precipitating factors that account for offenders' experiences, were used to form individual structural descriptions. These descriptions provide the "how" of the experience.

6. Individual textural and structural descriptions of participants' experiences were combined to form composite textural and structural narratives that encompass the experiences of each participant. These individual composite textural-structural descriptions were combined to form a composite textural-structural description.

In this composite description, common and divergent themes, characteristics, and processes were included to provide a clear understanding of the counseling relationship as experienced by juvenile offenders.

### *Trustworthiness*

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is the methodological equivalent to validity in quantitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In an effort to establish criteria for validity in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) delineated four categories that refer to validity in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility refers of the ability of the findings to accurately reflect the

meanings of the experience under investigation. Member checks were utilized throughout data analysis by meeting with each participant individually after an individual textural-structural description was formed. Transferability refers to the ability of this research to generalize to other areas. Results of phenomenological research, by nature, only apply to the participants interviewed (Hycner, 1985). Consequently, the results of this study apply directly only to those who participated in this study. Dependability of research is established by demonstrating its credibility. As a result, dependability of this research was demonstrated through the use of member checks. Confirmability refers to a means for ensuring that transcribed data provide support for and confirm the findings of the study. The method used to ensure confirmability was peer debriefing. This method involved the use of an impartial peer to discuss data analysis and findings. Through the use of these methods, trustworthiness of the findings was ensured.

### Results and Themes

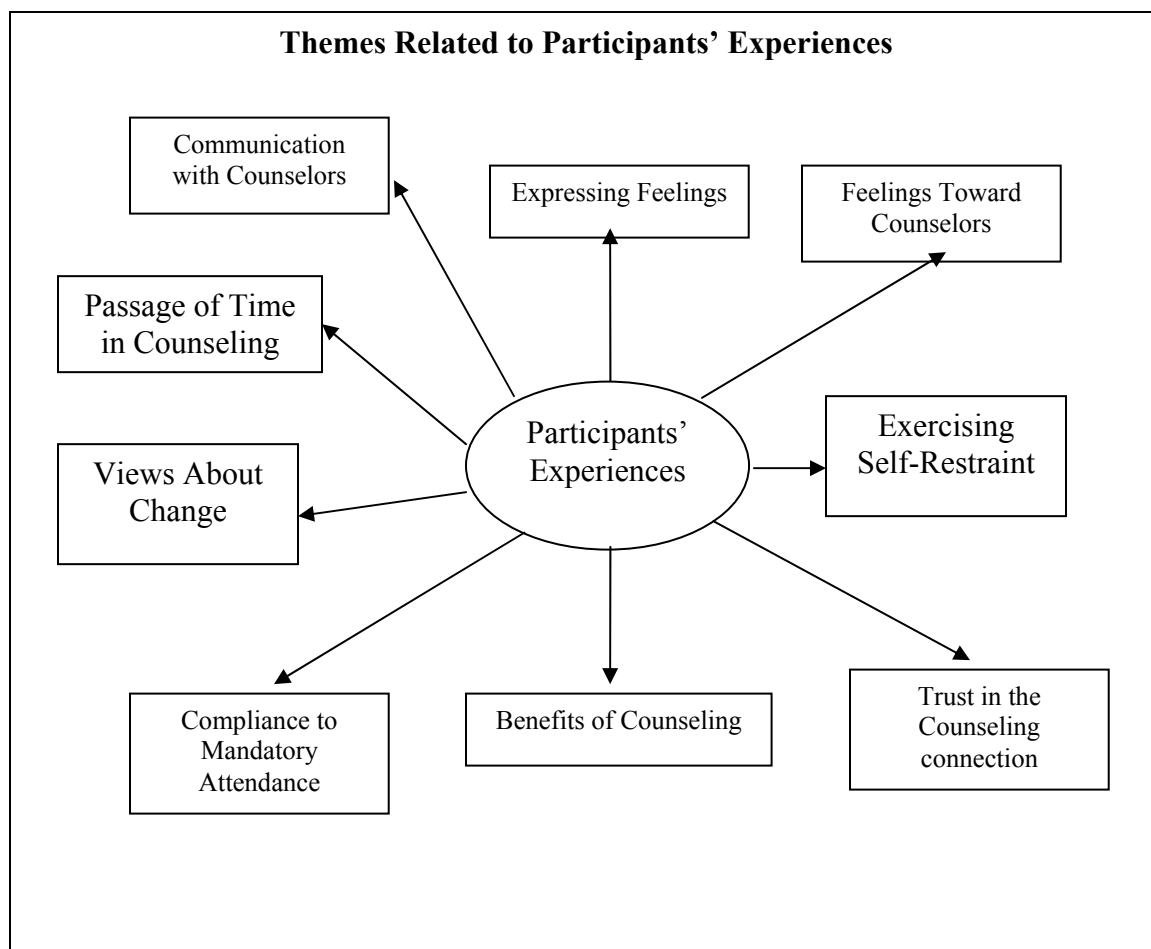
The themes represented in the participants' experiences were divided into three categories; themes related to the participant, themes related to the counselor, and themes related to the process of the counseling relationship.

#### *Themes Related to Participants' Experiences*

Consistent with phenomenological philosophy, each component of thematic categories is a necessary component for understanding the experiences as lived by participants. Themes are presented visually in Figure 1.

*Communication with counselors.* The task of communicating with the counselor was a central component of each participant's experience. Communication was described by one participant as being a mutual exchange of stories, "I'd have a story and she'd have

Figure 1



a story. We'd just talk back an forth." Mutual exchanges reflected the quality of the relationship as both counselor and client engaged in expressing themselves, feeling understood, and feeling accepted. One participant preferred the personal nature of the individual session to group sessions. He stated, "if I would have had a group, I couldn't talk to her 'cause I'd feel strange talking around other people." The individual attention allowed him to engage in increased interpersonal sharing by providing an environment that he could feel comfortable doing so. Only one participant expressed a failure of communication with the counselor. Rather than feeling heard, he felt the counselor was

only interested in asking questions and getting answers rather than listening to him. “I’m not being listened to.”

*Expressing feelings.* Expressing emotions was a difficult task. Participants expressed their inability to recognize their emotions, “I really never had any emotions. I’m not emotional.” The inability to recognize feelings spawned the use of emotional descriptions like, “good”, “cool”, and “real.” Substitution of adolescent vernacular for emotional qualities was a common theme in participants’ experiences.

Other participants were able to expressed negative emotions easier than positive emotions. Paradoxically, participants would express anger, hurt, and frustration in their experiences, yet they would not discuss joy, happiness, or excitement. “I was feeling good knowing that I got to talk and express my feelings to my counselor.”

*Feelings toward counselors.* Participants’ feelings toward the counselor significantly impacted the quality of the counseling relationship. Some participants described the counselor as “a cool person” and “real” and others felt the counselor was like their “best friend.” Some participants longed for the relationship to continue, “I wish he was still here and wish he was still helping me.” This longing reflected participants’ feelings toward the counselor in that there was a sense of loss and need fulfillment provided by the counselor that could not be fulfilled outside of the relationship.

*Trust in counseling relationships.* Trust was an intricate component that varied across participants and was both an essential component to the counseling relationship and a closely guarded treasure. Previous experiences affected participants’ their ability to trust the counselor, “some counselors will tell you just about anything so that you will tell them and they might run back and tell, and personal questions that will harm you.”



Thoughts of being harmed coexisted with the recognition that trust is necessary, “That’s the type of stuff that you need-just people to be real (straightforward)-like they ain’t gonna lie to you.”

*Benefits of counseling.* Participants expressed that the counseling relationship helped them improve relationships with family members. “He helped me get along with my sister,” and “me and my Mom’s relationship is a whole lot better because of him (the counselor).” Participants expressed decrease in conflicts with others, “now when I want to fight somebody, I talk it out,” and conflicts with peers in the neighborhood, with school peers, and with school staff. In addition, the counseling relationship provided participants a means for dealing with anger through discussing alternatives to conflict in sessions, “After I started getting deeper into the relationship with her, she started telling me how to deal with situations accordingly, so I just learned.”

Although participants had difficulty with *expressing* emotions, the release provided by the counseling relationship allowed them to *feel better*. “I’ll go to him (the counselor) and I’ll feel mad or upset and talk to him or feel down and they’ll try to cheer you up or make you feel better.” This aspect of the participants’ experiences belies the reality that although adolescents have difficulty expressing emotions, they nonetheless, experience a range of feelings. Three participants described a benefit of the counseling relationship as a transformation of their former selves. “I had a change of heart. I used to have a lot of hate in my heart so, it’s like somebody turned me around,” and “All my friends say that I’m a totally different person. The people that knew me before, like when I was bad are, like, ‘you’re a totally different person,’ and I really think I am. I’m not bad anymore.”

*Compliance to mandatory attendance.* In spite of each participant being mandated to attend counseling, only one of the eight participants expressed his views regarding mandated counseling. For him, participation in counseling required compliance, not acceptance. He would, “just tell them what they want to hear. Basically, that’s it.” Rather than using counseling as a means to improve, this participant complied with the probation requirement for counseling by attending and minimally engaging in the counseling relationship.

*Passage of time in counseling*

Understanding the underlying universal structure of time in participants’ experiences involved the use of participants’ expressions related to time and describing the passage of time in the section entitled, Themes Related to the Process of the Relationship. For two participants, however, the passage of time involved both rigidity and flexibility. For one participant, the counselor failed to conform to the time constraints of the allotted session. This participant experienced a negative counseling relationship was characterized by not feeling understood, anger, and frustration. For this participant, the counselor going over the allotted time increased his frustration, “she kept me over time and I didn’t want to talk because she got me real mad.” For this participant, his frustration was fueled by the violation of time constraints. For the other participant, time seemed to dissolve into the interactions between him and the counselor. The interactions between them captured his awareness of time so that time passed quickly, “I didn’t realize time was going so fast because we’d just be talking.” For both participants, the passage of time served as either jailer or liberator, depending on the quality of the counseling relationship and the perceived benefit from the relationship.

*Exercising self-restraint*

A common characteristic of juvenile offenders is difficulty controlling impulsive behaviors (Glueck & Glueck, 1982). Only one of the eight participants expressed thoughts about controlling impulsive behaviors. This participant expressed frustration over not being heard brought internal conversations of what he thought about telling the counselor, “As soon as she shuts the hell up, maybe I can say something,’ that ‘s what I be thinking the whole time. I could hear myself talking in my mind.” Internal conversations between embattled sides struggled to find ways to cope with frustrations. His desires to act out his frustrations wrestled with trying to maintain control. This participant attempted verbal and behavioral actions to be heard, but was unsuccessful. The result was overwhelming frustration and feeling trapped. For this participant, the struggle was a battle between his internal desire to be heard and holding back his anger.

In regard to the counseling relationship, this participant’s experience reflects the necessity for counselors to ensure juvenile offenders are listened to and understood. Through listening and understanding, most participants described the development of a positive relationship with counselors. However, as experienced by one participant, the absence of these qualities resulted in dissatisfaction and discontentment.

*Views about change*

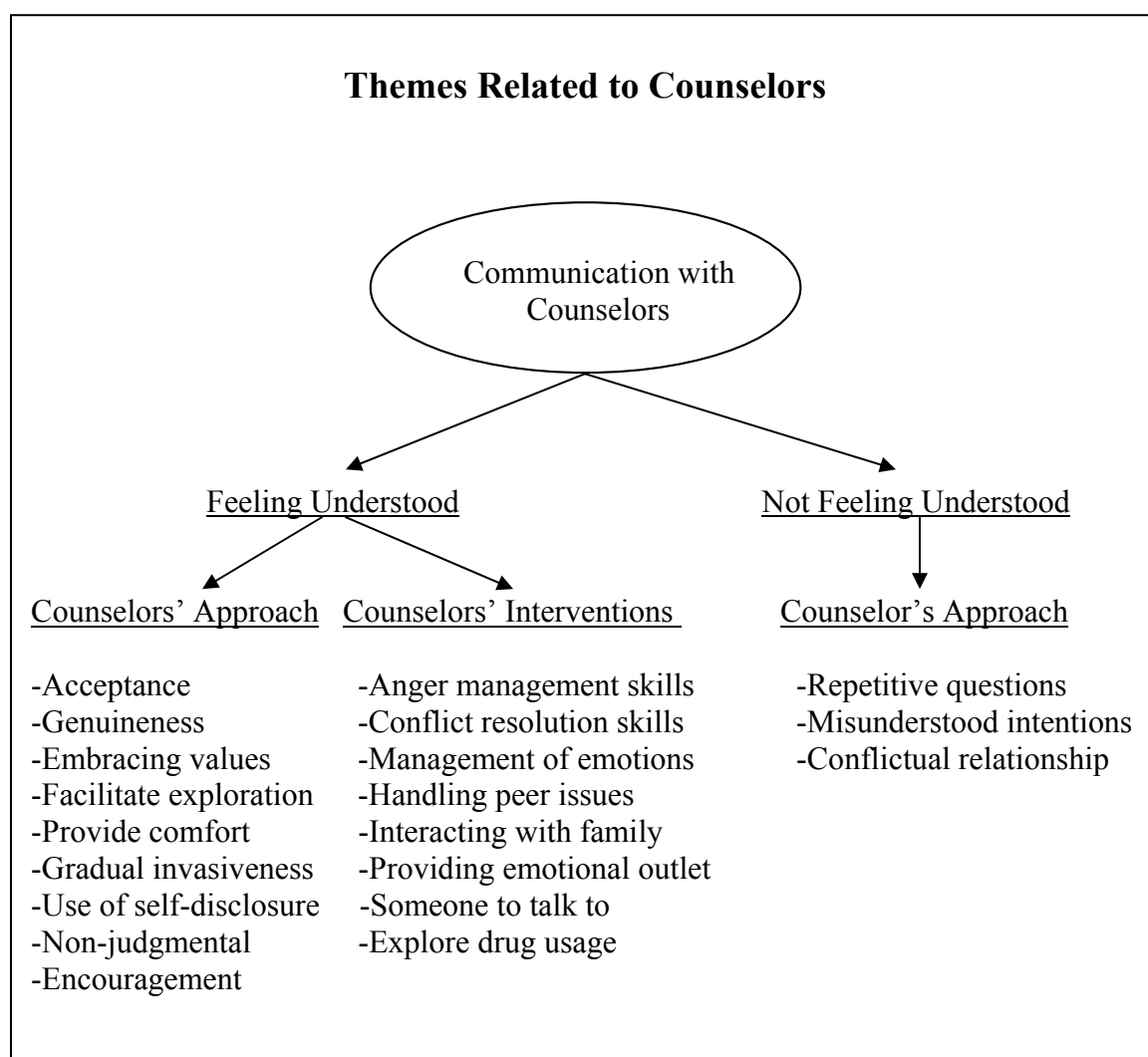
One participant expressed his views about how change occurs in adolescents. He was self-reliant and independent, “I got my own mind. I like to do things my way and what I want to do. That’s just me.” This participant was clear that he did not need anybody’s help. Change was believed to be a product of a person’s desire to change and of the passage of time. Characteristic of his independent approach to life, this participant

believed that change did not involve intervening by other people. Consequently, his independent stance challenged him throughout the counseling relationship. While he felt change was internally motivated, he admitted the counseling relationship had some minimal impact on his life.

### *Themes Related to the Counselor*

These themes included sub-themes that are the conditions that contribute to participants' experiences in the counseling relationship. A visual representation of these themes is provided in Figure 2.

Figure 2



*Communication with counselors.* Participants' experiences provided insight into both ineffective and effective qualities of counselors as related to communication. Participants' experiences reflected that communication with the counselor was a precursor to the quality of the counseling relationship. One participant, frustrated with the counseling relationship, provided a description of counselor behaviors as ineffective. "She kept asking me the same thing so I didn't say nothing." His inability to negotiate the terms of communication led to anger, frustration, and counterfeit compliance by giving an incorrect answer. Another participant, however, described the counselor's ability to communicate as more facilitative. For him, the counselor "didn't talk to me like a counselor. He talked to me like a friend and I respected him. The polarized viewpoints expressed by these two participants demonstrate the impact of counselors' behaviors on establishing effective communication with juvenile offenders.

*Counselors' approach.* Descriptions provided in this sub-theme relate to traits of counselors that established rapport and developed the counseling relationship. As an overarching theme, the types of interactions between participants and counselors mirrored the quality of the counseling relationships. The participant who described his counseling experience as negative also described incongruent interactions with the counselor. For example, "She (the counselor) don't like me at all. She says she tries to help me." Most participants, however, described the counseling experience as positive. "She (the counselor) was trying to see things the way I see them." Interactions with counselors involved respect, "I think she's trying to give me respect so I give her respect," encouragement, "She was just trying to fill it in my head, trying to let me know that it's real-that it can happen," and empathy, "Sometimes I had my real bad days where

I didn't want to be bothered and she (the counselor) kind of related to it. She knew what I was talking about, she knew what I was feeling, she knew how I was feeling."

Participants expressed that counselors were non-judgmental in their approach to the participant, "she didn't think I was a bad person so it (talking to her) felt alright." This non-judgmental approach set the stage for counselors to embrace and facilitate exploration of participants' values. Similarly, one participant commented that the counselor's approach enabled him to be comfortable. The counselor accomplished this by engaging in laughter and not showing an angry demeanor to the participant. As a consequence of the approachable demeanor, the participant became increasingly comfortable with the counselor. Another participant commented that communication was easier with the counselor because the counselor did not raise her voice to the participant. For this participant, communication with others was ineffective when people spoke to her in a disrespectful tone.

Participants expressed two additional qualities related to the counselor facilitated the counseling relationship. The first was self-disclosure. "He (the counselor) would tell me stuff about him like back in his days. I'd tell him about mine. We had a lot in common." The second quality was that counselors allowed the maintenance of an intimate sense of self. Two participants noted that the counselor allowed them to disclose at their own pace, which fostered the counseling relationship. "She (the counselor) asked questions, but she didn't ask personal personal questions where they get up into your business. That's why I really liked her."

*Counselors' interventions.* Most participants discussed the counselors' interventions as involving discussions about various topics and playing games. With the

exception of playing board games, such as Monopoly, discussions reflected traditional talk therapy and impacted participants in differing ways. Discussions focused on appropriate ways of handling conflict with teachers, parents, and peers. Similarly, discussions focused on appropriate ways of dealing with emotions, “she told me sometimes to express my feelings, I could write it down on a piece of paper,” including anger, “when I get mad I be ready to hit somebody, and she told me hitting somebody is not always the way to solve it.” Counselors’ interventions also focused on relationships with family members, “instead of fighting with your mom, just go into your room, just sit there, and just think about it,” and peers, “She said, ‘you got to choose better friends.’” Interventions also focused on using the counseling relationship as means for participants to reflect on alternative behaviors. One participant recalled, “If I would come in upset and she (the counselor) would be like, ‘What’s the matter?’ or something, and I might tell her what’s wrong and she would tell me how to solve that answer if something’s wrong.” Another participant stated, “He (the counselor) understood me. He said, ‘Look you can do this or you can do that...’ and I would walk out and would be like (sign of relief) ‘cause I hold my emotions in.” Finally, one participant commented that the counselor frequently discussed drug usage in their counseling sessions.

These themes demonstrate the importance of the counselor’s approach and interventions in the counseling relationship. From these participants’ experiences, it is particularly noteworthy that the ability to communicate with the counselor was paramount to the development of an effective counseling relationship. For participants that felt they were understood by the counselor, counselors’ approaches were described as accepting, genuine, embracing values, facilitating exploration, providing comfort,

gradual invasiveness, self-disclosing, non-judgmental, and encouraging. Similarly, participants who felt understood by counselors described counselors' interventions as focusing on anger management skills, conflict resolution skills, management of emotions, handling peer issues, interacting with families, providing emotional outlet, providing someone to talk to, and exploring drug use. However, for the participant that did not feel understood by the counselor, the counselor's approach was described as asking repetitive questions, having misunderstood intentions, and having a conflictual relationship with the participant.

#### *Themes Related to the Process of Relationships*

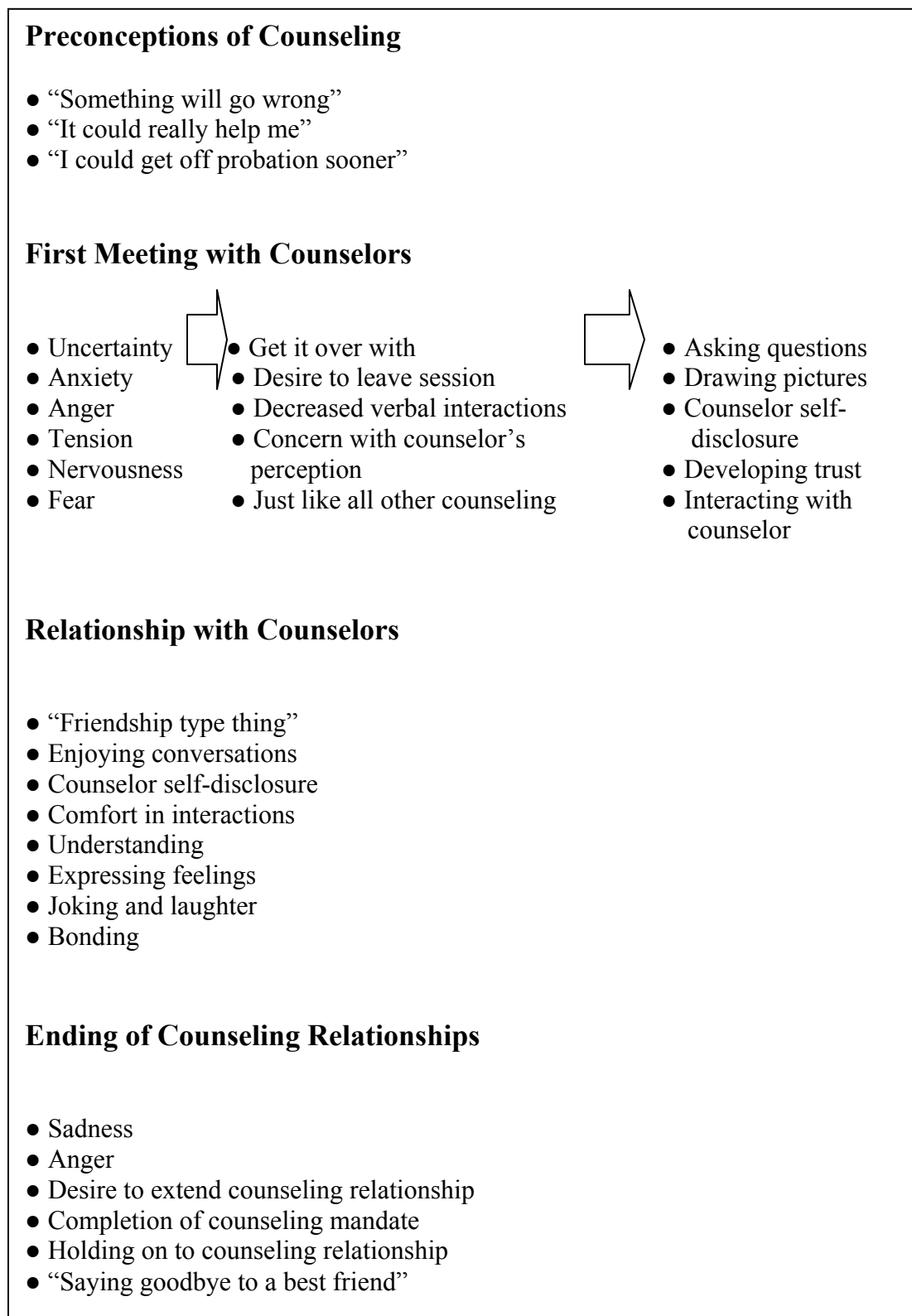
Themes related to the process of counseling relationships contained descriptions of participants' experiences that relate to the universal structures of time and causality. Descriptions depicted a transformation over time of the quality and timbre of counseling relationships. These themes are visually represented in Figure 3.

*Preconceptions of counseling.* For three participants, thoughts about the purpose of counseling guided their perceptions of what counseling would be. One felt, "I always think when I meet with a counselor that something is going to go wrong." For another participant, attendance to counseling would provide a means to get off probation sooner. Yet another believed that only crazy people went to see counselors. Thoughts about the uses and benefits of counseling led them to begin the counseling relationship with specific expectations that influences their interactions with the counselor during the first meeting.

*First meeting with counselors.* The first meeting was a time of uncertainty and confusion. For three participants, the reason for their attendance was ambiguous. One



Figure 3



participant thought he was going to get locked up, another thought she was going to see her probation officer for a probation violation, and another didn't know why he was there. Confusion seemed to contribute to their apprehension about meeting with the counselor. Participants expressed anger because they had to attend counseling, "my anger was about like just really not wanting to be there," while other descriptions of feelings in first sessions as scared, nervous, and tense. "When I first got there I was nervous, I mean, like some people when they do new things they nervous." Initial feelings of anxiety and uncertainty produced a desire to leave sessions to relieve the discomfort of not knowing what to do or what was expected.

In spite of the turmoil created by the swirling of thought, emotions, and desires to leave the discomfort, participants began to communicate with counselors. Counselors typically initiated the conversations by engaging participants in low-level conversation that focused on participants' families, school statuses, reasons for probation, and providing information about expectations of counseling. Participants' descriptions conveyed a transition from the anxieties in the beginning of the session to the development of a working relationship with the counselor. For several participants the transition occurred when they realized the purpose of counseling was for their benefit and that the counselor was on their side. "When I got to know her (the counselor) and she really started talking to me, I wanted to be there. I wasn't scared no more." Others became more relaxed when they knew what the expectations of counseling were. Once participants were comfortable with the reasons for counseling and the counselor, they were able to begin developing a working relationship with the counselor.

*Relationship with counselors.* A mixture of emotions and uncertainties characterized early stages of development of counseling relationships. From these early stages counseling relationships began to develop for most participants. For one participant, however, the counseling relationship did not progress into a working relationship. Difficulties in communication became the cornerstone of this relationship. Another participant interacted with the counselor only to the extent that met minimal requirements. For six other participants, the counseling relationship developed into a relationship characterized by mutual sharing and interpersonal growth. Participants described their relationships with their counselors in similar descriptions as friendships. Examples are, “as time passed, we went from shaking hands to dapping off,” “I don’t got a lot of friends, but he could be an associate,” “It was just like somebody I was talking to, like when you’re hanging out with somebody familiar,” and “we created that bond.” These descriptions challenge current views on juvenile offenders’ abilities to form relationships and provide insight into the perceptions of *adolescent offenders* engaged in *mandatory* counseling. Of particular note, these descriptions highlight the development of a bond between counselors and participants that served as the basis for the counseling relationship.

Interactions between the counselor and the participant were described as the counselor making participants comfortable by “asking questions on the slick, but having a good time doing it,” and “we would always joke around.” These interactions fostered the development of loyalty to the counselor. One participant stated, “he (the counselor) looked out for me in a way.” Another remarked, “All I needed was somebody for a little

understanding. All I need was somebody to relate to. If I had to do it all over, that would be the only (counselor) I'd go to."

*Ending of counseling relationships.* The qualities that characterized the end of the counseling relationships reflected the interpersonal involvement between counselors and participants. For two participants, terminating sessions brought anger because they did not want sessions to end. Another expressed, "it's hurtful, but you can get through it." Yet others expressed the desire to continue the counseling relationship. The sense of loss created by the ending of the counseling relationship was, "like saying good-bye to a best friend." The final counseling session contained summaries of what was learned by the participants.

*Summary.* Participants' descriptions of counseling relationships identified distinct stages of development. In the initial stage, counseling relationships were characterized by anxiety and uncertainty. Participants expressed a range of thoughts and emotions surrounding the start of the relationship. Through interactions with the counselor, participants became more relaxed toward counseling and the counselor. Through this transition, a bond developed between most of the participants and their counselors. Relationships ensued that was characterized by mutual communication, development of alternative behaviors, and feeling as though the counselor was a friend. The end of counseling relationships, like other losses, brought anger and hurtfulness for some participants. For others, the end of the counseling relationship brought the satisfaction of completing a probation requirement. Understanding the process of counseling relationships with juvenile offenders is critical for working with this population.

*Composite Textural-Structural Description*

The composite textural-structural description describes essences and meanings of counseling relationships for the group of participants as a whole. In order to facilitate descriptions of juvenile offenders' experiences, the description is divided into five major groupings: a) juveniles' preconceptions of counseling relationships, b) first sessions, c) transition into cohesive relationships, d) the working relationship, and e) termination of counseling relationships.

Regarding preconceptions of counseling relationships, participants' previous experiences with mental health professionals foreshadowed the beginning of many counseling relationships. A variety of presumptions influenced participants' feelings and thoughts about the counseling relationship. One participant expressed apathy towards benefiting from counseling, "I don't want to hear it, like, everything you said I've heard before." For another, his previous experiences with counselors led him to believe, "something is going to go wrong" when he meets with counselors. For yet another, a previous experience with a school counselor left him distrustful of counselors, in general; "some counselors will tell you just about anything so that you will tell them, and they might run back and tell." These presumptions affected how the participants' viewed counselors, the counseling relationship, and their ability to benefit from counseling.

The first session was described as a period of intense emotions, confusion, uncertainty, and thoughts of evading the discomfort. Initial moments of the first counseling session were full of uncertainty, "I didn't know what to do," and anger, "I was mad 'cause I thought I had to see my probation officer," "(I) was mad that I had to come (to counseling)," and "I thought it was not right for me to go see no psychiatrist." Participants were confused over the reasons why they were in counseling, "I didn't know

who he (the counselor) was,” “I didn’t know what to say,” and “I thought I was going to get locked up.” Anger and confusion created initial resistance to the counselor and a desire to remove themselves from the situation. One participant said he, “wanted to hurry up and go home ‘cause I didn’t know what to do,” and another stated he wanted to “get it over with.” Others desired to get the first session over so they could relieve the uncertainty of not knowing what to expect. One participant wanted to get the session over with to “feel comfortable about it (counseling).” In spite of their desires to leave, participants continued in the sessions and started interacting with the counselors. Many participants described that counselors initially engaged in relatively low intensity communication such as asking about school information, probation status, family information, and basic personal information (such as hobbies, activities, sports, etc.). Also, some counselors engaged in self-disclosure, which provided participants with a feeling of safety to share their own personal information. One participant, however, felt “I’m not being listened to,” which was a consistent description throughout his counseling relationship. The first session, for each participant, was crucial for establishing the tone for the remainder of the sessions.

With the exception of one participant that described his counselor as not listening to him, participants experienced a transition from initial confusion to a working relationship. A major component of the transition was the counselor’s demeanor. Counselors’ demeanors were characterized by participants as consisting of understanding, mutual sharing, genuineness, and empathy. These qualities served to allay anxieties and provide participants with the freedom to take risks and express themselves, “we kinda went from patient to counselor to friends.” Communication with the counselor either

strengthened the transition, “it (the counseling relationship) felt good just as long as nobody was yelling in my face,” and, “I could talk to her like a friend,” or weakened the relationship, “I’d tell her a few things, but right then she keeps asking me the same old thing, I’d get mad.” Trust was a common concern for participants during transition. As one participant stated, “You gotta have trust. If you cannot trust him (the counselor) then I cannot open up to him,” “we pretty much got a trust thing,” and, “people need to be real, like they ain’t gonna lie to you.” One participant struggled with whether the counselor was trustworthy in spite of the counselor’s genuineness; “in the back of her mind” she wondered whether he was violating the trust she had given him. As the relationship progressed, however, she found the counselor “was always on my side.”

Most participants described the counseling relationship as having developed into a relationship that was beneficial to them—a working relationship. Having proceeded through a period of transition, participants described aspects of the relationship related to the counselor’s approach, the participants’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, communication with the counselor, effects of the counseling relationship, and the passage of time. The counselor’s approach both initiated and maintained the counseling relationship. For one participant the counselor was, “playful and talkative;” for another, the counselor would, “try to help (me) out to benefit (me),” and tried, “to make me feel comfortable and do his job at the same time.” Another expressed comfort with the counselor’s unconditional acceptance of him, “she didn’t think I was a bad person so it (talking to her) felt alright.” Yet another expressed the development of a “bond” between them because the counselor “was down to earth.”

Participants' thoughts about the counseling relationship in the working phase were that, "I started liking it," "it felt great just to let everything out," and "it was a good relationship." On the contrary, one participant expressed his struggle to be heard, "I be thinking the whole time, 'as soon as she shuts the hell up, maybe I can say something.'"

Communication was a central component of participants' experiences. The dissonant description by one participant, "I tell her all I know and she asks the same thing, same thing," highlights the difficult communication between the participant and the counselor. Such difficult communication contrasted with other participants' descriptions of supportive communication; "I just liked talking to him," "(the counselor) would tell you things and mean what he said," and, "I could talk to her just like being around one of my friends." For several participants, the act of communicating was difficult; "(feelings are) not the type of stuff I would regularly talk about," "you basically answer their questions (and) get it over with," and "I don't like talking to people." Although there was a comfort with communicating with the counselor, there were issues too personal to discuss. Improved communication within the counseling relationship paralleled communication with relationships outside of counseling.

For many participants the counseling relationship mirrored relationships with others. Participants described how prior to the counseling relationship they argued and fought with peers, family members, and teachers. However, after the counseling relationship, "me and my mom's relationship is, like, a whole lot better because of him (the counselor)," "by her (the counselor) talking to me and we created that bond and I just started being real friendly with people," and "(I would) talk it (conflict) out (with others), and...avoid talking back to teachers." For most participants, the creation of a relaxed



environment through laughter and joking helped participants become comfortable, “I just feel I can joke around with her (the counselor). You can’t joke around with people when you got to be tense with them-you’re not really having a good relationship,” “(the counselor would ask questions) while having a good time doing it,” “he was cool,” and “he was down to earth.”

Results of the counseling relationship involved changes both within and outside the counseling relationship. Development of a strong relationship with the counselor enabled participants to “let everything out,” and to have a “change of heart,” and to “just like talking to him (the counselor) and just hanging around him.” Participants experienced a friendship blooming from a counseling relationship that began with confusion and anxiety. The friendship served, on an intrapersonal level, to solidify participants’ values. One participant felt, “I already knew right from wrong...all she did was embrace it.” Another felt, “he’ll (the counselor) talk to me and give me some insight.” Participants described benefits of the counseling relationship that extended outside counseling sessions. Many participants experienced a metamorphosis of their personalities. One participant explained that he had fewer fights in the neighborhood and stayed home more. Others remarked that they were better able to deal with anger by “talking it out” rather than impulsively fighting with peers. Participants described the changes as, “I just started being real friendly with people,” and “(my friends said I am) a totally different person.” Similarly, other participants experienced improvements in their school grades, an increase in sharing with others, the ability to express emotions appropriately, and avoiding talking back to teachers.

Regarding the passage of time, one participant expressed he, “didn’t realize time was going by so fast.” Mutual sharing of personal information consumed time as the participant and the counselor engaged in dialog. For the participant that did not feel he was being listened to, the passage of time was slow. His inability to negotiate the terms of their relationship was frustrating.

The end of counseling relationships can be described in terms of participants’ feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, and the meaning of loss for participants. For the participant that did not feel he was being listened to, the counseling session could not end soon enough. He would, “start running when I close the door (to the counseling room).” For him, the counselor did not listen to him and he did not feel understood by the counselor. For other participants, termination was described as the loss of “a best friend.” Common feelings about the loss were described by most participants as, “sad and mad,” and “like saying goodbye to a best friend.” Some participants bargained with thoughts of seeing the counselor again, “you can probably get in touch with your best friend; with this friend, I probably won’t never see her again.” For others, the loss of the counseling relationship was bittersweet in that the ending of the relationship marked completion of a probation requirement, yet the loss created a longing for the relationship to continue. The loss of the relationship also created a sense of loneliness for participants in that they no longer had an outlet to express their emotions. The lasting impression of the counseling relationship seemed to haunt participants, “at the end, I couldn’t get (seeing him) out of my mind,” and “I just wonder what she thinks about me now...I wonder if she thinks I’m not like other people, like, I’m not ignorant or going around starting trouble. I just hope she thinks I’m a good person.”

## Summary

These findings suggested that the counseling relationship is a dynamic interplay between client aspects, counselor characteristics, and the process of the counseling relationship. Participants' perceptions of counseling relationships were based largely on the ability of the counselors to engage the participants in a genuine, informative, and empathetic manner. Through these general traits, the counseling relationships blossomed into friendships that benefited the participants. The one participant that expressed dissatisfaction with his relationship did not *perceive* these qualities to be present.

As I interviewed the participants, it was apparent that each of them wanted to contribute to the project. Although initial meetings were at times tentative, once the participant understood the project intended no harm, they agreed to participate. My experiences in establishing rapport with these participants mirrored their experiences with their counselors. Once participants were aware of my intentions, they became more relaxed and able to describe their experiences to me. Each participant wanted to be accepted, feel understood, and wanted to contribute to this meaningful project. These desires propelled them to reach deep inside of themselves and do something they had never done before. Through their stories, a greater understanding of the qualities of the experience of the counseling relationship can be obtained.

## Discussion

The relevance of this research on the counseling relationship involves four areas-juvenile offenders, juvenile offender counselors, the counseling relationship, and treatment approaches. Literature on juvenile offenders' abilities to establish and maintain relationships indicates that this population typically has difficulty with this interpersonal

task. However, findings of this study provide contrary evidence. The development of a relationship was a critical factor in the effectiveness of the counseling relationship for participants. Similarly, literature points to attachment difficulties as precursors for relationship difficulties. Participants in this study, however, seemed to be attracted to counselors who demonstrated genuineness, honesty, and trustworthiness.

Regarding relevance of this research to current literature on juvenile offender counselors, findings support the importance of the counseling relationship. Participants in this study revealed such components as critical to the success of the counseling relationship. Traits of counselors were consistent with those discussed in counseling literature and described by participants as involving genuineness, honesty, understanding, trustworthiness, and empathy. These traits developed and nurtured the counseling relationship. An area not directly discussed by current literature is the need for juvenile offender counselors to understand the language of juvenile offenders. Most participants had difficulty expressing themselves and resorted to typical adolescent vernacular and colloquialisms. It is important for juvenile offender counselors to understand the language of juvenile offenders in order to truly understand this often misunderstood population.

Regarding the counseling relationship, current understandings lack a holistic view that does not include the perspective of the client. Findings from this study revealed the importance of clients' perspectives to provide both collaborative information for current knowledge or refuting information for current knowledge. Further, due to the ambiguous nature of the counseling relationship, objective measures alone are insufficient for providing a complete understanding of the counseling relationship. Critical components

of the counseling relationship are found in the meanings and essences ascribed to the counseling relationship by clients' descriptions of the experience.

Regarding relevance of the findings to current "rehabilitation" programs, findings provided a challenge to established programs that focus on juvenile offenders. Current rehabilitation programs use a cognitive-behavioral approach that denies the importance of establishing a relationship with clients. The findings of this study, however, provided contrary evidence. Improvements in interpersonal relationships, decreases in school-related problems, and fewer peer conflicts resulted from counseling relationships that were described positively by participants. Further, the use of recidivism as a measure of treatment effectiveness is inappropriate and myopic. Findings of this study suggested that recidivism is only one of many measures to gauge effectiveness of treatment. Although recidivism is easy to measure, treatment effectiveness extends far beyond a juvenile's ability to avoid incarceration.

### Conclusion

Use of phenomenological method to discover juvenile offenders' perceptions of counseling relationships have provided both support and contradiction to current views about counseling this population. Participants expressed the importance of the counseling relationship in positive behavioral and attitudinal outcomes. Further, juveniles' perceptions refuted evidence by "rehabilitation" programs that establishing a counseling relationship is not central to positive outcomes. Juvenile offender counselors should be cognizant of the impact of their behaviors on clients so that a maximum benefit can be achieved. As a final note, juvenile offenders are valuable resources that are wasted by the juvenile justice system that was created to serve them. It is our

responsibility to provide this population with the tools necessary to be successful throughout their lives-not just until they are incarcerated.

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APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Contact Letter

December 18, 2002

Address

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I would like to take this time to inform you that your child, \_\_\_\_\_, is invited to participate in a research project that is a combined effort between the Department of Juvenile Services and University of New Orleans. The project will involve two 60-90 minute interviews with your child. Before starting, I will provide a complete explanation of the project and provide you with a written description of the project.

Please note that all interviews are confidential and will not affect your child's probation status in any way. The purpose of the project is to develop a better understanding of how juveniles on probation perceive counseling. Participation in this project is voluntary and there is no penalty for not participating.

I will be contacting you by phone in the coming weeks to schedule an appointment. The appointment will be held at your convenience and will be either at 2245 Manhattan Blvd., Harvey, or another suitable location. If you have any questions, please contact me at 364-3750, extension 241 or by pager, 403-0115.

I appreciate your assistance and look forward to our meeting together. Your participation will be valuable in helping those who work with juveniles in the legal system. Happy Holidays!

Sincerely,

John S. Ryals, Jr.

## Appendix B: Human Subjects Proposal

**HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW FORM****1. Title:**

Juvenile Offenders' Perceptions of the Counseling Relationship

**2. Investigators:**

Principal Investigator: John S. Ryals, Jr., MA, LPC, LMFT, Doctoral Student,  
Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling and Foundations  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Vivian McCollum, Professor, Department of Educational  
Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations, ED 172

**3. Introduction:**

Within the field of counseling, much attention has been given to counseling relationships (Andrews, 1994; Corey, 1991). In spite of this attention, a myopic view of counseling relationships has developed consisting of specific observable components of counseling relationships. However, a crucial missing component is the perception of the client in identifying the quality of the counseling relationships. As such, qualitative inquiry methodology can enhance understanding of the counseling relationships (Lee, 1999; Oiler, 1982). Juvenile offenders represent a critically misunderstood population that has been the center of an abundance of research (Gendreau, 1999; Lipsey & Wilson, 1997; Richards & Sullivan, 1996). Few studies have been performed with this population that gives them a voice in the results of the study. As a result, juvenile offenders remain a population that is largely misunderstood. Qualitative inquiry, therefore, provides a broader understanding of the counseling relationship as perceived by juvenile offenders.

**4. Participants:**

Participants for this study will be juvenile offenders. This includes males and females from ages 12-18. These juveniles will have committed at least one criminal offense or status offense and be under the supervision of the Jefferson Parish Department of Juvenile Services. Participants will be involved in counseling for at least eight sessions. This study will utilize 6-10 participants.

**5. Justification for using this particular population:**

Attempts to understand the causes and correlates of juvenile delinquency have been made by various professional disciplines ranging from criminal justice to psychiatry. Therapeutic interventions have been aimed at a range of skill development and behavioral modifications (Goldstein & Glick, 1987; Henggeler & Borduin, 1990; Lasater & Robinson, 2001; Ross & Fabiano, 1985) Empirical outcomes have demonstrated nominal reductions in recidivism, a common measure of program effectiveness. The inherent strength of the counseling relationship with this population has been neglected in research efforts.

**6. Subject recruitment procedures:**

Participants will be accessed through the Jefferson Parish Department of Juvenile Services' Probation Division. Participants will be on probation and will have been engaged in individual counseling with a counselor. To meet eligibility criteria, counselors must have graduate degrees in counseling, under supervision for counselor licensure, or be a licensed counselor. I have contacted the Director of the Department of Juvenile Services and have received approval for this study. I will speak with counselors who are contracted to provide therapeutic services for Juvenile Services. I will ask for a list of participants who are able to communicate their thoughts in a logical manner. I will then contact the parent and request permission for the juvenile to participate in the study. Once the participant list is generated from those parents who approve, I will schedule a meeting with the parent and juvenile to review the consent form and obtain signatures on the form.

#### **7. General experimental procedures:**

The sole source of data collection will be a single, hour-long interview. The primary investigator will conduct interviews. Parents or guardians will be asked to sign the consent form giving permission for participation in this research and audiotaping of each interview. The interview will be semi-structured to focus on the participants' experiences. Interviews will be audiotaped and transcribed by either the primary investigator or a professional transcriptionist. Tapes will be erased upon completion of data analysis.

#### **8. Procedures for obtaining subject consent:**

Participant consent will be obtained by an initial meeting with the parent or guardian and the juvenile. The consent form will be explained along with the purpose, procedures, benefits, and risks of the study. Signatures will be obtained from both the parent or guardian and the juvenile. Participants will be reminded of their ability to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants and their parents or guardians will be given a copy of the consent form.

#### **9. Discussion of anonymity, confidentiality, handling of data collected in the study:**

The names of participants and parents or guardians will be kept confidential at all times. Interview tapes will be used for transcription and will be available for review by the participants, parents or guardians, and members of my doctoral committee. Peer researchers and members of the doctoral committee will review transcripts. All documents (tapes, transcripts, data analysis, etc.) related to this research will be maintained in a secure location to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

#### **10. Debriefing procedures:**

Participants and parents or guardians will be given the consent form to inform them of potential risks and benefits of participation in this study. This will address the interpersonal impact of participation. In addition, participants and parents or guardians will be given the opportunity to inquire about the overall results of the research by contacting the primary investigator upon completion of the research. If asked for a copy of the research results, participants and parents or guardians will be provided with a copy of Chapter 6, which is a publishable summary of the research project.



11. Describe potential risks to subjects and measures that will be taken to minimize risks: Qualitative inquiry used in this research aims to discover the perceptions of juvenile offenders of the counseling relationship. As such, there is minimal risk to the participant. A risk in the interview process is that participants may become fatigued during the interview. Participants will be safeguarded from fatigue by taking breaks when needed. Also, participants may experience discomfort in recalling unpleasant experiences. Participants will be encouraged to discuss with the principal investigator any discomfort they are experiencing as a result of participation in this research.

12. Reference list:

Andrews, D. A. (1994). An overview of treatment effectiveness: Research and clinical principles. In *What works: Bridging the gap between research and correctional practice*. Longmont, CO: National Institute of Corrections.

Corey, G. (1991). *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Gendreau, P. (1999). Rational policies for reforming offenders. *The International Community Corrections Association [ICCA] Journal*, 9(2), 16-20.

Goldstein, A. P., & Glick, B. (1987). *Aggression replacement training: A comprehension intervention for aggressive youth*. Champagne, IL: Research Press.

Henggeler, S. W., & Borduin, C. M. (1990). *Family therapy and beyond: A multisystemic approach to treating the behavior problems of children and adolescents*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

**Lasater, L., & Robinson, K. D. (2001). Montana pilot project results: Using Moral Reconciliation Therapy for at-risk youth at Billings Senior High School. *Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment Review*, 10(1-2), 1-6.**

Lee, M. (1999). The role of cultural values in the interpretation of significant life experiences. 1999 AERC Proceedings. Retrieved January 25, 2002, from <http://edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/1999/99lee.htm>

Lipsey, M. W., & Wilson, D. B. (1997). *Effective interventions for serious juvenile offenders: A synthesis of research*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University.

Oiler, C. (1982). The phenomenological approach in nursing research. *Nursing Research*, 31, 178-181.

Richards, I., & Sullivan, A. (1996). Psychotherapy for delinquents? *Journal of Adolescence*, 19, 63-73.

Ross, R. R., & Fabiano, E. A. (1985). *Time to think: A cognitive model of delinquency prevention and offender rehabilitation*. Johnson City, TN: Institute of Social Sciences and Arts.

Appendix C: Human Subjects Committee Approval

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ORLEANS  
COMMITTEE ON THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

Form Number: 10DEC02 (please refer to this number in all future correspondence concerning this protocol)

Principal Investigator: John S. Ryals, Jr. Title: Graduate Student

Department: ELCF College: Education

Name of Faculty Supervisor: Vivian McCollum, Ph.D. (if PI is a student)

Project Title: Juvenile offenders' perceptions of the counseling relationship.

Date Reviewed: December 12, 2002

Dates of Proposed Project Period: From 12/02 to 12/03\*

\*approval is for one year from approval date only and may be renewed yearly.

Note: Consent forms and related materials are to be kept by the PI for a period of three years following the completion of the study.

Full Committee Approval

Expedited Approval

Continuation

Rejected

The protocol will be approved following receipt of satisfactory response(s) to the following question(s) within 15 days:

# 7 says interview consent form says 2-3 interviews need to be conducted

Who are the "peer associates"?

Subjects to group beaten for data?

Committee Signatures:

Matthew S. Stanford, Ph.D. (Chair)

Scott Bauer, Ph.D.

Gary Granata, Ph.D.

Betty Lo, M.D.

Hae-Seong Park, Ph.D.

Jane Prudhomme

Jayaraman Rao, M.D. (NBDL protocols only)

Richard B. Speaker, Ph.D.

Gary Talarchek, Ph.D.

## Appendix D: Consent Form

## Consent Form

1. **Title of Research:** Juvenile Offenders' Perceptions of the Counseling Relationship

2. **Project Director:**

John S. Ryals, Jr., Doctoral Student, Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Foundations, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana, 70148. I am a Licensed Professional Counselor and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist working with the Jefferson Parish Department of Juvenile Services as Treatment/Evaluation Supervisor in Harvey, Louisiana 70058.

This research project is in partial fulfillment of course requirements for a doctor of philosophy in Counselor Education. This research is performed under the supervision of Dr. Vivian McCollum, Professor, Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling and Foundations, ED 348, University of New Orleans, New Orleans, Louisiana, 70148. Telephone: 504-280-6661

3. **Purpose of Research:**

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the counseling relationship between juvenile offenders and counselors. An important part of the research is to gain the perspective of juvenile offenders who have been in counseling.

4. **Procedures for this Research:**

Participants will voluntarily participate in two to three individual interviews lasting from 60-90 minutes each. The Project Director will conduct all interviews in person and will be audio taped for transcription purposes. Videotapes will be erased upon completion of transcription and data analysis. Parents or guardians of participants will be asked to sign this form giving permission for participation in this research and audio taping of each interview. Each participant will also sign this form giving his or her consent to the interview.

5. **Potential Risks or Discomforts:**

Participants may experience slight emotional distress in the process of recalling unpleasant or stress inducing experiences. There is also the possibility that participants may become fatigued during the interview. Participants will be allowed to take breaks if needed and will be offered an opportunity to discuss issues brought up in the course of the interview. All aspects of participation are voluntary and the participant may choose to conclude the interview at any time. If at any time participants experience discomfort or distress, they are encouraged to contact the Project Director.

6. **Potential Benefits to You or Others:**

The results of this study will be used to increase the understanding of juvenile offenders in counseling relationships. The impact of these results will be that juvenile offender

counselors will have the ability to make better-informed decisions regarding the course and goals of counseling with this population.

**7. Voluntary Participation:**

Participation is entirely voluntary and participants may withdraw consent and terminate participation at any time without consequence.

**8. Protection of Confidentiality:**

The names of all participants will be kept confidential at all times. The interview videotapes will be transcribed by either the Project Director or by a professional transcriptionist. Other researchers may review transcriptions for accuracy, but participant anonymity will be protected at all times. The signed consent forms, audiotapes, interview transcripts, and any other materials related to this project will remain unlabeled and maintained in a secure and confidential manner by the Project Director. If the results of this study are published, the names of the participants will remain anonymous.

**9. Signatures and Consent to Participate:**

Federal and University regulations require that we obtain signed consent for participation in research projects that involve human subjects. After the purpose, procedures, benefits, and risks of this project have been explained to participants, they are instructed to indicate their consent to participate by signing the statement below:

**I have been fully informed of the purpose, procedures, benefits, and risks of this study and I hereby agree to participate in this research.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**I have been fully informed of the purpose, procedures, benefits, and risks of this study and I hereby give permission for the above named participant to participate in this research project.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Project Director

John S. Ryals, Jr., LPC  
Name of Project Director

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix E: Permission to Proceed from Department of Juvenile Services



TIM P. COULON  
PARISH PRESIDENT

**JEFFERSON PARISH  
LOUISIANA**  
DEPARTMENT OF JUVENILE SERVICES

ROY L. JUNCKER, JR.  
DIRECTOR

November 13, 2002

John S. Ryals, Jr., MA, LPC, LMFT  
840 Matador Dr.  
Terrytown, LA 70056

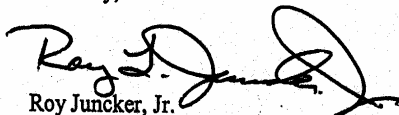
Re: Letter of Permission

Dear Mr. Ryals:

It is my understanding that you will be performing a research project involving juvenile offenders who are under supervision by the Department of Juvenile Services. I further understand that the confidentiality and safety of these juvenile will be ensured through the use of signed consent forms and storing information in a secured location.

In support of Juvenile Services' mission "to research and initiate programs and policies to control delinquency", I grant you permission to utilize information from the Department of Juvenile Services to access the juvenile offender population. It is my hope that the outcome of your study can benefit the juvenile offender population. Please let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

  
Roy Juncker, Jr.  
Director, DJS

## Appendix F: Interview Guide

## Interview Protocol form

Project: Juvenile Offenders' Perceptions of the Counseling Relationship

Time of interview:

Date:

Location:

Interviewee:

Physical position of interviewee:

(Introduction: Develop rapport, explain purpose of study, and explain counseling relationship.)

Questions:

1. Can you tell me about your first meeting with the counselor? What was it like?
2. Can you tell me about (describe) the relationship between you and your counselor? Give me an example of a time when you met with your counselor that stands out for you.
3. What parts of the relationship with the counselor stand out for you or stick in your mind?
4. How did the counseling relationship affect you? Did any changes occur as a result of the counseling relationship?
5. What feelings did you feel in your relationship with the counselor?
6. What thoughts stand out for you about your relationship with the counselor?
7. What bodily changes were you aware of during the counseling relationship?
8. How many times did you meet with the counselor? Can you tell me about your last meeting with the counselor?
9. Are there any other thoughts, feelings, or memories you'd like to share?

(Thank individual for participating in the interview. Assure him/her of confidentiality of responses and potential future interviews.)

## Appendix G: Example of Horizontalization

## Case Example: Horizontalization

I really didn't know her, so I was just... I wanted to find out what she was gonna, how she was gonna talk to me or whatever, so I was just listening to her

She was asking me about how I got into probation, and all that, and I was letting her know.

I was in there and time was going by fast when we were talking about stuff, talking about all the stuff that I did.

The first session I really just wanted to get it over with. I wanted to hurry up and go home... 'cause I didn't know what she was trying to do.

I didn't know how she was gonna try to make me look on paper, if she was gonna make me look, like, how was she writing me down, or whatever-what kind of image am I gonna be on that piece of paper.

I was wondering, like, exactly what was she writing because I knew she was writing down things that I was saying. I wondered how I looked after you read it...after you read the piece of paper.

I was trying to see if she had a mad face, or whatever, so I could, like, I was trying to see if she could be mean...she *could* be mean, I mean, she could be, but I ain't seen a mad face on her once. So I was, like, that's what made it easier to get comfortable with her.

She was asking me how I got onto probation. I was telling her it was all an accident. I told her how it was. She agreed with me that it was something stupid to be on probation on. It was just like, she was trying to see things the way I see them

I'm a good person. I don't do that. After a while she got to know that.

We were like friends. I used to tell her about all the things I used to do.

she'd just listen to me. She won't be like, I don't know, I didn't feel stupid talking to her 'cause I felt comfortable with her.

I was just comfortable with her. I'd tell her whatever she asked me.

She just listened and laughed. You know, once somebody starts laughing you're talking to them and you just start joking around or whatever and you just get used to that person. I was just comfortable with her.



I just feel I can just joke around with her. You can't joke around with people when you got to be tense with them. You're not really having a good relationship-you're not really having fun.

I'd have a story and she'd have a story. We'd just talk back and forth

I remember I was telling her I want to work in a hospital, so she, um, then one time I went over there and she brought tapes, and stuff, showing me stuff about a hospitals and all that she sent me in the mail. She was just trying to fill it in my head, trying to let me know that it's real-that it can happen. Just trying to help me out

I didn't mind leaving, stopping, like the counseling being gone, but I wouldn't mind being there still-it wouldn't bother me 'cause time would go by fast-it would be like da, da, da.

We used to just talk and time would be going by fast. I didn't realize time was going so fast because we'd be just be talking

it didn't feel like she was my counselor. It was just like somebody I was talking to...like, when you're hanging out with somebody familiar, you just, I don't know, talking to them, like, chilling.

I don't know how it affected me, I couldn't tell you, but I'm pretty sure it did one way or the other.

I already know what's right and what's wrong, I got my own opinion about that, and all she did was, let me know, you know, kinda went along with it, but I...I ain't got a bad one, like I didn't go around smoking and all that. Like, since it was a good outlook, all she did was embrace it or whatever, but if it was something bad, I'm pretty sure she would try to correct me.

I don't know what she would say if I told her that.

I just liked her...it was easy to talk to her, she was cool. I got a picture of her in my head, me and her were standing outside waiting for my ride. She could have left but we still was, you know, yacking, ya, ya, ya, ya, 'till my mom cam pick me up. It was cool though.

I liked her. I thought she was a good person...just, you know I can get a long with a lot of people, it's just like, alright, she's cool, I like her, I liked being around her, I don't mind being around her, I could talk to her, just like being around one of my friends.

she didn't think I was a bad person so it felt alright, because she didn't see me as a bad person.

It's like, "What's up?," you know, "Let's talk about whatever," tell me about drugs and all that, this and that, and after that we'd just talk about other things. It wasn't always, "Why you did this?" and "Why you did that?"; it was more, like, we talked about...I'd be telling stories about what I did and she'd ask me how did you think it affected your outlook on things. But, it's really true, about the way she was saying things, like, cause the way you live your life, it develops you-the way you think.

I really didn't feel anything...cause it felt normal, it felt normal being with her. I wasn't aggravated. I wasn't tired of being in there...It was just like being with one of my friends...I just didn't feel nothing... it was normal.

I was always relaxed with her. I really don't know...I don't know...I really don't know...Alright, I'll sit in the chair, relax, talk to you for a while...(laugh). I don't know, I just felt good around her...'cause she was never mad.

I kinda didn't want to leave, but I knew it was, like, time to leave

I just wonder what she thinks about me right now. I don't know...I wonder if she thinks, like, I'm not like other people... like, I'm not ignorant, or whatever...I'm not going around starting trouble. I just hope she thinks I'm a good person...that's what I try to show her, that I'm not a bad person.

I didn't hate being in counseling, but you know how you don't like being in school but then the last day comes and you start missing everything.

It was kinda like happy but still...it felt like something was going to be missing because I got used to it eight weeks in a row. I got used to it

Some things you just can't say, you just know how it feels, it's like, I don't know, (inaudible) you don't realize it, it's just natural, normal, and regular.

I don't think a lot of people are comfortable with the counselor like that, 'cause it was just me and her. Like, if I would have had a group, I couldn't talk to her 'cause I'd feel strange talking around other people.

## Appendix H: Example of Invariant Constituents

## Case Example: Invariant Constituents

I really didn't know her, so I was just... I wanted to find out what she was gonna, how she was gonna talk to me or whatever, so I was just listening to her

She was asking me about how I got into probation, and all that, and I was letting her know.

The first session I really just wanted to get it over with. I wanted to hurry up and go home... 'cause I didn't know what she was trying to do.

I didn't know how she was gonna try to make me look on paper, if she was gonna make me look, like, how was she writing me down, or whatever-what kind of image am I gonna be on that piece of paper.

I was trying to see if she had a mad face, or whatever, so I could, like, I was trying to see if she could be mean...she *could* be mean, I mean, she could be, but I ain't seen a mad face on her once. So I was, like, that's what made it easier to get comfortable with her.

she was trying to see things the way I see them

I didn't feel stupid talking to her 'cause I felt comfortable with her.

She just listened and laughed. You know, once somebody starts laughing you're talking to them and you just start joking around or whatever and you just get used to that person. I was just comfortable with her.

I just feel I can just joke around with her. You can't joke around with people when you got to be tense with them. You're not really having a good relationship-you're not really having fun.

I'd have a story and she'd have a story. We'd just talk back and forth

I remember I was telling her I want to work in a hospital, so she, um, then one time I went over there and she brought tapes, and stuff, showing me stuff about a hospitals and all that she sent me in the mail. She was just trying to fill it in my head, trying to let me know that it's real-that it can happen. Just trying to help me out

We used to just talk and time would be going by fast. I didn't realize time was going so fast because we'd be just be talking

it didn't feel like she was my counselor. It was just like somebody I was talking to...like, when you're hanging out with somebody familiar, you just, I don't know, talking to them, like, chilling.

I don't know how it affected me, I couldn't tell you, but I'm pretty sure it did one way or the other.

I already know what's right and what's wrong, I got my own opinion about that, and all she did was, let me know, you know, kinda went along with it, but I...I ain't got a bad one, like I didn't go around smoking and all that. Like, since it was a good outlook, all she did was embrace it or whatever, but if it was something bad, I'm pretty sure she would try to correct me.

I like her, I liked being around her, I don't mind being around her, I could talk to her, just like being around one of my friends.

she didn't think I was a bad person so it (talking to her) felt alright, because she didn't see me as a bad person.

It wasn't always, "Why you did this?" and "Why you did that?"; it was more, like, we talked about...I'd be telling stories about what I did and she'd ask me how did you think it affected your outlook on things. But, it's really true, about the way she was saying things, like, cause the way you live your life, it develops you-the way you think.

I really didn't feel anything...cause it felt normal, it felt normal being with her. I wasn't aggravated. I wasn't tired of being in there.

I was always relaxed with her. I just felt good around her...'cause she was never mad.

I kinda didn't want to leave, but I knew it was, like, time to leave

I just wonder what she thinks about me right now. I don't know...I wonder if she thinks, like, I'm not like other people... like, I'm not ignorant, or whatever...I'm not going around starting trouble. I just hope she thinks I'm a good person...that's what I try to show her, that I'm not a bad person.

I didn't hate being in counseling, but you know how you don't like being in school but then the last day comes and you start missing everything.

Some things you just can't say, you just know how it feels, it's like, you dont realize it, its just natural, normal, and regular.

if I would have had a group, I couldn't talk to her 'cause I'd feel strange talking around other people.

## Appendix I: Example of Themes

## Case Example: Themes

**I. First Session**

- A. I didn't know how she was gonna try to make me look on paper, if she was gonna make me look, like, how was she writing me down, or whatever-what kind of image am I gonna be on that piece of paper.
- B. I really didn't know her, so I was just... I wanted to find out what she was gonna, how she was gonna talk to me or whatever, so I was just listening to her
- C. She was asking me about how I got into probation, and all that, and I was letting her know.
- D. The first session I really just wanted to get it over with. I wanted to hurry up and go home... 'cause I didn't know what she was trying to do.

**II. Counselor's Approach**

- A. I already know what's right and what's wrong, I got my own opinion about that, and since it was a good outlook, all she did was embrace it or whatever, but if it was something bad, I'm pretty sure she would try to correct me.
- B. I remember I was telling her I want to work in a hospital, so she, um, then one time I went over there and she brought tapes, and stuff, showing me stuff about a hospitals and all that she sent me in the mail. She was just trying to fill it in my head, trying to let me know that it's real-that it can happen. Just trying to help me out
- C. I was trying to see if she had a mad face, or whatever, so I could, like, I was trying to see if she could be mean...she *could* be mean, I mean, she could be, but I ain't seen a mad face on her once. So I was, like, that's what made it easier to get comfortable with her.
- D. It wasn't always, "Why you did this?" and "Why you did that?"; it was more, like, we talked about...I'd be telling stories about what I did and she'd ask me how did you think it affected your outlook on things. But, it's really true, about the way she was saying things, like, cause the way you live your life, it develops you-the way you think.
- E. she didn't think I was a bad person so it (talking to her) felt alright, because she didn't see me as a bad person.

F. She just listened and laughed. You know, once somebody starts laughing you're talking to them and you just start joking around or whatever and you just get used to that person

H. she was trying to see things the way I see them

### **III. Relationship with Counselor**

A. I didn't feel stupid talking to her 'cause I felt comfortable with her.

B. I just feel I can just joke around with her. You can't joke around with people when you got to be tense with them, you're not really having a good relationship, you're not really having fun.

C. I like her, I liked being around her, I don't mind being around her, I could talk to her, just like being around one of my friends.

D. it didn't feel like she was my counselor. It was just like somebody I was talking to...like, when you're hanging out with somebody familiar, you just, I don't know, talking to them, like, chilling.

### **IV. Communication with Counselor**

A. I'd have a story and she'd have a story. We'd just talk back and forth.

B. if I would have had a group, I couldn't talk to her 'cause I'd feel strange talking around other people.

### **V. Passing of Time**

A. We used to just talk and time would be going by fast. I didn't realize time was going so fast because we'd be just be talking.

### **VI. Effects of Counseling**

A. I don't know how it affected me, I couldn't tell you, but I'm pretty sure it did one way or the other.

### **VII. Expression of Feelings**

A. I really didn't feel anything...cause it felt normal, it felt normal being with her. I wasn't aggravated. I wasn't tired of being in there.

B. Some things you just can't say, you just know how it feels, it's like, you don't realize it, it's just natural, normal, and regular.

### **VIII. End of Counseling Relationship**

A. I didn't hate being in counseling, but you know how you don't like being in school but then the last day comes and you start missing everything.

B. I just wonder what she thinks about me right now. I don't know...I wonder if she thinks, like, I'm not like other people... like, I'm not ignorant, or whatever...I'm not going around starting trouble. I just hope she thinks I'm a good person...that's what I try to show her, that I'm not a bad person.

C. I kinda didn't want to leave, but I knew it was, like, time to leave

## Appendix J: Example of Individual Textural Description

### Case Example: Individual Textural Description

The textural qualities that characterize P's relationship with the counselor lie in his internal thoughts of the counselor's perceptions of him, in his feeling comfortable with the counselor, and his feelings of mutual understanding between him and the counselor.

The first session started with P being unfamiliar with the counselor, "I really didn't know her so I just wanted to find out how she was gonna talk to me, so I was just listening to her." Uncertainty centered on how the counselor described him in writing, "I didn't know how she was gonna try to make me look on paper... what kind of image am I gonna be on that piece of paper." Discomfort in the first session led P to "get it over with. I wanted to hurry up and go home 'cause I didn't know what she was trying to do." As the initial session progressed, however, the counselor, "was asking me questions about how I got on to probation, and all that, and I was letting her know." The communication between them started to increase.

P's impression of the counselor was that he, "ain't seen a mad face on her once." He recalled examining the counselor's face, "to see if she could be mean." In contrast, "she just listened and laughed," which led P to feel increasingly more comfortable with the counselor. P observed the counselor's demeanor and noted, "once somebody starts laughing, you're talking to them and you just start joking around and you just get used to that person." As sessions continued, the counselor's perceptions of him were important, "she didn't think I was a bad person so it (talking to her) felt alright, because she didn't see me as a bad person." Also, the counselor was, "trying to see things the way I see them." The counselor showed moral support of P, "I already know what's right and what's wrong, I got my own opinion about that, and since it was a good outlook, all she did was embrace it, or whatever; but, if it was something bad, I'm pretty sure she would try to correct me." For P, the counselor established in the relationship a sense of right and wrong.

The relationship between P and the counselor allowed him to link his behaviors to his thoughts, "I'd be telling stories about what I did and she'd ask me, 'How did you think it affected your outlook on things?' But, it's really true, about the way she was saying things, like, 'cause the way you live your life, it develop you... the way you think." Not only did the counselor focus on cognitive aspects of P, but she also, "brought tapes, and stuff, showing me stuff about hospitals and all that she sent me in the mail. She was just trying to fill it in my head, trying to let me know that it's real-that it can happen."

P's thoughts about the counseling relationship were focused on his perceptions of the counselor and his interactions with her. For him, "it didn't feel like she was my counselor. She was just somebody I was talking to... like, when you're hanging out with somebody familiar, you just talking to them, like chilling." Comfort with the counselor was characterized by joking, "I just feel I can just joke around with her. You can't joke around with people when you got to be tense with them, you're not really having a good relationship, you're not really having fun." For P, comfort with the counselor was



because he “didn’t feel stupid talking to her.” He, “liked being around her. I don’t mind being around her. I could talk to her just like being around one of my friends.”

Communication between them was a mutual sharing of information, “I’d have a story and she’d have a story. We’d just talk back and forth.” However, P admitted, “if I would have had a group, I couldn’t talk to her ‘cause I’d feel strange talking around other people.” In relation to time, P felt their conversations would pass the time quickly, “we used to talk and the time would be going by fast. I didn’t realize time was going by so fast because we’d just be talking.”

Regarding his expression of feelings, P admits he, “really didn’t feel anything ‘cause I felt normal being with her. I wasn’t aggravated. I wasn’t tired of being there.” Expression of feelings was limited to saying that the experience was, “natural, normal, and regular.” P did not express specific feelings about the counselor or counseling relationship and admitted to having difficulty expressing emotions. “Some things you just can’t say, you just know how it feels.

The end of the counseling relationship for P was compared to school, “you know how you don’t like being in school, but then the last day comes and you start missing everything.” In spite of not wanting to leave counseling, he, “knew it was time to leave.” As he reflected back on his relationship, he is faced with thoughts of how the counselor thinks about him. “I just wonder what she thinks about me now...I wonder if she thinks I’m not like other people, like, I’m not ignorant or going around starting trouble. I just hope she thinks I’m a good person. That’s what I try to show her that I’m not a bad person.

Themes present in P’s perception of the counseling relationship are 1) the first session, 2) the counselor’s approach, 3) the relationship with the counselor, 4) communication with the counselor, 5) difficulty expressing feelings, and 6) the ending of the relationship.

In relation to himself, P is conscious about how he presents himself to others. He is concerned about how others perceive him. In relation to others, P places importance on the counselor’s perception of him. He wants to be thought of in a positive manner by the counselor even after the relationship has terminated.

## Appendix K: Example of Individual Structural Description

## Case Example: Individual Structural Description

For P, the uncertainty of the counseling relationship was based on his unfamiliarity with the counselor and how the counselor perceived him. His concern over what the counselor was writing foreshadowed his larger concern of the counselor's perception of him. In an attempt to lessen the anxiety of uncertainty, P wanted to leave the session, but instead, listened to the counselor and assessed her intentions.

As the sessions progressed, P's comfort with the counselor increased. Through her relaxed demeanor, she conveyed to him a sense of acceptance, support, and mutual sharing. She agreed with his perception of himself, which fostered the development of the relationship. In spite of her acceptance of his outlook, the counselor communicated the P that there were limitations for acceptable and unacceptable behaviors.

Comfort with the counselor was driven by his observations and interactions with her. P carefully watched the counselor to determine whether she would judge him for his actions or for how he presented himself. Interactions were full of laughter and joking around. These are common traits of P's relationships with his friends. For P, the counselor's perception weighed heavily on his view of the relationship. Contrary to the discomfort of the initial session, his relaxation with the counselor fostered increased communication about anything he wanted to discuss. His feelings of being able to share viewpoints with the counselor was unique to individual therapeutic sessions in that he felt more comfortable when just the two of them met together.

P's detachment from his emotions was more of a difficulty labeling the feelings than the inability to feel. His inability to describe feelings about the counseling relationship is an extension of the inability to describe feelings about other life events. As the sessions ended, P felt the absence of the sessions as he became used to the weekly conversations with the counselor. He thinks about how the counselor perceives him even after the relationship has ended. His intense desire to be viewed as a good person drives his thoughts about the counselor's perception of him.

## Appendix L: Example of Composite Textural-Structural Description

## Case Example: Composite Textural-Structural Description

For P, the start of the counseling relationship created anxiety and uncertainty, “I really didn’t know her.” Curiosity sought to relieve the unpleasantness of not knowing, “I wanted to find out how she was gonna talk to me, so I was just listening.” Fueled by confusion, P, “wanted to hurry up and go home ‘cause I didn’t know what to do.” Anxiety diminished as conversations between P and the counselor began to clarify the counselor’s intentions and purpose. The counselor’s appearance was a large factor in the relief of anxiety, “I ain’t seen a mad face on her once, so that’s what made it easier to get comfortable with her” and reinforced his desire to be seen by the counselor in a positive light.

For P, the counselor’s demeanor served as the foundation of the relationship. To him, she provided moral clarification, “I already know right from wrong...all she did was embrace it,” mutual respect, “I could talk to her like a friend,” and positive unconditional regard, “I didn’t feel stupid talking to her.” Comfort within the relationship facilitated P’s ability to discuss anything with the counselor; “I could talk to her just like being around one of my friends.”

For P, laughter and joking served as barometers for the quality of relationships, in general. Just as laughter and joking were common characteristics of his friendships outside of counseling, they were similarly characteristic of his relationship with the counselor; “I just feel I can joke around with her. You can’t joke around with people when you got to be tense with them-you’re not really having a good relationship-you’re not really having fun.” The counseling relationship provided a mirror reflection of P as he sought to impress upon the counselor that he was a good person. The counselor mirrored a positive image to P, thus enabling him to express himself easily; “she didn’t think I was a bad person so it (talking to her) felt alright, because she didn’t see me as a bad person.” Overt benefits of counseling recalled by P were the development of a cognitive connection between his thoughts and his outlook on life, and learning about his personal aspiration to work in a hospital. However, a crucial covert benefit was that P found friendship blooming from a counseling relationship that he initially found confusing and uncertain.

In relation to time, counseling sessions passed quickly as he, “didn’t realize time was going by so fast.” Mutual sharing of personal information consumed time as P and the counselor engaged in dialog. At the termination of the relationship, P felt the absence of the weekly meetings. In retrospect, he wondered about the counselor’s lasting impression of him. “I just wonder about what she thinks about me now...I wonder if she thinks I’m not like other people, like, I’m not ignorant or going around starting trouble. I just hope she thinks I’m a good person.”

## VITA

John S. Ryals, Jr. resides in Terrytown, Louisiana with his wife, Cindy, and two daughters, Katelynn and Sarah. John's career in counseling began in 1983 when he was selected to become a peer counselor as a high school senior. This experience sparked a desire to help others that has spanned over two decades. In 1984, John attended Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, Louisiana where he studied Psychology and Marketing. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1988. He then attended Our Lady of Holy Cross College in New Orleans, Louisiana and earned a Master of Arts degree in Education in Marriage in Family Therapy.

John's experience includes a wide variety of counseling and administrative positions serving adolescents and families. John began professional counseling employment as an Agency Therapist at the St. Bernard Parish Group Homes. Since then he has been employed as a Vocational Counselor at the Jefferson Parish Adult Education Center, a Substance Abuse Counselor for serious, habitual offenders, and a counselor for first-time juvenile offenders. He has been the Director of the award-winning Jefferson Parish District Attorney's Juvenile Diversion Program and the Jefferson Parish Department of Juvenile Services. He currently serves as the Treatment/Evaluation Supervisor for the Jefferson Parish Department of Juvenile Services. In this capacity, John is a co-coordinator of Louisiana's first Juvenile Assessment Center and coordinator for parish-wide assessment of juvenile offenders. Also, John is a Chief Petty Officer in the United States Naval Reserve and is assigned to the Naval Reserve Naval Hospital Pensacola.

Through his professional experiences, John has been involved in numerous committees and organizations whose goals are to improve the availability and quality of services to youth. Several of these are the Jefferson Parish Workforce Investment Act Youth Council, Family Preservation Consortium, Juvenile Justice Inter-Agency Task Force, Juvenile Assessment Center Advisory Board, and Louisiana Restorative Justice Task Force. John has made presentations to community groups, school staff and students, and state and local corrections employees on topics such as implementing a comprehensive strategy in juvenile justice, the juvenile justice system, juvenile offender risk assessment, restorative justice, anti-drug education, and juvenile diversion programs.

As a counselor, John is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, and Board Approved Supervisor. He is a member of the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the International Association for Marriage and

Family Therapy (IAMFT). He works predominantly with juvenile offenders and their families. His interests lie in counselor education and advocacy, working with families of at-risk adolescents, implementing restorative justice practices, and building strong communities.

# DOCTORAL DISSERTATION REPORT

CANDIDATE: John S. Ryals, Jr.

MAJOR FIELD: Counselor Education

TITLE OF DISSERTATION: Juvenile Offenders' Perceptions of the Counseling Relationship

APPROVED:



Major Professor & Chair  
VIVIAN MCCOLLUM



Dean of the Graduate School

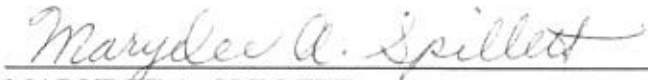
EXAMINING COMMITTEE:



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DATE OF EXAMINATION:

May 7, 2003