A PROSPECTIVE STUDY OF THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG ADAPTIVE STRENGTHS AND RECIDIVISM RATES WITH MALE JUVENILE OFFENDERS

by

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(Under the Direction of Brian A. Glaser)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the possibility of a relationship between the presence of adaptive skills and recidivism rates in juvenile offenders. Specifically, the study examined four adaptive skills as measured by the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992), and analyzed these scores in relation to the number and seriousness of offenses for a sample of male juvenile offenders. It was hypothesized that these adaptive skills, individually and as a total construct, could be used to explain and/or predict differences in two separate levels of juvenile offender recidivism rates. The study sample included 250 male adolescent detainees ages 12-17 in a regional youth detention center in Georgia. Juvenile offense histories, including number of days in detention and number and types of offenses for two years pre- and two years post-test administration date, were accessed via the Juvenile Tracking System. Results indicated that no/minor recidivists differed from serious recidivists in that no/minor recidivists reported higher levels of adaptive skills, specifically interpersonal relations, relations with parents, and self-reliance. The adaptive scale of Relations with Parents captured a small but significant amount of the variance in the prediction of level of recidivism, with lower scores indicating a greater likelihood of serious recidivism. It was also

found that the construct of adaptive skills could be used to explain differences in the two groups of recidivists, specifically that no/minor recidivists obtained higher overall adaptive scores than serious recidivists. In terms of predictive value, the construct of adaptive skills did show good prediction rates for who would not re-offend, but no better than chance prediction rates for who would re-offend. Implications of this study suggest that risk factors alone do not account for the differences in juvenile offenders and differences in their offense patterns. There is a need to investigate the protective factors that prevent some juvenile offenders from re-offending or committing more serious crimes, and from such investigations, a need to develop treatment and intervention programs that will target the development and enhancement of such adaptive skills.

INDEX WORDS: Juvenile offenders, Recidivism, Adaptive skills, Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC)

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the loving memory of my grandfather (Papa), Straud Solomon Carlton. A better man I have never known, he left us for his heavenly home on April 29, 2004. From him I learned that a job worth doing is one that is worth doing well, and to never give up on anything that I set out to accomplish. Out of all the wisdom I gained from being around him, two important lessons I learned from his actions will forever guide me: the importance of family, and work ethic. As a strong Christian, a devoted family man, and an honest and hardworking businessman, Papa touched the lives of many people that knew him, and I will be forever grateful for his model of how to live the right kind of life. Forever a source of inspiration and motivation to achieve even the seemingly unattainable, thanks for everything Papa.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Juvenile delinquency, a concept born in the mid 1800s, came to be amid a growing emphasis on reform schools and other institutions that would correct, educate, and socialize deviant youths instead of experiencing incarceration with adult criminals. To those who would advocate for such reform measures, the temptations of an increasingly industrialized and urban environment seemed to be the basis for such delinquency. Policies and attitudes began to change however, and in 1899 the first Juvenile Court was established in Illinois, representing a culmination of efforts to reform children without committing them to reform school or sending them to jail. This dramatic shift in attitudes on how best to deal with the problem of juvenile delinquency indicated a preference for diagnosis and rehabilitation rather than incarceration (Mennel, 1982). Eventually the treatment and rehabilitation initiative was seen as ineffective, thereby facilitating a movement backwards to punishment in large, custodial institutions. Over time, along with the rise and fall of multiple policy shifts, institutional changes, and societal reactions to troubled youth, juvenile delinquency has become a serious concern for national, state, and local policymakers. From only a cursory glance of the literature and statistics, one can quickly see that such delinquency deserves our attention in multiple ways.

According to Dryfoos (1990), one in four adolescents in the United States is at risk for engaging in socially unacceptable behaviors. It has also been suggested that 50% of adolescents engage in at least two or more risky behaviors (Dryfoos, 1997). In 1993, more than 2 million juveniles were arrested with a 59% increase in juvenile arrests for violent crimes according to the

Federal Bureau of Investigation (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1995). In 1996, as reported by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), U.S. law enforcement agencies made an estimated 2.9 million arrests of persons under the age of 18 (U.S. Department of Justice, 1997). This same report indicated that 2 million of these youths were involved in the juvenile court system. Further, it was reported that the rate of violent crimes committed by juvenile offenders increased by 67% between 1986 and 1995 (OJJDP, 1998). Male delinquency is a prominent focus of many of these reports, with males accounting for 85% of violent crimes committed by juvenile offenders, as well as accounting for 1.5 million arrests of approximately 2 million arrests of youths under the age of 18 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1995). In addition to these statistics, OJJDP (1998) reports that 74% of all youth who adjudicate delinquent are male.

Delinquency is seen by many has having multiple pathways, and in taking the approach from one interactional theory, it is important not to view delinquency as merely a consequence of a social process (Thornberry, 1987). This theory posits that reciprocal causal models are necessary to explain the social settings in which delinquent behavior develops. Associations with delinquent peers, delinquent values, and delinquent behavior can be viewed as existing in a causal loop, each reinforcing the others over time and creating a vicious cycle of increasing delinquency. In addition to these variables, there are mechanisms binding adolescents to the conventional world including attachment to parents, commitment to school, and belief in conventional values. Thornberry (1987) refers to these mechanisms as bonding variables, and a synopsis of their effects and interactions warrants further explication. Parental influence is seen as central in controlling the behavior of youths while instilling a sense of belief in conventional values. Such a belief in these values strongly affects a commitment to school while also being

affected by the commitment to school. Lastly, an attachment to parents brings about a likely commitment to school. These three bonding variables interacting with each other over time are likely to reduce delinquency. On the other hand, they can be seen as reciprocally linked to delinquency, exerting a causal impact on associations with delinquent peers and delinquent behavior and being causally affected by them. Delinquency and interactions between the delinquent variables can weaken the bonds to family, school, and conventional beliefs. For example, during early adolescence those youths weakly attached to parents, weakly committed to school, and giving little credence to conventional values are at a greater risk for high levels of delinquency, further weakening the bond to parents and school (Thornberry, 1987). Middle adolescence naturally brings about a decline in the importance of family, while school and peers take on increasing significance. The combination of initially weak bonds and high levels of delinquency make it extremely difficult to reestablish bonds to conventional society at later ages. Hence, delinquency from this theoretical point of view can be seen as an active part of the developmental process interacting with other social factors over time to determine the person's ultimate behavioral patterns (Thornberry, 1987).

The Juvenile Counseling and Assessment Program (JCAP) model views delinquent behaviors as resulting from variables associated with a) characteristics of the child (e.g., genetic predisposition/heredity, gender, personality/intelligence dimensions, social competence/life skills, and cognitive processing factors), b) ecological contexts within which the child lives (e.g., the family, peers, school, and the community), and c) interactions among these variables (Calhoun, Glaser, & Bartolomucci, 2001). This particular model emphasizes the examination of protective and risk factors to aid in youth resiliency by allowing youth to use their personal and environmental assets to prevent further delinquency while achieving success. Similar to the

interactional and JCAP models, other models have been proposed linking delinquency with variables associated with family, peers, academics, adolescent age, neighborhood, and youth-environment interactions (Simcha-Fagan & Schwartz, 1986; Henggeler & Borduin, 1990; Home, Norsworthy, Forehand, & Frame, 1990; Patterson, Capaldi, & Bank, 1991). Knowledge and utilization of models such as these can serve two purposes. They help to better explain the process of juvenile delinquency and how delinquent behavior can come to be such a prominent force in the life of a particular adolescent. Also, they can give a sense of direction to policymakers, juvenile justice system officials, and mental health professionals who are engaged in an attempt to reverse the pattern of delinquency, to increase positive opportunities for at-risk youth, and to create a society that adequately addresses the needs of all adolescents.

Important to the study of juvenile delinquency and its causal framework is the issue of recidivism, a concept inherent in the interactional theory described above which views increased delinquency as having a causal loop of delinquent variables. Myner, Santman, Cappelletty, and Perlmutter (1998) have cited a common definition of recidivism from previous studies: reoffending within a limited time frame. Studies of chronic delinquents have been based on two types of research designs: 1) Cohort studies tracking samples of individuals over time with analyses being based on official document data (i.e. school, police, juvenile court records), and 2) Interviews with juveniles self-reporting their involvement in delinquent acts. There have been two overarching conclusions from both types of studies: a) Delinquency is widespread and common, meaning most adolescents engage in some sort of rule-breaking during their teenage years, and b) there is a small core of adolescents who are responsible for a disproportionate amount of delinquency, especially the more serious and violent offending (Myers & Borg, 2000).

It is this latter conclusion that presents a particular concern for those working with juvenile offenders, the possibility that one offense will lead to another, and another, and so on.

There have been consistent conclusions from studies investigating chronic offenders in regards to race, gender, and socioeconomic status (SES). Males are more likely than females to be chronic offenders. Teens belonging to minority and lower SES groups are disproportionately represented among chronic offenders compared to white and middle- and upper-class adolescents. Recidivists tend to begin offending at a very young age and are more likely than other youth to be involved in serious and violent offenses. It has also been noted that negative experiences in family, peer, and school relationships contribute to high-rate offending patterns (Myers & Borg, 2000).

Speirs (1988) found that 69% of youths who appeared in juvenile court two times before age 15 continued their criminal activity, 80% who appeared three times reoffended, and 93% with eight appearances ended up being arrested again. It becomes increasingly evident that the ability to identify those juveniles likely to continue criminal activities would greatly assist both juvenile courts and the systems of care in which they are placed. In their study of recidivism in male juvenile offenders, Duncan, Kennedy, and Patrick (1995) found the best predictor of recidivism to be antisocial behavior. In a similar study, Myner et al. (1998) reported that age at first conviction captured most of the variance in predicting recidivism, and they go on to say that younger delinquents may experience difficult living conditions that could increase the likelihood for the development of antisocial behavior. Antisocial behaviors are generally seen as disregard for, and violation of the rights of others where societal norms or rules are violated. They can include, but are not limited to, aggression, destruction of property, deceitfulness or theft, and other serious violations of rules (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

This brief review of the history, statistics, and variables related to juvenile delinquency and recidivism begs the question of how to better serve these youth identified as juvenile offenders. Long and Sherer (1984) explain that the helping professions are playing an ever-expanding role in the assessment and rehabilitation of juvenile offenders. Most studies and statistical reports focus on the negative characteristics of these youth or certain antisocial behaviors that may be taken for granted with the mention of juvenile delinquency. By focusing on risk, researchers have seen the youthful offender as lacking in confidence, having poor social relationships, low academic abilities, and low parental support (Lerner & Galambos, 1998). Rarely have investigations explored the positive characteristics that could be enhanced through therapeutic intervention. By virtue of focusing on, and increasing strengths and desirable behaviors (reinforcement of incompatible behaviors), the undesirable behaviors and negative consequences may decrease. These strengths, or adaptive skills as they will be called from this point forward, can serve as protective factors for the juvenile offender, standing in stark contrast to the risk factors outlined above. Adaptive skills can be seen as the opposite of behavior problems (Kamphaus & Frick, 1996), and it has been suggested that adaptive skills may be the characteristics providing a buffer or assisting children in resisting the effects of adversity in their lives (Luthar, Woolston, Sparrow, Zimmerman, & Riddle, 1995). Resiliency investigators assert that there are protective factors in resilient children which buffer them from risk factors, decrease the chances of engaging in problem behaviors, and can promote successful adolescent development (Carr & Vandiver, 2001). Therefore, it would seem plausible that the measurement of adaptive skills would be particularly important in a juvenile offender population. These youth have multiple negative factors working against them, and they could use enhanced adaptive skills to more effectively deal with the negative influences interacting in their environments.

It is clear that at least one of the contributors to delinquency is a failure of life-skills maturation; that is, requisite skills for effective living are not achieved, and conduct occurs that is outside the bounds of socially acceptable behavior and established laws (Kadish, Glaser, Calhoun, & Ginter, 2001). McFall (1976) found that juvenile offenders habitually attain their goals through illegal means; often behaving maladaptively because they lack the requisite skills to act appropriately. Social skills are often lacking in juvenile offenders, those skills which would allow them to interact positively and nonaggressively with others. Spence (1982) isolated three potential mechanisms whereby skills deficits may influence delinquency: 1) Difficulties in developing and maintaining peer relations result in offending as a means of obtaining approval and status (shoplifting is often a result of this); 2) Difficulties with peers and teachers at school lead to truancy and hence increased opportunities to offend; and 3) Mismanagement of encounters with the police increases the likelihood of arrest and conviction (running away from approaching police officers).

Knowing that most personality and behavioral measures for children and adolescents focus on negative attributes, the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992) was designed to assess positive, as well as negative characteristics. Though designed for educational settings, the BASC is also being utilized and researched at a variety of sites to identify the needs of adjudicated and incarcerated adolescents (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2002). Helping these youth requires careful assessment of multiple domains since they can often feel capable in one area while reporting problems in another. The developers of this instrument have identified four domains useful to the overall assessment of adaptive skills: interpersonal relations, relations with parents, self-esteem, and self-reliance. The Interpersonal Relations scale measures success at relating to others and the degree of enjoyment derived from such

interactions, with low scorers evidencing problems in the development of social skills for relating to peers as well as adults. The Relations with Parents scale surveys an individual's perception of being important in the family, the status of the parent-child relationship, and the child's perception of the degree of parental trust and concern; low scores denoting severe family problems and possibly alienation. The Self-Esteem scale assesses a child's self-satisfaction, with reference to both physical and more global characteristics; low scores representing a pervasive sense of dissatisfaction with the self. Lastly, the Self-Reliance scale measures self-confidence and assurance in one's ability to make decisions; low scores are indicative of someone with low self-confidence, difficulty facing life's challenges, and the tendency to repress unpleasant thoughts or feelings. These four adaptive scales load into a composite score of Personal Adjustment. A low composite score indicates a tendency toward withdrawal and introversion, a tendency for repression of uncomfortable thoughts and feelings, and a youth who has few positive outlets for problems (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992). While this instrument is multi-method, including having parent and teacher rating scales, this study will be limited to the self-report of the adolescents.

Statement of the Problem

Calhoun et al. (1999) state that "Juvenile delinquency has many faces," and that "Those who work with these youth never cease to be amazed at the uniqueness of individuals, situations, and case presentations that so often fly in the face of the popular stereotypical perception of them as juvenile delinquents" (p. 342). Existing literature has not been as attentive to the examination of adaptive skills, or positive characteristics of juvenile offenders as it has been with negative, or clinical, dimensions, and researchers have placed youth offenders within a high-risk, nonresilient category (Ferguson & Lynskey, 1996). With the ebb and flow of punitive vs. rehabilitative

juvenile justice initiatives, counseling psychologists have a responsibility to try and target those adaptive behaviors that would serve in promoting a more responsible lifestyle and the prevention of further delinquency. For example, with the acquisition of more appropriate social skills, one could expect cognitive changes in that person that would shift toward a more internal locus of control and an increase in self-esteem (Long & Sherer, 1984). By enhancing or gaining adaptive skills, these juvenile offenders could become more able to recognize and choose appropriate alternatives to social and interpersonal situations.

In order to stem recidivism, we have to meet the needs of the adolescents committing delinquent acts and being placed in our systems of care. Through assessment with personality inventories, psychologists can better target appropriate rehabilitative interventions to meet these individual needs without relying solely on the negative characteristics often associated with such youth. The problem to be investigated in the present study is whether adaptive skills of juvenile offenders relate to their recidivism. In understanding these relationships, the literature related to juvenile delinquency can be enhanced by a more complete description of what juvenile offenders lack in terms of skill development and whether adaptive skills are associated with more healthy functioning (i.e. less chance of recidivism).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between adaptive skills and juvenile offense rates. By using a well-normed personality inventory such as the BASC to identify adaptive skills; specifically: interpersonal relations, relations with parents, self-esteem, and self- reliance, and analyzing these scores in relation to the number and seriousness of offenses, this investigation can attempt to show the predictive power of adaptive skills for recidivism among juvenile offenders as well as the differences in levels of adaptive skills among

different types of recidivists. The results of this study can further aid psychologists, mental health clinicians, and other professionals in their attempts to successfully intervene in the lives of these youth by promoting skills development in order that they may lead more socially responsible lives. It is hoped that a strength-based framework can be more effective in meeting the challenges of juvenile delinquency and preventing the possibility that a youth's first offense is just the beginning of a life of crime and disregard for social standards.

Research Questions

Predictive factors have been employed in models of recidivism in prior empirical studies. Many of these factors that have been used to explain the nature of recidivism and what places a person at risk for re-offense come from deficit-based models or problem-oriented theoretical frameworks. Can adaptive skills, levels of positive adjustment, particular strengths, or the possession of desirable characteristics be used to predict levels of juvenile offender recidivism?

Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis 1. There are no differences between the two groups based on level of severity of offense (no/minor versus serious) on each of the four measures of adaptive skills (*Interpersonal Relations*, *Relations with Parents, Self-Esteem*, and *Self-Reliance).*

Null Hypothesis 2. Adaptive skills (*Interpersonal Relations*, *Relations with Parents, Self-Esteem*, and *Self-Reliance)* do not account for a significant amount of the variance in the juvenile offense history outcome data.

Null Hypothesis 3. The construct of Adaptive Skills does not explain any differences between two levels of severity of recidivists.

Delimitations

The current study focuses on male juvenile offenders who have been detained in a regional youth detention center (RYDC), and who subsequently completed a self-report version of the BASC. No corresponding behavioral observations, or corresponding reports from teachers and/or parents will be used. Only those individuals with valid profiles will be included in the study, and only those whose offense histories could be accessed via the Juvenile Tracking System will be included in the final sample. For the purposes of the statistical analyses, only the Adaptive Scales and corresponding composite portion of the BASC will be utilized. For each subject, offenses two years prior to test administration and two years post administration will be categorized and tallied according to the classification system formulated by OJJDP (1999) including status offenses, drug law violations, offenses against public order, crimes against property, and crimes against persons.

Definition of Terms

Juvenile Offender. A juvenile offender is a child or adolescent under the age of 18 who is caught and convicted of committing an illegal act. The range of these acts varies widely and includes such offenses as truancy, weapons possession, shoplifting, drug and alcohol violations, and aggravated assault. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, rather the point being made is that juvenile crime falls on a very large continuum from minor status offenses to more serious and sometimes violent felony offenses. Juvenile offenders are those individuals that are relegated to a separate judicial system from adults, the juvenile court system. For the purposes of this study, the operational definition of a juvenile offender is a male adolescent between the ages of 12 and 17 being detained at a regional youth detention center (RYDC) at the time tests are administered.

Adaptive Skills. Adaptive skills are frequently defined as the opposite of behavior problems, those skills allowing for positive adjustment, or skills that are viewed as promoting positive and desirable characteristics. Such skills often function as protective factors against negative environments, stress, and adversity. Other terms that have been used to describe adaptive skills include life skills, social skills, social competence, and the like. As pertaining to the relevant scales of the BASC, adaptive skills include *Interpersonal Relations, Relations with Parents, Self-Esteem,* and *Self-Reliance*. For the purposes of this study, the definitions for each of these scales delineated by Reynolds and Kamphaus (1992) will be used.

Interpersonal Relations is the perception of having good social relationships and friendships with peers. *Relations with Parents* is a positive regard towards parents and a feeling of being esteemed by them. *Self-Esteem* describes feelings of self-esteem, self-respect, and self-acceptance. *Self-Reliance* is confidence in one' s ability to solve problems; a belief in one' s personal dependability and decisiveness.

Recidivism. A common definition of recidivism employed in past studies has been reoffending within a limited time frame. Terms often used to describe juvenile offenders who recidivate are serial offenders, chronic delinquents, and career criminals. Other methods to define recidivism have involved retrospective accounts of past arrests or convictions of current delinquents. In this study, recidivism takes on the very broad operational definition of a pattern of persistent offending during the child and adolescent years. Through the Juvenile Tracking System, the entire juvenile delinquency history of the participants was able to be examined from the first offense up until the age of 18. This total number of offenses along with a subsequent breakdown of status, misdemeanor, and felony offenses was used in the final data analysis.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Adolescence is characterized as a period of change and transition that brings varying degrees of stress into the lives of adolescents (Compas, 1987). In a similar vein, others describe it as a period of exploration and experimentation with a variety of roles and behaviors as youth attempt to define their identity (Dusek & Flaherty, 1981; Erikson, 1968; Waterman, 1982). This developmental stage, often described as being from the ages of 12-18, brings the individual into closer contact with peers who concomitantly will exert an enormous influence over the adolescent, often participating in behaviors that the peer group advances as appropriate. When personal and social resources are not sufficiently developed for coping with developmental tasks, adolescents can be vulnerable to a multitude of behavioral and emotional difficulties (Chung & Elias, 1996). Pertinent to the study of juvenile offenders, adolescent problem behaviors have been conceptualized as maladaptive attempts to cope with personal or environmental stressors associated with developmental issues (Allison, Leone, & Spero, 1990; Elliot, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985; Jessor & Jessor, 1977; Silberreisen & Noack, 1988).

Juvenile Offenders

Juvenile offenders, those earlier defined as a child or adolescent under age 18 who is caught and convicted of committing an illegal act, can be placed on probation, recommended for residential or other therapeutic programs, or incarcerated in a youth detention facility (Kadish et al., 2001). For adolescent problem behaviors to get to this breaking point, there are multiple avenues affecting the juvenile offender's development. Through the family, peers, school, and

other social contexts, troubled adolescents learn maladaptive ways of meeting their needs. Dodge (1993) has suggested that the information processing of juvenile offenders becomes closely tied to their behavior, appearing to be one and the same. From their research, Fitts and Hammer (1969) suggest that when the juvenile offender sees himself as bad and worthless, he will act accordingly with his behavior being an expression of his self-concept. This is a part of what separates the juvenile offender from non-offenders.

Two other dimensions separating juvenile offenders from non-offenders are locus of control and self-esteem. Young offenders tend to score as "external" on locus of control scales (Eitzen, 1975; Rotter, 1971), and in a longitudinal study, Ollendick and Elliott (1978) found a 26% recidivism rate for internally-oriented delinquents as opposed to a 58% recidivism rate for externally-oriented delinquents. Juvenile offenders often score low on self-esteem scales, however, self-esteem could come from unconventional standards. Cohen (1959) has suggested that many adolescents who fail within the middle class education system, and hence suffer a loss in self-esteem, tend to regain self-esteem from identification with a delinquent sub-culture. Other studies have shown juvenile offenders often have inflated self-esteem and that such narcissistic tendencies are related to violence (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). Therefore it is postulated that if a juvenile offender has no apparent lack of self-esteem, there is still a possibility for separating their self-esteem from that of non-offenders exhibiting conventional standards of behavior.

Aggressive behaviors and antisocial tendencies are common constructs associated with juvenile offenders since they often lack the skills that would allow them to interact positively and nonaggressively with others. At greater risk for these problem behaviors are those adolescents who lack appropriate social problem solving skills, and this link has been identified in numerous

studies. Delinquent and substance abusing adolescents repeatedly have been found to use less effective strategies for resolving interpersonal conflict than other adolescents (Allen, Leadbeater, & Aber, 1990a, 1994; Freedman, Rosenthal, Donohoe, Schlundt, & McFall, 1978; Hains & Herrman, 1989; Pont, 1995). These same adolescents may possess less sophisticated skills for integrating the perspectives of self and others (Leadbeater, Hellner, Allen, & Aber, 1989; Lenhart & Rabiner, 1995). These studies bring one to the conclusion that poor social skills place youth at risk for antisocial behavior. Juvenile offenders may learn to perceive situations as more threatening than non-offending peers, and by consequence act more aggressively. These types of situations often lead to frustration, confusion, and anger. An inability to cope appropriately with these feelings leads to children who are more likely to act out in the forms of violence, crime, substance abuse, depression, suicide, and self-destruction (Omizo, Hershberger, & Omizo, 1988). Such behaviors as have been mentioned here can lead to diagnoses of Conduct Disorder.

Conduct Disorder is very often associated with juvenile offenders, and it is estimated that between 6% and 16% of males under age 18 exhibit diagnosable disorders of conduct. Approximately two-thirds of those will continue to display antisocial behavior into adulthood (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1994). This is not to say that of all juvenile offenders who are diagnosed with Conduct Disorder; some may be diagnosed with other disorders such as Oppositional Defiant Disorder, or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and others may only display a limited number of characteristics associated with the above disorders but not be diagnosable. The downfall of all of these behaviors is that they appear to be stable and prognosis is poor, with conduct problems in childhood and adolescence leading to more serious problems in adulthood. From this, one can quickly see that the delinquent and antisocial behavior of children and adolescents is a societal problem that requires therapeutic attention (Horne, Glaser,

& Calhoun, 1999). Psychology has assumed a paramount role within the juvenile justice system to assess, diagnose, and design programs for conduct disordered youth (Schwitzgebel & Schwitzgebel, 1980).

Strategies for prevention and intervention need to take into account the cause of problem behaviors. Juvenile offenders may exhibit early disruptive behaviors just like any other child, but the likelihood of these early behaviors progressing to more serious and chronic behavioral disorders is increased for many juvenile offenders due to the presence of negative psychosocial influences (Lambert, 1988). Not all influences are easily dealt with through therapeutic means, such as poverty, family disorganization, parent psychopathology, or social isolation. However, there are child and environmental components that should be the focus of preventive interventions including: child's use of problem-solving strategies, anger management, social skills training; parental discipline and monitoring, involvement, and support. Agee (1995) reported that effective assessment is a key component of providing successful treatment to a juvenile offender population.

At some point the juvenile offender will come into contact with the court system. It is then this system's responsibility to place the juvenile into a punitive and/or rehabilitative intervention. Individual therapy has been found to be the most effective treatment modality in creating long-term changes throughout the individual's life (OJJDP, 1998). The Juvenile Counseling and Assessment Program model, described earlier, supplements individual counseling with group counseling, psychological assessments, and family consultations, all tailored to the individual needs of each juvenile offender with whom it works. Examining juvenile programs, Lipsey and Wilson (1993) found that multimodal, skill-oriented programs focusing on behavioral change, such as JCAP, are the most effective in meeting the needs of

juvenile offenders. Models using interventions to assess and strengthen existing skills can prevent future delinquency from occurring (Calhoun et al., 2001, Kadish et al., 2001, Long & Sherer, 1984).

Juvenile offenders have been labeled internalizers and externalizers, undersocialized aggressive, socialized aggressive, attention-deficit disordered, anxiety-dysphoric, power-oriented, passive conforming, or neurotic (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983; Palmer, 1974; Quay, 1987). Such labels do very little for explaining delinquent behavior and often serve to further isolate the adolescent from appropriate care. Negative perceptions of this population and a focus on psychological weaknesses have been very evident in the literature (Grosnick & Huntze, 1984), and societal reactions to these youth have historically been less than exemplary (Sharp & Hancock, 1998). Recognizing a need to investigate delinquency from a "normalized" perspective, Brannon and Kunce (1990) performed a study to determine if the circumplex relationship of the emotional, physical, and cognitive interpersonal styles and personality traits documented among other populations generalize to adjudicated youthful offenders. The results supported the use of the Personal Styles Inventory (PSI; Kunce, Cope, & Newton, 1986) with juvenile offenders. The importance of such an instrument is that its "normalized" offender typology shares many of the structural components of other classification models that tend to focus on identification of psychopathology. Instead of a juvenile offender' s behavior being diagnosed as symptomatic of a socialized, aggressive conduct disorder (Quay, 1987), or resulting from an externalizing, aggressive delinquent (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983), utilization of the PSI could identify that same individual as an overly extroverted, expansive youth who possesses a high interpersonal need for social approval (Brannon & Kunce, 1990). By offering another lens through which to view the particular behavior, a psychologist could quickly surmise that the

criminal conduct and conformity to a delinquent peer group is meeting the need for social approval.

We can conclude that multiple variables, factors, and interactions among these variables and factors will land certain adolescents in the category known as juvenile offenders. Juvenile justice agencies, the courts, and systems of care should be attune to the needs of each adolescent with attempts to emphasize and increase particular strengths while downplaying the need for others to over-pathologize these offenders. Psychologists can aid in this endeavor by thorough assessment, therapeutic treatments, and promoting the recognition of the need for rehabilitative intervention. Failure to do these things and failing to recognize the individual needs of each juvenile offender can begin a vicious cycle where the adolescent will return to our systems of care again and again at an enormous cost to society, with estimates that failing to prevent one youth from leaving high school for a "life of crime" and drug abuse costs society $1.7 to $2.3 million dollars (Cohen, 1998). We now turn our attention to juvenile recidivism, how much of a problem it has really become, and the factors related to its proliferation.

Recidivism

As is the case throughout time, social mores are constantly changing, bringing about dramatic shifts in the family and family structure. Findings consistently point to the conclusion that youth are offending at younger ages and that these behaviors are persisting throughout adolescence (U.S. Department of Justice, 1997). We may assume that an association with delinquent peers at younger ages and the instillation of delinquent values carries the enormous consequence of an increase in recidivism for today' s juvenile offender.

In the first large scale generalizable cohort study investigating delinquency in the United States, Wolfgang, Figlio, and Sellin (1972) examined the official police contacts between the

10th and 18th birthdays of 9,945 boys born in Philadelphia in 1945. 10,214 official police contacts (official reports, not necessarily arrests) were accumulated, yielding the finding that about 6% of these males had a minimum of five police contacts and were responsible for 52% of the total offenses in the data. These males were labeled the "chronic delinquent" group. In a follow-up study examining the 1958 birth cohort, similar results were found, and the chronic offenders in each cohort were responsible for the majority of serious offenses (i.e. homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault). In the 1945 cohort, 76% of the violent offenses were committed by the chronic delinquent group, while 71% of these offenses were committed by the chronic delinquents in the 1958 cohort (Tracy, Wolfgang, & Figlio, 1990). Research of later birth cohorts from different regions have found similar categories of chronic offenders (Myers & Borg, 2000).

More recent studies have found a slight increase in the percentage of chronic offenders since the 1980s. Snyder (1997) examined the court records of 151,000 juveniles turning 18 between 1980 and 1995 and found that 15% of the sample had been referred four or more times and was responsible for 59% of all serious referrals. Snyder found that the proportion of chronic delinquents increased with each graduating class from about 13% in the 1980s to 17% in the early 1990s. From the 16 years of data included in this study, serial offenders had an average of 6.6 referrals to the juvenile court.

Recent research has focused on differences among serial juvenile offenders. Findings indicate that one type is typically involved in non-serious and status offenses (i.e. shoplifting, truancy, runaway), and a second type is involved in more serious and violent crimes (i.e. burglary, motor vehicle theft, arson, drug trafficking, robbery, rape) (Myers & Borg, 2000). Related to these findings, there is also some research to suggest that juvenile status offenders

generally do not escalate into more serious or violent offending (Shelden, Horvath, & Tracy, 1989). Shelden and colleagues concluded from longitudinal data that if status offenders do return to court, it is not for a more serious crime.

There are three ongoing longitudinal studies conducted in Rochester, Denver, and Pittsburgh with 4,500 inner-city youth ages 7 to 15 in 1988 being sponsored by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Data analysis through the Spring of 1994 has produced some key findings (Thornberry, Huizinga, & Loeber, 1995). First, with age and gender tending to be the most significant demographic predictors of chronic offending, preliminary data suggests that chronic violent offenders begin involvement in both general delinquency and violence between 1 and 2.5 years earlier than non-chronic violent offenders. Kelley, Huizinga, Thornberry, and Loeber (1997) found that older boys and young men were much more likely to be involved in serious high-rate offending than girls or older men. Second, from the data in Denver, chronic violent offenders comprised 15% of the sample, but were responsible for 82% of violent offenses that were reported. Non-chronic violent offenders comprised 36% of the sample, but accounted for only 18% of the violent crimes (Thornberry et al., 1995). Third, chronic violent offenders tend to be generalists rather than specialists in their offending patterns while also exhibiting a variety of other behavioral problems. Finally, chronic violent offenders seem to have distinct family, social, peer, and neighborhood relationships putting them at high risk for violent behavior (i.e. lower attachment, less parental monitoring, greater exposure to family violence, less commitment to school, greater association with delinquent peers, and greater likelihood of high-crime neighborhoods) (Thornberry, et al., 1995). These studies show that serial delinquents are typically male, tend to come from a disadvantaged socioeconomic status, begin offending at very young ages, and are more likely than other adolescents to be

involved in serious and violent offenses. They are also seen to have more negative experiences in family, peer, and school relationships that contribute to high-rate offending patterns.

The presence of developmental disorders among serious and habitual juvenile offenders has been documented in the literature. When juvenile recidivists were referred for a psychiatric evaluation, they were more likely than other recidivists to commit violent offenses (Wenk, 1972). Juvenile offenders labeled as "disturbed" are responsible for a disproportionate amount of the violent offenses while a significant level of psychiatric and/or neurological impairment has been found among court-referred delinquents who are violent (Lewis & Balla, 1976; Strasburg, 1978). In their study of 200 incarcerated male juvenile offenders, Hollander and Turner (1985) found that recidivists, defined as those previously sentenced to a correctional institution, comprised 39.4% of their sample. Pervasive and serious developmental disorders were common among the sample with 47% having Borderline intelligence scores, 34% having personality disorders, and 18% showing a specific Developmental Disability and/or Attention Deficit Disorder. Family variables and socioeconomic status were statistically linked to recidivism. They suggest that the careers of violent juvenile offenders with developmental disorders, having histories of early institutionalization, should be studied to determine if they do indeed present a special danger to the communities in which they live (Hollander & Turner, 1985).

Recidivism has a multimodal pathway as exhibited in multiple studies investigating variables related to recidivism among juvenile offenders. In order to provide a more extensive and accurate assessment of recidivism and to clarify inconsistent findings in juvenile recidivism research, Myner et al. (1998) investigated relationships between recidivism and demographic, behavioral, familial, school-related, and crime-related variables alone and in combination with one another. Specifically, they examined the data for male juvenile offenders and in an initial

regression analysis found that age at first conviction captures most of the variance in predicting recidivism. Also included in this initial analysis as significant predictors were alcohol abuse, status conviction, and length of incarceration (the longer the incarceration, the greater the total number of convictions). Myner and colleagues performed a second regression analysis in which age at first incarceration was excluded. The significant predictors of recidivism found here were status conviction, group home placement, and birth order (firstborn having a higher rate of conviction). This study found no relationship between recidivism rate and SES, drug abuse, or school achievement, but did find type of offense to be linked to recidivism with convictions for substance-related, status, or violent offenses being associated with higher rates of recidivism (Myner et al., 1998).

Duncan et al. (1995) cited research indicating that juvenile offenders who recidivate have lower levels of intellectual functioning, poorer verbal abilities, lower academic achievement, fewer neurotic and anxious characteristics, and more sociopathic characteristics. They designed a study to test the relative contribution of multiple variables toward recidivism prediction in juvenile offenders, specifically wanting to identify classes of variables instead of individual variables that would best predict repeat offending. Findings indicate that a past history of antisocial behavior plays the strongest role in the prediction of recidivism while institutional adjustment, intellectual achievement, and psychological distress played only minor roles. The authors note that even though the latter three played only small roles in the prediction of recidivism, inclusion of these variables in the model improved the prediction rate from 67.2% to 73.5%. Duncan and colleagues suggest that an investigation of classes of variables, rather than individual variables, can provide a meaningful and effective approach to the prediction of recidivism.

Byrd, O' Connor, Thackrey, and Sacks (1993) have examined the usefulness of self-concept as a predictor of recidivism among juvenile offenders. These authors found no direct relationship between self-concept and delinquent behavior. They do suggest however, that those offenders who showed a tendency to deny any delinquent features in their self-concepts may be concealing information from themselves, and such concealment may be depriving them the opportunity to do something about their delinquency, thereby increasing their potential for delinquent behavior. Delinquent behavior by repeat juvenile offenders may be explained by them in ways that will protect a non-delinquent self-concept; such as minimization, attributing it to the behavior of others, or being understood as justified (Byrd et al., 1993).

While juvenile delinquency represents a significant problem for society and for the adolescents who become entrapped within its clutches, recidivism among these juvenile offenders has become rampant as has the rise in violent and serious crimes among these youth. By virtue of the nature of recidivism, these chronic offenders comprise only a small portion of the delinquent population but are committing an inordinate portion of the juvenile crimes. Classes of variables and individual factors with negative underpinnings have been shown to be related to and even predict levels of recidivism, so classes of strengths and individual positive characteristics may serve as protective factors against the possibility of recidivism. However, it is these adaptive skills that are rarely the focus of investigation in prior juvenile delinquency research. Important to this study is a review of the literature on adaptive skills and how they may pertain to the juvenile offender.

Adaptive Skills

The American Association on Mental Deficiency (AAMD) states that adaptive behavior is "the effectiveness with which the individual copes with the natural and social demands of his

environment" (Grossman, 1973, p.11). Leland, Nihira, Foster, Shellhass, and Kagin (1968) describe the behavior in terms of independent functioning and personal social responsibility. Similarly, the adaptive skill of social competence has been defined as the ability to make use of environmental and personal resources to achieve a good developmental outcome (Henggeler, 1989). It has been stated that adaptive skills are a variety of individual and social characteristics that serve protective functions, mitigating the effects of exposure to risk factors (Rolf, Masten, Cicchetti, Neuchterlein, & Weintraub, 1990). The existence of adaptive behavior is a reliable indicator of social, emotional, and psychological adjustment (Asher, Renshaw, & Hymel, 1982; Parker, 1987). Therefore, the assessment of adaptive behavior can be viewed as having important implications for the treatment planning and placement of juvenile offenders.

A major component of adaptive behavior is social skills development. Social skills have been defined as "socially acceptable learned behaviors that enable a person to interact with others that elicit positive responses and assist in avoiding negative response" (Elliott & Busse, 1991, p.64). Juvenile offenders have a difficult time acquiring such skills in their often hostile and negativistic environments, so they tend to develop their own values, which can be quite different from societal norms. By never learning to appropriately identify and express emotions, some juvenile offenders may resort to violence as a means of conflict resolution, which in turn alienates them from their peers and prevents them from developing good social skills (Calhoun et al., 2001). Sarason and Ganzer (1973) showed that group application of social skills training with juvenile delinquents could be effective in increasing locus of control and reducing recidivism. In a study by Long and Sherer (1984), similar results were produced showing that for male juvenile offenders, social skills training helped to further the belief that one' s behavior and consequences are controlled by oneself rather than by external factors. Their findings

further indicated that positive changes in the offenders' belief systems were also produced, increasing the probability for a lasting effect. Finally, Long and Sherer conclude by saying that the conceptualization of delinquent behavior as a social skills deficit was supported by their finding that low-frequency offenders exhibited better social skills than high-frequency offenders.

Studies have shown that social skills deficits accompany a greater risk for problematic behaviors. They have also shown that adolescents' expectations, values, and beliefs about social problem solving have implications for their engagement in problem behavior (Allen, Aber, & Leadbeater, 1990b, 1994; Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989). Kuperminc and Allen (2001) evaluated the role of adolescents' orientation toward the use of adaptive skills in explaining both the extent to which adolescents generate effective problem solving strategies and their involvement in serious problem behaviors. They defined a positive social orientation as a set of beliefs that include positive self-evaluations of effectiveness in past problem-solving, a sense of self-efficacy in facing future conflicts, and identification with prosocial goals. Their findings indicate that a positive social orientation does play a role in adolescents' levels of delinquent behavior and drug involvement, specifically that such an orientation leads to higher levels of social problem solving skills and lower levels of delinquency. Results suggest that delinquent behavior might be the result of both poor social skills and little motivation to employ competent problem solving strategies (Kuperminc & Allen, 2001). Social skill enhancing interventions need to broaden the scope of these interventions to target the interpersonal, intrapersonal, and social factors influencing motivations to engage in problem behaviors, thereby allowing adolescents to make and preserve interpersonal relationships, to cope with constantly changing environments, and to gain and maintain self-esteem and an internal locus of control

(Durlak, 1983, 1995; Gilchrist, Schinke, & Maxwell, 1987; Weissberg, Caplan, & Harwood, 1991).

In one such broad based intervention strategy, as part of the Minnesota Competence Enhancement Project; Braswell, August, Bloomquist, Realmuto, Skare, and Crosby (1997) compared a multicomponent competence enhancement intervention (MCEI) designed to reduce disruptive behaviors and improve adaptive behaviors and social skills to a smaller scale information/attention control (IAC) condition. Children in both conditions rated themselves as more positively adjusted and less likely to display either school problems or symptoms of clinical distress over time. Teacher ratings of child problem solving improved over time for both conditions, and behavioral observations reflected a decrease in the display of interfering behavior over time for both conditions. Children identified as disruptive were not displaying further increases in teacher-rated school problems or other symptomatology, possibly a preventive impact for both conditions. This large scale, broad based intervention and training program did not produce a superior result over the control group, but the authors do note that the lack of a no-treatment control group of disruptive children could have contributed to this (Braswell et al., 1997).

Other variables have been described in the literature that can be viewed as pertinent to the development and maintenance of adaptive skills. These include self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy, social competence, and social support. The presence of emotional and behavioral problems has been found to be associated with low self-esteem, such as delinquency, psychological discomfort, and psychiatric disorder (Marton, Golombek, Stein, & Korenblum, 1988). Marton and colleagues found that competence in personality functions and adaptive skills are equally linked with self-esteem, reporting that adolescents with personality disturbance have

lower self-esteem, and adolescents with a disturbance in adaptive skills also have lower self-esteem. This is not to say that all juvenile offenders have low self-esteem or that low self-esteem is the cause of problematic behaviors. Baumeister, Smart, and Boden (1996) suggest that juvenile delinquents often have inflated self-esteem and such narcissistic tendencies can be related to violence, whereas Henggeler (1989) proposes that those juvenile offenders who do have low self-esteem are realistically appraising their negative life experiences and failures rather than it being a cause of their delinquency.

Problem behavior involvement patterns have been linked to adolescents' self-efficacy, social competence, and life events which suggest that a strong co-occurrence of a variety of adolescent problem behaviors is likely to be found in the presence of low self-efficacy in one's academic performance, low involvement in various nonacademic activities, or negative life events (Chung & Elias, 1996). Findings such as this suggest that juvenile offenders displaying such characteristics have less chance of utilizing adaptive skills to divert them from continued involvement in problematic behaviors. Adolescents with negative self-efficacy expectations are likely to experience socially challenging events as distressing, and respond in ways that undermine their ability to use the social skills they possess (Bandura, 1980, 1993). Negative beliefs about the outcomes of their problem solving efforts may cause an adolescent to respond to interpersonal conflict in ways that bring negative outcomes, with these negative beliefs and negative outcomes being mutually reinforcing (Kuperminc & Allen, 2001). The negative beliefs held by juvenile offenders may be reducing their motivation to pursue developmental goals in socially appropriate ways.

Low social competence is associated with juvenile delinquency (Blechman, Tinsley, Carella, & McEnroe, 1985). Deficits in social competence are often displayed through poor

interpersonal skills, poor stress and anger management skills, and poor decision-making skills. It is these deficits that lead to dysfunctional coping styles and the profundity of delinquent behavior for many juvenile offenders.

The relationships between social support and problem behavior have also been investigated. Low levels of family support have been found to contribute to an increase in drug and alcohol use as well as delinquency by adolescents (Frauenglass, Routh, Pantin, & Mason, 1997; Licitra-Kleckler & Waas, 1993; Lifrak, McKay, Rostain, Alterman, & O'Brien, 1997; Piko, 2000). Garnefski and Diekstra (1996) found adolescents with emotional and behavioral problems tend to have negative perceptions of the support available to them from family, peers, and school. In relating social support to self-concept, researchers have found that higher levels of perceived social support is associated with higher levels of self-concept (Cauce, Felner, & Primavera, 1982; Forman, 1988; Kloomak & Cosden, 1994).

In a comprehensive study examining the relationships among perceived social support and various academic, behavioral, social indicators; Demaray and Malecki (2002) found significant relationships between how students perceive themselves and their competencies and the social support they perceive from those around them. Significant relationships were also found among adaptive skills and perceived social support. Negative relationships exist between the amount of social support perceived and the amount of problem behaviors in which adolescents are engaging. In regards to self-concept and social skills, student scores were significantly higher if they had high levels of perceived social support than if they had only average levels of perceived social support with the implication that perceived social support is associated with more positive outcomes and more positive feelings of one's self (Demaray & Malecki, 2002).

Adaptive skills therefore are extremely important for study because they have been shown to play a protective role or inhibiting factor in the development of childhood psychopathology (Coie, Watt, West, Hawkins, Asaronw, Markman, Ramey, Shure, & Long, 1993). One can quickly see the relationships adaptive skills often have with the development of problem behaviors and the continuance of delinquent actions. These skills are all too often overlooked in the conceptualization of juvenile offenders, and for this society pays a heavy price. By buying into the negative stereotypes, we are seriously undermining the potential of these youth to develop and effectively use appropriate adaptive skills, for as Fitts and Hammer (1969) assert: if a juvenile offender sees himself as bad and worthless, he will act accordingly.

In applying resiliency research to juvenile delinquency, Carr and Vandiver (2001) identified not only risk factors associated with youth offenders, but protective factors that were associated with positive outcomes exhibited by nonrepeat offenders. They found that such protective factors play an important role in decreasing recidivism among youth offenders, specifically that personal, familial, social, and academic protective factors discriminated nonrepeat offenders from repeat offenders. In describing the differences, Carr and Vandiver (2001) noted that nonrepeat offenders reported feeling happy with themselves, believing that they got along well with others, having more positive attitudes towards school rules and authority, having more structure and rules within the household, family support and guidance, and having more friends as compared to repeat offenders. These significant differences in protective factors between the two groups of offenders lends credence to past resiliency research, suggesting that a focus on such protective factors may move juvenile offenders away from further criminality (Carr & Vandiver, 2001).

As stated previously, the BASC allows us to measure adaptive skills or protective factors through four scales; interpersonal relations, relations with parents, self-esteem, and self-reliance. Protective factors can be categorized into two types. Specific behavioral and cognitive skills can be acquired to cope with stressful situations and reduce psychological symptoms (Caplan, Vinokur, Price, and VanRyn, 1989). This type can be measured by the self-esteem and self-reliance scales of the BASC. A second type of protective factor involves the attributes of social support, parental warmth, appropriate discipline, adult monitoring and supervision, and bonding to family or other prosocial models (Coie et al., 1993). The BASC scales of interpersonal relations and relations with parents serve to measure perceptions of this second type of protective factor. It is hoped that a self-report measurement of these adaptive skills can serve a predictive function in the levels of recidivism for juvenile offenders

Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC)

The BASC (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992) is an integrated instrument consisting of a self-report, a teacher rating scale, a parent rating scale, a developmental history, and an observation protocol all designed to assess children ages 4-18 for the differential diagnosis and treatment of emotional and behavior disorders. One of its strengths lies in the fact that it focuses on both maladaptive and adaptive behavior that can be capitalized on during treatment. The present study uses only the Self-Report for Adolescents (SRP-A), a self-report measure of personality and emotional/psychological functioning and health in adolescents ages 12-18. Sensitively collected self-reports can provide the least biased estimates of specific adolescent problem behaviors (Allen et al., 1994; Elliott, Huizinga, & Menard, 1989; Farrington, 1973). It is also noted that children and adolescents can be a reliable source of information about themselves (Moreau & Weissman, 1993), providing information about their own feelings and

perceptions. While there may be some limitations to the use of self-report measures, scales that measure lying, faking good, faking bad, and defensiveness can be very helpful in measuring the accuracy of an adolescent's self-disclosures. The BASC (SRP-A) is equipped with such indices, which are discussed at length in the next chapter.

The BASC has been shown to be a considerable improvement over other objective personality measures used by school psychologists (Flanagan, 1995), and is said to be made up of some of the best measures of their kind, representing an approach of choice for identifying children with emotional and behavioral disorders (Sandoval & Echandia, 1994). The SRP is an omnibus personality inventory consisting of statements for which the child or adolescent must respond as either *true* or *false*. It has many uses beyond that of differential diagnosis, such as screening, treatment planning, evaluation, and research (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2002). According to one review, Sandoval and Echandia (1994) assert that it has been carefully developed and represents a synthesis of what is known about developmental psychopathology and personality development with items for all components having been derived from a review of the relevant literature, collected clinical experience, and other measures.

The BASC has also been found to be useful in the typology and classification of children and adolescents through use of its normative sample. A typology of teacher-rated child behavior yielded a seven-cluster solution (Kamphaus, Huberty, DiStefano, & Petoskey, 1997). A similar typology of parent-rated child behavior found a nine-cluster solution (Kamphaus, Petoskey, Cody, Rowe, Huberty, & Reynolds, 1999), while a self-report typology using the child version of the SRP resulted in a 10-cluster solution (Kamphaus, DiStefano, & Lease, 2003). These cluster solutions as reported and named by the researchers ranged from well-adapted to severe behavioral problems. This type of research with this instrument is important in the fact that it

shows the usefulness of the BASC in being able to differentiate children and adolescents in terms of their maladaptive as well as adaptive behavior patterns and characteristics.

The BASC was used by Calhoun (2001) in order to identify the differences between male and female juvenile offenders and make recommendations for differential treatment planning for female juvenile offenders. The BASC was successful in identifying the different psychological, emotional, and behavioral issues between these two types of offenders, with female offenders identifying significantly higher levels of external locus of control, social stress, anxiety, and depression, with lower identified levels of relations with parents and self-esteem. This study shows the usefulness of the BASC in treatment and programming considerations, in particular with juvenile offenders.

Kadish et al. (2001) attempted to correlate the Life-Skills Development Scale-Juvenile Form (LSDS-JF) with the BASC Adaptive scales and the Personal Adjustment composite, using the data from male juvenile offenders in a detention center. They found that adolescents who received high scores on the Adaptive scales tended to receive high scores on four life-skills dimensions. Also of importance is their finding that those adolescents who scored high on Clinical scales of the BASC, indicative of psychological difficulties, had lower scores on the life-skills dimensions. In correlating so highly with this particular life-skills measure, the BASC can be seen as an excellent measure of these particular positive characteristics that would serve as protective factors for juvenile offenders. In terms of evaluation and treatment planning, one could shift from maladaptive to adaptive, or from deficits to strengths.

In a review of 13 behavioral and social-emotional third-party instruments for young children, the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 1990) and the BASC were regarded as two of the most technically adequate (Bracken, Keith, & Walker, 1994). Flanagan,

Alfonso, Primavera, Povall, and Higgins (1996) found evidence of convergent validity between the Social Skills scale on the *parent forms* of the BASC and SSRS. Although this differs from the self-report, it can be assumed that the BASC has done well in gaining validity in its assessment of adaptive skills, such as social skills that would be identified by a parent rating of the child's behavior.

The current study focused only on the adaptive scales of the BASC and the composite score of Personal Adjustment. Stowers-Wright (2000) found that incarcerated youths experiencing adjustment difficulties have strained relationships with parental figures, do not feel self-reliant, yet their self-esteem remains intact. This points to the fact that youths can feel very capable in one area while reporting problems in another. A careful assessment of these positive or desirable characteristics is necessary in order to measure what protective factors the juvenile offender may have to aid in a transition out of the cycle of delinquency. Positive interpersonal relations, relations with parents, self-esteem, and self-reliance can be very helpful in allowing an adolescent to make appropriate choices, act in socially acceptable ways, and foster a positive sense of self to combat a negative belief system. While these are helpful for the "normal" adolescent, the juvenile offender can use them too, but intervention may be necessary to help them develop a capacity for applying such adaptive skills to their previous dysfunctional learning patterns. It is the hope of this study that the measurement of adaptive skills, as measured by the scales of the BASC (SRP-A) will aid in the prediction of recidivism rates and patterns of male juvenile offenders. In so doing, professionals invested in redirecting the paths of these otherwise misguided youth can focus on the adolescents' strengths and modify their treatment programs to more effectively and efficiently produce youth who are more well-adapted, socially skilled, and less likely to revisit systems of care.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Participants

Participants for this study consisted of 250 male adolescent detainees at a short-term regional youth detention center (RYDC). The RYDC is located in a small southeastern city with a population of approximately 100,000, and serves a region of 10 counties in the state. This particular RYDC houses only male juvenile offenders and is a holding facility for those awaiting trial in the Juvenile Court System. The range of offenses for detainees includes status offenses, crimes related to drugs and/or alcohol, offenses against public order, crimes against persons, and crimes against property. The in-house population ranges from 10-30 youths at any given time, with the average stay between 1 and 2 months. The racial composition of the participants consisted of 153 African Americans, 85 Caucasians, and 12 Hispanics with an overall mean age of 15.18 years, with a standard deviation of 1.22, and a range of 12 to 17.

In order to better describe the participants for the current study, juvenile offense histories were accessed via the Juvenile Tracking System and the number of days in detention as well as the number and type of offenses were analyzed for two years prior to the test administration date. Detention days were defined as the number of days in the 2-year pre-test administration period that the juvenile was detained in a regional youth detention center, committed to a state youth detention center, or committed to a residential rehabilitation program. Offenses were categorized according to a glossary of terms formulated by OJJDP (1999) with a classification system

including status offenses, drug law violations, offenses against public order, crimes against property, and crimes against persons.

- Status offenses. Status offenses include acts or types of conduct that are offenses only when committed or engaged in by a juvenile and that can be adjudicated only by a juvenile court (i.e. runaway, truancy, ungovernability, status liquor law violations).
- Drug law violations. Drug law violations include unlawful sale, purchase, distribution, manufacture, cultivation, transport, possession, or use of a controlled or prohibited substance or drug or drug paraphernalia, or attempt to commit these acts.
- Offenses against public order. These offenses include weapons offenses, nonviolent sex offenses, liquor law violations that are not status, disorderly conduct, obstruction of justice, and violation of probation or other court order.
- Crimes against property. These offenses include burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, arson, vandalism, stolen property offenses, trespassing, and fraud offenses.
- Crimes against persons. Such crimes included criminal homicide, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, simple assault, other violent sex acts, kidnapping, unlawful restraint, and other person offenses.

For the purposes of this study, the above definitions were utilized when analyzing the offense histories of the participants. In regards to the number of days in detention for two years prior to the test administration, the participants had a mean of 55.68 with a standard deviation of 98.24, and a range of zero to 730. For the number of status offenses committed in this same two-year period, there was a mean of .68 with a standard deviation of 1.13, and a range of zero to 8.

Drug law violations had a mean of .46 with a standard deviation of .96, and a range of zero to 6. Offenses against public order had a mean of 1.9 with a standard deviation of 2.28, and a range of zero to 16. Crimes against property had a mean of 1.68 with a standard deviation of 2.29, and a range of zero to 20. Crimes against persons had a mean of 1.06 with a standard deviation of 1.61, and a range of zero to 13. When adding these categories together, the total number of pre-offenses had a mean of 5.79 with a standard deviation of 4.16, and a range of zero to 27.

Design

The present study employed a prospective longitudinal quasi-experimental design. Male juvenile offenders in a short-term regional youth detention center completed a self-report form of a personality and behavioral inventory. In order to control for the youths' history, the investigator recorded offense history and detention days for the two years preceding the completion of the questionnaire. Subsequently, the researcher examined the offense history and detention days two years after the youth had completed the questionnaire. In this way, the study is a modified time series design.

Instruments

The instrument employed in this study is the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC) Self-Report of the Personality-Adolescent (SRP-A). The BASC is a multi-method multidimensional approach to evaluate the behavior and self-perceptions of children aged 4-18. The BASC measures several aspects of the youth's behavior with multiple forms: self-report (12-18), parent-report, and teacher-report. The instrument was standardized on a large national sample, that was representative of the general population of U.S. children with regard to gender, race/ethnicity, and clinical or special education classification. Items contained in all components

of the instrument are derived from reviews of relevant literature, other measures, and collected clinical experience (Sandoval & Echandia, 1994).

To measure the personality and emotional and psychological health of adolescents, the BASC (SRP-A) contains 186 questions in the format of 'True-False' loading into 10 different clinical scales as well as four scales of adaptive functioning, for pinpointing specific syndromes or strengths. Clinical scales include: anxiety, attitude to school, attitude to teachers, atypicality, depression, locus of control, sensation seeking, sense of inadequacy, social stress, and somatization. Adaptive scales include: interpersonal relations, relations with parents, self-esteem, and self-reliance. Also included are composite scales which are helpful for summarizing responses and making broad conclusions regarding different types of adaptive and maladaptive personality tendencies. The composite scales include: clinical maladjustment, school maladjustment, personal adjustment, and emotional symptoms index. The SRP can be interpreted in relation to national age norms (general, male, female) and to clinical norms (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2002). For the purposes of this study, general norms were used for interpretation. Normative scores for each scale and each composite are given in the form of T-scores (M=50, SD=10).

Special indexes have been incorporated to assess the validity of a child's responses (*F*, *L*, and *V*) and shall be described separately here. The *F* index measures the adolescent's tendency to be excessively negative in describing self-perceptions and emotions, possibly wanting to "fake bad." Items loading onto this index are extremely negative items for which the response was *True* or positive items for which the response was *False*. High scores may also be due to reading difficulties, a failure to follow directions, or random responding (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992).

The *L* index, in contrast to the *F* index, measures the adolescent' s tendency to give an extremely positive picture of themselves, possibly "faking good." Items for this index are unrealistically positive or mildly self-critical. A high score on this scale may indicate that the adolescent is giving socially desirable responses, or may be psychologically naïve in their denial of common, everyday problems (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2002). Random responding, item comprehension difficulties, or an inability to read may also elevate this index (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992).

The *V*, or Validity, index consists of nonsensical or highly implausible items. These items may be marked as *True* due to carelessness, inability to understand the directions, a non-cooperative attitude, or by an adolescent who is illiterate, mentally disabled, confused or psychotic (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992).

Reliability of the BASC-SRP scales is good as indicated by a variety of methods (Kamphaus & Frick, 2002). Median internal consistency coefficients are generally in the .80s for both the general and clinical samples. Test-retest coefficients taken at a 1-month interval are generally in the .70s.

For the purposes of this study, analysis was focused on the Adaptive Scales portion of the BASC (SRP-A). The Adaptive Scales and corresponding composite scale measure positive adjustment with higher scores indicating positive or desirable characteristics. The four scales included in this portion are: Interpersonal Relations, Relations with Parents, Self-Esteem, and Self-Reliance. The composite scale, Personal Adjustment, is derived from the above-mentioned four adaptive scale scores.

Table 1

Definitions of the SRP-A' s Clinical and Adaptive Scales

Scale	Definition
Anxiety	Feelings of nervousness, worry, and fear; the tendency to be overwhelmed by problems
Attitude to School	Feelings of alienation, hostility, and dissatisfaction regarding school
Attitude to Teachers	Feeling of resentment and dislike of teachers; beliefs that teachers are unfair, uncaring, or overly demanding
Atypicality	The tendency toward gross mood swings, bizarre thoughts, subjective experiences, or obsessive-compulsive thoughts or behaviors often considered odd
Depression	Feelings of unhappiness, sadness, and dejection; a belief that nothing goes right
Interpersonal Relations	The perception of having good social relationships and friendships with peers
Locus of Control	The belief that rewards and punishments are controlled by external events or other people
Relations with Parents	A positive regard towards parents and a feeling of being esteemed by them
Self-Esteem	Feelings of self-esteem, self-respect, and self-acceptance
Self-Reliance	Confidence in one' s ability to solve problems; a belief in one' s personal dependability and decisiveness
Sensation Seeking	The tendency to take risks, to like noise, and to seek excitement
Sense of Inadequacy	Perceptions of being unsuccessful in school, unable to achieve one' s goals, and generally inadequate
Social Stress	Feelings of stress and tension in personal relationships; a feeling of being excluded from social activities
Somatization	The tendency to be overly sensitive to, experience, or complain about relatively minor physical problems and discomforts

Table 1 is adapted from Reynolds and Kamphaus (1992)

Data Collection

The Institutional Review Board of the University of Georgia has approved the research protocol used in the current study, including consent forms and other relevant materials. Informed consent was obtained from the parent/guardian of the participants as well as assent

from the participants. Permission to collect the data was granted by the Department of Juvenile Justice in conjunction with the Juvenile Counseling and Assessment Program of the University of Georgia. This program is part of a collaborative partnership with the juvenile court system, the State Department of Juvenile Justice, and a university counselor-training program. All efforts were taken during data collection and subsequent analyses to ensure confidentiality.

All participants used in the study were detained at the RYDC at the time the instruments were completed. Data was collected on a weekly basis in a group administration format in an RYDC classroom.

The testing was administered by Master' s level clinicians participating in a practicum/internship experience through the Juvenile Counseling and Assessment Program. Any questions concerning the testing process were able to be answered by the clinicians. Completed instruments were collected, scored, and entered in a computer database.

Audited placement and offense histories of each juvenile were accessed via the Juvenile Tracking System and categorized according to the classification system described in the participant section.

Statistical Analyses

Descriptive statistics were employed in order to describe the participants. Simple bivariate correlations and ANOVAs were conducted in order to ensure that the two groups (no/minor recidivists and serious recidivists) were not different on pre-data variables and that pre-data did not account for variance in the post-data variables.

In order to answer the three research questions, three statistical techniques were employed respectively: One-Way ANOVA, Multiple Regression, and Predictive Discriminant Analysis.

Limitations

This study used a convenience sample of juvenile offenders being detained at a single RYDC in a small southeastern city. All juveniles with a valid profile and whose offense histories could be accessed were included in the study. There was no randomization of subjects since all detainees completed a BASC (SRP-A).

Some detainees may not have been tested when no testing occurred during certain weeks due to time constraints of the Master' s level clinicians and/or activities taking place within the RYDC. Not all of the participants with valid profiles had accessible placement and offense histories due to missing information in the Juvenile Tracking System. These participants were dropped from the final data analysis portion of the study. Therefore the population may not be validly represented by the final sample employed in the study. Also, all personality and behavioral data came from self-reports with no attempt to make comparisons with parent and/or teacher reports.

Assumptions

It is assumed that participants in this study represent a typical juvenile offender population currently being detained by the Department of Juvenile Justice. It is assumed that the instrument directions were understood, as well as the items, and that the instrument was completed in an accurate and truthful manner. It is also assumed that all audited placement and offense histories for each juvenile offender are accurate and current in the Juvenile Tracking System.

Research Questions

Predictive factors have been employed in models of recidivism in prior empirical studies. Many of these factors that have been used to explain the nature of recidivism and what places a

person at risk for re-offense come from deficit-based models or problem-oriented theoretical frameworks. Can adaptive skills, levels of positive adjustment, particular strengths, or the possession of desirable characteristics be used to predict levels of juvenile offender recidivism?

Prior to analyzing the data for the research questions, pre-data variables (number of days in detention, and category of offense) were examined by means of bivariate correlations and One-Way ANOVAs in order to ensure that they did not account for post-data. With the exception of pre-drug charges, none of the pre-data variables was related to, or significantly different from post-data variables (level of offense). A small, but significant correlation was found ($r = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$) between having a drug law violation and level of offense within two years of completing the BASC. That is, participants with a drug offense within two years prior to completing the BASC were very slightly more likely to have a serious offense within two years after completing the BASC. Again, there were no findings for the pre-variables of days in detention, status offenses, offenses against public order, property offense, and person offenses.

Hypotheses

There are three main null hypotheses for the study:

Null Hypothesis 1. There are no differences between the two groups based on level of severity of offense (no/minor versus serious) on each of the four measures of adaptive skills (*Interpersonal Relations*, *Relations with Parents, Self-Esteem*, and *Self-Reliance).*

Null Hypothesis 2. Adaptive skills (*Interpersonal Relations*, *Relations with Parents, Self-Esteem*, and *Self-Reliance)* do not account for a significant amount of the variance in the juvenile offense history outcome data.

Null Hypothesis 3. The construct of Adaptive Skills does not explain any differences between two levels of severity of recidivists.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The present study was designed to examine the relationship of adaptive skills to recidivism rates in a juvenile offender population. While recidivism among juvenile offenders has risen, it is the rise in violent and serious crimes among these youth that is most concerning. Juvenile recidivists comprise only a small portion of the delinquent population but are committing a disproportionate amount of the juvenile crimes. Classes of variables and individual factors, most often negative in nature, have been shown to be related to and even predict levels of recidivism. On the other hand, adaptive skills may serve as protective factors against the possibility of recidivism. However, strength-based variables, such as adaptive skills, have rarely been the focus of investigation in juvenile delinquency research. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between adaptive skills and juvenile offense rates. A well-normed personality inventory was used to identify adaptive skills, specifically: *interpersonal relations, relations with parents, self-esteem, and self- reliance*. These scores were examined in relation to the number and seriousness of offenses. This investigation demonstrated the predictive power of adaptive skills for recidivism among juvenile offenders.

Three main research hypotheses were developed in order to determine whether adaptive skills are useful in the prediction of levels of juvenile offender recidivism.

Null Hypothesis 1. There are no differences between the two groups based on level of severity of offense (no/minor versus serious) on each of the four measures of adaptive skills (*Interpersonal Relations*, *Relations with Parents, Self-Esteem*, and *Self-Reliance).*

Null Hypothesis 2. Adaptive skills (*Interpersonal Relations*, *Relations with Parents, Self-Esteem*, and *Self-Reliance)* do not account for a significant amount of the variance in the juvenile offense history outcome data.

Null Hypothesis 3. The construct of Adaptive Skills does not explain any differences between two levels of severity of recidivists.

An in-depth demographic description of the subjects that participated in this study is presented in the Methods and Discussion chapters of this dissertation. This chapter presents the results of the statistical procedures used for each of the three hypotheses: One-way ANOVA, Multiple Regression Analysis, and Predictive Discriminant Analysis.

Preliminary Analyses

As explained in Chapter 3, a series of bivariate correlations and one-way ANOVAs were performed to ensure that pre-data variables (days in detention and offenses two years prior to taking the BASC) did not account for the post-data examined in the actual study (number and seriousness of offenses two years after taking the BASC). There were no findings for the pre-variables of days in detention, status offenses, offenses against public order, property offenses, and person offenses in relation to the post-data variables (level of offense). However, a small, but significant correlation was found ($r = 0.14$, $p < 0.05$) between having a drug law violation and level of offense within two years of completing the BASC. That is, participants with a drug offense within two years prior to completing the BASC were very slightly more likely to have a serious offense within two years after completing the BASC.

Levels of Offense Severity and Adaptive Skills

Once the participants were categorized into two groups (no/minor and serious recidvists) based on the level of the most severe offense two years post BASC administration, it was

necessary to determine if there were any differences that existed between them on each on the four measures of adaptive skills. In order to test Hypothesis 1, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine means of study variables between the two groups. As shown in Table 2, this analysis of variance revealed statistically significant differences between the two groups (no/minor and serious recidivists) with regard to scores on the Relations with Parents scale ($\underline{F}$ (1,241) = 10.92; $\underline{p} < .001$), the Interpersonal Relations scale ($\underline{F}$ (1,238) = 9.63; $\underline{p} < .01$), and the Self-Reliance scale ($\underline{F}$ (1,241) = 8.02; $\underline{p} < .01$). The *no/minor* recidivists in Group 1 ($\underline{M}$= 47.68) scored significantly higher than the *serious* recidivists in Group 2 ($\underline{M}$=42.98) on Relations with Parents, significantly higher on Interpersonal Relations ($\underline{M}$=49.90, $\underline{M}$=45.93, respectively), and significantly higher on Self-Reliance ($\underline{M}$=47.71, $\underline{M}$=43.56, respectively). It should be noted here that when examined alone, the Self-Esteem scale was also significantly different between no/minor recidivists and serious recidivists ($\underline{M}$=52.73, $\underline{M}$=50.79, respectively), but this difference was no longer statistically significant when the Bonferroni t-test adjustment was made for the four analyses. It is not at all surprising that the smallest difference between the two groups would be on the Self-Esteem scale, and this will be discussed more extensively in Chapter 5.

Table 2

One-Way Analyses of Variance for Effects of Offense Severity on Adaptive Skills

Variable and source	df	SS	MS	F
Relations with Parents				
Between groups	1	1301.47	1301.47	10.92*
Within groups	241	28729.06	119.21	
Interpersonal Relations				
Between groups	1	917.35	917.35	9.63*
Within groups	238	22683.12	95.31	
Self-Esteem				
Between groups	1	222.20	222.20	4.39
Within groups	241	12204.47	50.64	
Self-Reliance				
Between groups	1	1014.97	1014.97	8.02*
Within groups	241	30483.99	126.49	

Note. A Bonferroni t-test adjustment was made for each univariate test to control for experiment-wise error rate ($\alpha = 0.05/4 = 0.0125$) (Haase & Ellis, 1987).
*$p<0.0125$

Predictive Validity of Adaptive Skills for Juvenile Recidivism

As outlined in Hypothesis 2, a primary goal of this study was to determine if adaptive skills as measured by the BASC-SRP-A (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992) could account for a significant amount of the variance in the juvenile offense history outcome data. The data were examined using a multiple linear regression equation. The dependent variable was level of offense severity two years post-BASC (no/minor versus serious). The BASC adaptive scales of *Interpersonal Relations, Relations with Parents, Self-Esteem, and Self-Reliance* were the pre-selected independent variables.

The regression was significant (F (4,235) = 3.99, $p < .01$), $R^2 = .064$ with an Adjusted $R^2 = .048$ (see Table 4). The regression of the independent variable Relations with Parents

($p < .05$) on the dependent variable of offense severity was significant. The regression of the independent variables Interpersonal Relations ($p = .35$), Self-Esteem ($p = .65$), and Self-Reliance ($p = .32$) on the dependent variable of offense severity were not significant. In summary, only the independent variable of Relations with Parents explained a very small but significant amount of the variance of the juvenile offense history outcome data.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for Offense Severity and Adaptive Skills Predictor Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4
Level of Offense Severity	1.41	.49	-.209**	-.197**	-.132*	-.174**
Predictor Variable						
1. Interpersonal Relations	48.26	9.94	--	.421**	.540**	.498**
2. Relations with Parents	45.65	11.17		--	.209**	.336**
3. Self-Esteem	51.90	7.18			--	.327**
4. Self-Reliance	45.96	11.44				--

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Table 4

Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting Offense Severity

Variable	B	SEB	β
Interpersonal Relations	-.004	.004	-.081
Relations with Parents	-.006	.003	-.143*
Self-Esteem	-.002	.005	-.034
Self-Reliance	-.003	.003	-.075

Note. $R^2 = .048$ ($N = 239$, $p < .01$).

*$p < .05$.

A Construct of Adaptive Skills

In order to describe grouping variable effects, a predictive discriminant analysis (PDA) was conducted (Huberty & Lowman, 1998). The purpose of conducting a PDA is to determine the ability of the construct (as measured by the 4 Adaptive BASC scales) that underlies the resultant effects of a grouping variable (no/minor recidivism and serious recidivism) to predict group membership. This statistical analysis was utilized to answer the following research question: Do the BASC adaptive scales collectively predict membership between those youth who committed no or minor offenses and those who committed serious offenses?

BASC-SRP-A Adaptive Scales and Recidivism. The analysis examined the relationship between BASC-SRP-A adaptive variables (Interpersonal Relations, Relations with Parents, Self-Esteem, and Self-Reliance) and recidivism. That is, are the 4 adaptive scales of the BASC-SRP-A able to predict membership in the no/minor recidivist group or the serious recidivist group? The classification results of the PDA comparing actual group membership to predicted group membership are reported in Table 5, and the means for the 4 BASC subscales (separated by level of recidivism) are graphically displayed in Figure 1. Following the PDA, an external analysis was conducted (Huberty, 1994). Specifically, the findings were cross-validated with a leave-one-out classification analysis (Table 5). The resulting PDA yielded a small but improved prediction over chance (62.5% of original grouped cases correctly classified; $z = 3.29$, $p<.001$). As can be seen in Table 5, the improvement over chance is limited to the prediction of no/minor recidivism (116/141 for 82.3% prediction rate; $z = 5.41$, $p<.001$) while the prediction of more serious recidivism was no better than chance (34/99 for 34.3% prediction rate; $z = -0.23$, ns).

These results suggest that the collection of 4 BASC adaptive scales measuring adaptive skills (Parent Relations, Interpersonal Relations, Self-Esteem, and Self-Reliance) provide some

incremental improvement in prediction over chance in determining membership in the no/minor recidivism group.

Table 5

Cross-validated (Leave-one-out) Classification Analysis for Adaptive Skills

Actual Group Membership	n	Predicted Group Membership	
		No/Minor	Serious
No/Minor			
n	141	116	25
%		82.3	17.7
Serious			
n	99	65	34
%		65.7	34.3

Note. Overall percentage of correctly classified cross-validated cases = 62.5%.

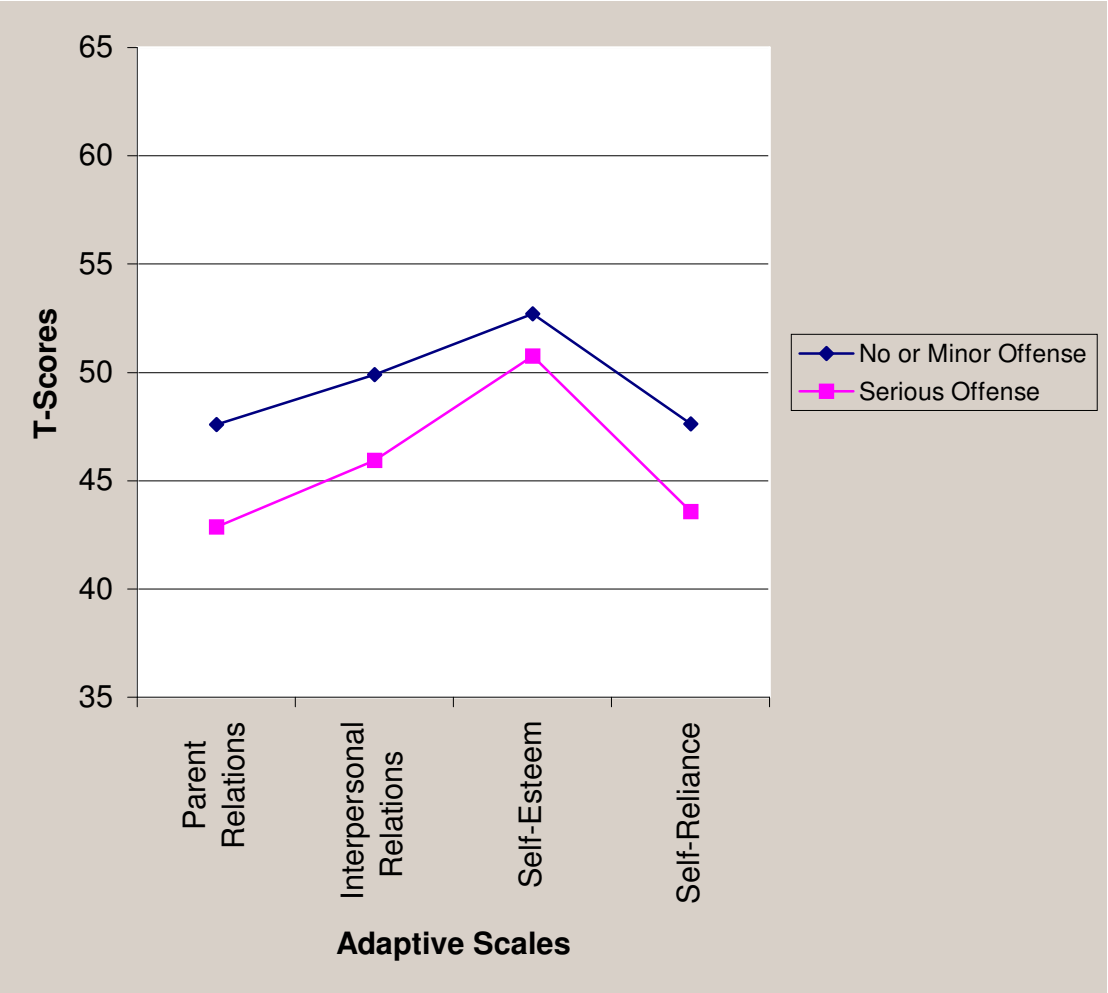

Figure 1. T-scores for the BASC Adaptive scales as a function of juvenile recidivism severity.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Statement of the Problem

Juvenile offender, a child or adolescent under the age of 18 who is caught and convicted of committing an illegal act, is a term that is steadily requiring increased attention for policymakers, law enforcement officials, and the helping professions. Such youth are in and out of our current systems of care for crimes ranging from truancy and unruly to aggravated assault and armed robbery. When juvenile delinquency comes to be such a prominent force and an enticement for so many of our youth, it is up to us as a society to take notice, to listen, to investigate, and establish better alternatives to meet the needs of these youth, for they are our responsibility to educate, habilitate, and mold into productive members of our communities. It is very obvious from crime statistics and the juvenile delinquency literature to date that we as a society are failing in our current efforts to meet these needs. The problem is that our troubled children and adolescents, who deserve our positive attention, are learning maladaptive ways of meeting their needs and are becoming the juvenile offenders that get most of our negative attention. Cohen (1998) estimates that failing to prevent one high school youth from leaving school for a "life of crime" and drug abuse costs society between $1.7 and $2.3 million dollars.

Juvenile offenders, upon contact with the juvenile court system, are placed on probation, incarcerated in youth detention facilities, or remanded to various residential therapeutic programs. This involvement with the courts is just the beginning of what comes to separate the youthful offender from the non-offender. The juvenile offender comes to view themselves as

bad and worthless, with subsequent behavior being an expression of this negative self-concept (Fitts & Hammer, 1969). Locus of control and self-esteem are other dimensions separating the offenders from the non-offenders with juvenile offenders often exhibiting a more external locus of control (Eitzen, 1975; Rotter, 1971) and scoring lower on self-esteem scales (Eitzen, 1975). Other constructs commonly associated with juvenile offenders are aggressive behaviors and antisocial tendencies, due in part to deficits in social problem solving skills. Poor social skills place youth at risk for perceiving situations as more threatening than non-offending peers, act more aggressively; leading to frustration, confusion, and anger. With fewer coping resources and less effective strategies for dealing with interpersonal conflict, juvenile offenders are more likely to act out in the forms of violence, crime, substance abuse, depression, suicide, and self-destruction (Omizo, Hershberger, & Omizo, 1988). These adolescents may exhibit early disruptive behaviors just like any other child, but the likelihood of these early behaviors progressing to more serious and chronic behavioral disorders is increased for many juvenile offenders due to the presence of negative psychosocial influences (Lambert, 1988).

It would be naïve to think that delinquency is limited to those whom this study has been referring to as juvenile offenders when it is known that delinquency is widespread and common, with most adolescents engaging in some sort of rule breaking during their teenage years. Dryfoos (1997) has suggested that 50% of adolescents engage in at least two or more risky behaviors. The problem for our society is the knowledge that there is a small core of adolescents who are responsible for a disproportionate amount of delinquency, especially the more serious and violent offending (Myers & Borg, 2000). Failure to recognize the individual needs of each juvenile offender passing through our systems of care, thereby negating the chance for successful rehabilitation only increases the chance that one offense will lead to another more serious offense

and return that adolescent back to the same institution to start the cycle over again, all at huge costs to society.

Between 1986 and 1995, the rate of violent crimes committed by juvenile offenders increased by 67% (OJJDP, 1998). Committing most of these violent crimes are juvenile recidivists, those who have offended before and have not been helped by the punishment and/or rehabilitation initiatives given them. According to Speirs (1988), 69% of youths who appeared in juvenile court two times before age 15 continued their criminal activity, 80% who appeared three times reoffended, and 93% with eight appearances ended up being arrested again. Snyder (1997) found that 15% of a sample of 151,000 juveniles turning 18 between 1980 and 1995 had been referred four or more times and was responsible for 59% of all serious referrals. Further, the proportion of chronic delinquents increased with each graduating class from about 13% in the 1980s to 17% in the early 1990s. Much of the literature on juvenile recidivism paints the same grim picture, that chronic offenders comprise only a small portion of the delinquent population but are committing an inordinate portion of the juvenile crimes, with a steady rise in violent and serious crimes among these youth. Many conclusions are consistent when investigating chronic offenders: males are more likely than females to be chronic offenders, minority and lower SES groups are disproportionately represented among chronic offenders compared to white and middle- and upper-class adolescents, recidivists tend to begin offending at a very young age, and that negative experiences in family, peer, and school relationships contribute to high-rate offending patterns (Myers & Borg, 2000). Past histories of antisocial behavior and age at first conviction have been shown to be solid predictors of recidivism in male juvenile offenders (Duncan et al., 1995; Myner et al., 1998).

By examining the constructs of the interactional theory (Thornberry, 1987) as discussed in Chapter 1, recidivism can be shown to have a causal loop of delinquent variables, specifically associations with delinquent peers, delinquent values, and delinquent behavior. These variables reinforce each other over time and create a vicious cycle of increasing delinquency. Thus, an association with delinquent peers at younger ages and embracing delinquent values is leading to the phenomenon we see today; an increase in recidivism for many juvenile offenders. The common thread of juvenile recidivism research to date has been negative variables, negative predictors, and factors stemming from deficit-based frameworks. In looking at these youth from what can be called a risk perspective, there seems to be very little hope for helping them to abandon their pathway to continued criminality. However, if we can begin to examine these same juvenile offenders through a different lens, a lens that emphasizes strengths and positive assets these youth may possess or could easily develop, we can safeguard these youth from such negative outcomes. Adaptive skills, as they have been called throughout this study, have rarely been the focus of investigation in juvenile delinquency research.

There has been a movement in general psychology away from pathology and deficit-based interventions toward interventions that are more strength and skill-based in nature. Researchers have argued for the use of nonpathological assessment measures of conduct disordered adolescents in order to provide helping professionals with a normalized, positive psychological framework for categorizing the interpersonal coping styles, personality traits, and treatment needs of an individual youth (Brannon & Kunce, 1990). Such an adaptive model would emphasize the factors and processes that serve to safeguard youth from adverse outcomes (Carr & Vandiver, 2001). This seems to be the result of studies that highlight the role of protective factors in reducing psychological distress. For example, Coie et al. (1993) found that

adaptive skills play a protective role or inhibiting factor in the development of childhood psychopathology, while Caplan et al. (1989) asserted that certain behavioral and cognitive skills can be acquired to cope with stressful situations and reduce psychological symptoms. Rolf et al. (1990) state that adaptive skills are characteristics that serve protective functions, often mitigating the effects of exposure to risk factors. Findings such as these are causing shifts in thinking about the way in which we deal with groups such as at-risk youth and juvenile offenders, locating and emphasizing positive characteristics that can negate negative influences.

The remaining constructs in the interactional theory mentioned above meet such strength-based criteria: attachment to parents, commitment to school, and belief in conventional values. It is these constructs that work against the delinquent constructs of the theory by binding the adolescent to the conventional world. A shift in focus from delinquent variables to these "bonding" variables can enhance their interaction with one another, protect the adolescent from the delinquent variables, and over time reduce delinquency (Thornberry, 1987). Unfortunately, negative characteristics and antisocial behaviors have become synonymous with the mention of juvenile delinquency, and many assessment instruments used with this population assume deficits and/or pathology. Adaptive skills on the other hand are protective factors and can provide a buffer or assist children in resisting the effects of adversity in their lives (Luthar et al., 1995). Juvenile offenders therefore could use such skills to deal with the negativity and risk factors that so often seem to surround them, making it far less likely that a life of crime is their ultimate outcome.

By resisting the temptations to view juvenile offenders through stereotypical negative perceptions, psychologists and other helping professionals have an obligation to society at large to adopt a strength-based framework in further work with these youth by targeting the adaptive

behaviors that would best promote a more responsible lifestyle and prevent further delinquency. We can give these offenders the keys to new futures; ones that they may not have imagined were possible because of negative societal reactions and perceptions. By ceasing to focus on the negative characteristics too often associated with these youth, psychologists entrusted with their care can better target interventions that utilize and enhance adaptive skills, or positive characteristics of these youth. It was the purpose of this study to identify the adaptive skills of a sample of juvenile offenders through a well-normed personality inventory and examine the relationships between these skills and juvenile offense patterns. It is hoped that this study can add to the literature of juvenile delinquency by offering a description of what juvenile offenders lack in terms of adaptive skills and whether such skills do in fact serve as protective factors against further delinquency, or recidivism. It is further hoped that a strength-based framework can be more effective than multiple previous deficit-based frameworks in meeting the challenges of juvenile delinquency and preventing the possibility that one youthful offense will lead to other, more serious crimes that disregard the rights of others.

Statement of the Procedures

The Behavior Assessment System for Children Self-Report of the Personality-Adolescent (BASC-SRP-A; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992) was administered to 250 male adolescent detainees at a short-term regional youth detention center (RYDC) located in a small southeastern city with a population of approximately 100,000, serving a region of 10 counties in the state. This particular RYDC houses only male juvenile offenders and is a holding facility for those awaiting trial in the Juvenile Court System. All participants used in the study were detained at the RYDC at the time the instruments were completed. Data was collected on a weekly basis in a group administration format in an RYDC classroom. Completed instruments were collected,

scored, and entered in a computer database. Audited placement and offense histories of each juvenile were accessed via the Juvenile Tracking System and categorized according to a classification system described below.

In order to control for the youths' history, both offense histories and detention days were recorded for the two years preceding the completion of the questionnaire. The offense histories and detention days for the two years following the date the youth completed the questionnaire were also recorded for the research purposes of the study. In other words, the time frame for this study was four years with two years of retrospective control and two years of prospective outcome. Detention days were defined as the number of days in the 2-year pre- and post-test administration period that the juvenile was detained in a regional youth detention center, committed to a state youth detention center, or committed to a residential rehabilitation program. Offenses were categorized according to a glossary of terms formulated by OJJDP (1999) with a classification system including status offenses, drug law violations, offenses against public order, crimes against property, and crimes against persons. As a separate and distinct category, post-test offenses were counted and categorized, and a two-group classification category was formed. If the juvenile offender committed no offense or a minor offense in the two years post BASC administration, he was placed in Group 1. If he committed a more serious offense in the two years post BASC administration, he was placed in Group 2. Group 1 equals *no/minor offense*, and Group 2 equals *serious offense*. A description of charges for each offense category and its inclusion in the minor or serious offense category can be found in Table 6.

Table 6

Juvenile Offenses across Five Categories

Category	Offenses
Status (Minor)	Runaway, truancy, ungovernable, unruly, possession/purchase/consumption of alcohol, curfew violation
Drug Law Violations (Minor)	Unlawful sale, purchase, distribution, manufacture, cultivation, transport, possession, or use of controlled or prohibited substance
Offenses against Public Order (Minor)	Possession/carrying weapon, nonviolent sex offenses (statutory rape, indecent exposure), liquor law violations not status (public intoxication), disorderly conduct, obstruction, loitering/prowling, violation of probation, contempt of court/violation of bond, giving false name, traffic violations, affray
Crimes against Property (Serious)	Burglary, larceny, shoplifting, motor vehicle theft, arson, vandalism, buying/receiving/possessing stolen property, criminal trespass, extortion, forgery, counterfeiting
Crimes against Person (Serious)	Homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, simple assault, battery, kidnapping, incest/sodomy, unlawful restraint, false imprisonment, reckless endangerment, harassment, terroristic threats

Descriptive statistics were employed in order to describe the participants. Simple bivariate correlations and ANOVAs were conducted in order to ensure that the two groups (no/minor recidivists and serious recidivists) were not different on pre-data variables and that pre-data did not account for variance in the post-data variables. For the purposes of this study, the analyses were focused on the Adaptive Scales portion of the BASC (SRP-A). The Adaptive Scales and corresponding composite scale measure positive adjustment with higher scores indicating positive or desirable characteristics. The four scales included in this portion are: Interpersonal Relations, Relations with Parents, Self-Esteem, and Self-Reliance. The composite

scale, Personal Adjustment, is derived from the above-mentioned four adaptive scale scores and was not examined in this study. In order to answer the three research questions, three statistical techniques were employed respectively: One-Way ANOVA, Multiple Regression, and Predictive Discriminant Analysis.

Research Hypotheses Used

The research question informing this study was derived after careful review of the juvenile delinquency research, particularly as it pertained to juvenile recidivism rates and patterns. Since many variables and factors investigated in prior research have come from deficit-based models and problem-oriented theoretical frameworks, this study sought to investigate adaptive skills, specifically asking the question if variables from a strength-based framework such as adaptive skills could be used to predict levels of juvenile offender recidivism. In order to do this, the adaptive skills portion of a well-normed personality inventory, the BASC-SRP-A, was utilized to examine three research hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1. It is hypothesized that there will be a statistically significant difference between no/minor recidivists and serious recidivists in favor of the no/minor recidivists on each of the four measures of adaptive skills (*Interpersonal Relations*, *Relations with Parents, Self-Esteem*, and *Self-Reliance).*

Hypothesis 2. It is hypothesized that Adaptive skills (*Interpersonal Relations*, *Relations with Parents, Self-Esteem*, and *Self-Reliance)* will account for a significant amount of the variance in the juvenile offense history outcome data.

Hypothesis 3. It is hypothesized that the construct of Adaptive Skills will explain the differences between no/minor recidivists and serious recidivists.

Conclusions

As stated before, separate statistical analyses were performed to examine the data as it pertained to each of the three hypotheses. Generally speaking, each analysis was used to determine the extent, if any, of relationships between adaptive skills and the recidivism patterns of juvenile offenders.

Hypothesis 1: By looking at each adaptive scale of the BASC, it was hypothesized that no/minor recidivists would have better developed adaptive skills than serious recidivists. After conducting a one-way ANOVA, the null hypothesis was rejected since three of the four scales were significantly different for the two groups at at least the .0125 level. Group 1 was composed of those participants who had committed no more offenses or only minor offenses in the two years following their completion of the BASC instrument. Group 2 was composed of those participants who had committed at least one serious offense (crime against person or property) in the two years following their completion of the BASC instrument.

Group 1 obtained significantly higher scores than did Group 2 on the Relations with Parents scale. According the BASC manual (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992), these higher scores would indicate that the juvenile offenders in Group 1 feel more important in their families, rate the status of the parent-child relationship as more positive, and perceive a higher degree of parental trust and concern than do the juvenile offenders in Group 2. For the Interpersonal Relations scale, Group 1 also exhibited significantly higher scores than Group 2. These scores indicate better success at relating to others and more enjoyment derived from such interactions for those in Group 1. Finally, Group 1 had significantly higher scores on the Self-Reliance scale than Group 2. This shows that participants in Group 1 display more confidence in their own ability to solve problems, and think of themselves as more dependable and decisive. According

to the scores obtained for the Self-Esteem scale, Group 1 scored higher than did Group 2, although this difference was not statistically significant, suggesting that juvenile offenders in both groups exhibit similar feelings of self-satisfaction, self-respect, and self-acceptance.

These findings indicate that there are differences in groups of juvenile recidivists as measured by their self-ratings of levels of adaptive skills. Those more likely to commit more serious crimes display lower levels of adaptive skills, namely relationships with parents, interpersonal relations, and self-reliance. More will be said about the significance of the Self-Esteem finding when implications of the study's findings are discussed.

Hypothesis 2: It was hypothesized that the four adaptive skills would be able to predict levels of juvenile recidivism. Results of the regression analysis indicate that the adaptive scale of Relations with Parents captures a small but significant amount of the variance in the prediction of level of recidivism, with lower scores indicating a greater likelihood of serious recidivism. The other independent variables of Interpersonal Relations, Self-Esteem, and Self-Reliance did not reach significance in explaining any of the variance in recidivism prediction. The model as a whole with all four predictors taken into account only explained a small amount of the variance in the two groups. In this case, the null hypothesis is accepted that the adaptive skills did not account for a significant amount of the variance in the juvenile offense history outcome data.

Hypothesis 3: It was hypothesized that the adaptive skills, if viewed as a construct, could explain the differences between the two groups of recidivists and thereby be able to predict those juvenile offenders who would re-offend. In order to identify the construct that would describe the grouping variable effects between the two groups, a predictive discriminant analysis (PDA) was conducted. The finding that the collection of all four adaptive skills as measured by the

BASC reached statistical significance in describing the differences between no/minor juvenile recidivists and serious juvenile recidivists supports the rejection of the null hypothesis in this case. The construct of adaptive skills therefore can be used to explain differences in these two groups of juvenile offenders.

The resulting outcome variables defining the construct that separates no/minor recidivists from serious recidivists consists of Interpersonal Relations, Relations with Parents, Self-Esteem, and Self-Reliance. In terms of all four of the above adaptive skills as measured by the BASC, the two groups of recidivists classified in this study are significantly separate from one another. Group 1 (no/minor recidivists) obtained higher adaptive scale scores than did those youths in Group 2 (serious recidivists). However, in looking at the classification analysis from the PDA, it is noted that the construct of adaptive skills provides a better than chance prediction rate for no/minor recidivists, but does not fare well in predicting serious recidivists.

Overall, the conclusions gathered from the three separate research hypotheses lend credence to the establishment of a relationship between adaptive skills and levels of juvenile recidivism. The two groups (no/minor and serious recidivists) are different from each other in the area of adaptive skills.

Implications

One of the most important findings of this study was that of notable differences between two types of juvenile recidivists, specifically on measures of adaptive skills within a self-report personality inventory. This finding suggests that not every juvenile offender who stands before a court, is remanded to the custody of a juvenile detention center, or falters in a residential therapeutic program shares the same characteristics as the next juvenile offender whose name appeared on the court docket after them. This finding underscores the importance of the

statement made by Calhoun et al. (1999) that juvenile delinquency has many faces and the larger meaning that stereotypical preconceptions do not often hold true when working with juvenile offenders. There are those juveniles who will recidivate, committing very serious crimes against persons or property, and those juveniles who will not recidivate, or if they do, commit only minor offenses. The findings of this study have shown that these offenders differ from one another in terms of the positive characteristics they view within themselves and how they view the quality of their interactions with significant others in their lives. Carr and Vandiver (2001), in their study of risk and protective factors, found personal, familial, social, and academic protective factors discriminated between non-repeat offenders and repeat offenders. We cannot continue to solely look at risk factors that separate the two groups since it is clear that there is value to investigating the protective factors that prevent some juvenile offenders from embarking on a life of crime and continuing on a path of self-destruction (Carr & Vandiver, 2001).

These findings further amplify the significance of the interactional theory of delinquency (Thornberry, 1997) presented in Chapter 1 where recidivism can be seen as having reciprocal causation. The lower adaptive skills exhibited by the serious recidivists can be shown to be related to the weaknesses in the bonding variables explained by this theory thereby leading the juvenile offender to higher levels of delinquency, more association with delinquent peers, and placing higher importance on delinquent values (Thornberry, 1987). In short, risk factors do not exist alone or in a vacuum; with protective factors, namely adaptive skills, never being available to the population of juvenile offenders. Research findings indicate that many people raised in adverse circumstances, with early criminal records, have overcome their environment and become well-adjusted adults (Jessor, 1993; Lerner & Galambos, 1998; Werner, 1993). It is suggested then that there is a negative correlation between the two, and it can be inferred here

that the no/minor recidivists display higher adaptive behaviors, which insulate them from the risk factors that play so heavily into the lives of the serious recidivists, and vice versa.

Findings show that the no/minor recidivists in the study scored better on all four measures of adaptive skills than did the serious recidivists. In general this implies that they view themselves as having more positive, or desirable characteristics allowing them to handle the stressors in their lives and better adjust to negative events that may happen to them. This lends credence to what resiliency investigators have identified as protective factors in resilient children that buffer risk factors and decrease the likelihood of engaging in problem behaviors (Cowen & Work, 1988; Rutter, 1985; Werner, 1989). By not endorsing these adaptive scales as much as their counterparts, it may be said that the serious recidivists have learned and become accustomed to maladaptive ways of seeing that their needs are met, habitually attaining their goals through illegal means (McFall, 1976). It is necessary that we also look at what the scores for the specific scales might imply for each group of recidivists.

By enjoying better and more positive relationships with peers and adults in their lives as measured by the Interpersonal Relationships scale, no/minor recidivists feel supported and encouraged by those around them, and therefore do not feel the pull from delinquent peers to engage in misbehavior and continue a chain of offenses that would only threaten these more positive relationships they enjoy. Having informal relationships with supportive adults and the quality of peer relationships have been found to be sources of resiliency for children from high-risk backgrounds (Cowen & Work, 1988; Werner, 1993). Likewise, school connectedness and good relationships with teachers have been associated with reduced delinquency rates (Calhoun et al., 2001). In a similar vein, these same positive relationships are not as evident for serious recidivists who then feel the need to reach out further to the delinquent subculture for acceptance

with research showing that an association with deviant peers is a powerful predictor of delinquent behavior (Henggeler, 1989). Positive interpersonal relationships are a major asset to today's youth, a variable that can bind them c loser to the conventional world and away from an adherence to delinquent values (Thornberry, 1987).

Regarding the Relations with Parents scales, if a child or adolescent sees him/herself as being important in their family, can place great value on the relationship they have with one or more of their parents, and can feel that their parent(s) have a suitable degree of trust and a great concern for their well-being, that child will not be as likely to commit serious offenses as a child who cannot express the same sentiment. Family cohesion and good communication with parents is strongly associated with good adaptation in young adolescents (Grossman, Beinashowitz, Anderson, Sakurai, Finnin, & Flaherty, 1992). Fergusson and Lynskey (1996) found that the presence of nurturant and supportive relationships with at least one parent could mitigate those effects of adversity.

Much like the bonding variable of attachment to parents in the interactional theory (Thornberry, 1987), these positive parental relationships expressed by the no/minor recidivists enable them to focus more on what is right and the values their parents have instilled in them to prevent them from committing more serious crimes. Further, the role of parent competency for parents of juvenile offenders has been empirically validated (Rose, 2000). It is a great possibility that having a better relationship with one's parents prevents these youth from further damaging this relationship and turning away from a life of crime. The serious recidivists may not care as much about the hurt and disappointment future crimes may cause their parent(s) since this relationship is not viewed as important, or for the fact that they view their parents as not having a great degree of concern for them. By not feeling important, and by not experiencing the love and

concern that comes with a nurturing and encouraging relationship with a parent, these serious recidivists are turning more to delinquent peers and lashing out against others by means of serious crimes against persons and property. Disrupted parenting practices have been indicated as a primary means for the production of antisocial deviancy among youth (Patterson, Forgatch, Yoerger, & Stoolmiller, 1998). These crimes, in a maladaptive way, are meeting their needs that are otherwise being met in the parental relationships experienced by the no/minor recidivists.

Not surprisingly, the Self-Esteem scale displayed the smallest separation between no/minor recidivists and serious recidivists. The small difference is not surprising given the fact that much of the juvenile delinquency research has shown that self-esteem can often be inflated among juvenile offenders, to the point it takes on narcissistic tendencies (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996). This complex relationship between self-esteem and delinquent behavior can be seen as reciprocal with low self-esteem appearing to foster delinquency while delinquent behavior actually raises self-esteem (Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989).

As was the case with the other adaptive scales, this scale was scored higher by the no/minor recidivists than the serious recidivists. It is this latter group that is achieving self-esteem in less than desirable ways. Self-esteem is the evaluative component of the self-concept, which is a primary determinant of one's behavior. Rose, Glaser, and Roth (1998) assert that adolescents who exhibit delinquent or antisocial behavior should also have a deviant, negative, or poor self-concept, not necessarily a low self-concept, but one that is deviant or negative. Their view of self has come to be associated with a delinquent predisposition, seeing themselves as bad and worthless and acting accordingly (Fitts & Hammer, 1969), and so they reoffend with more serious consequences. The no/minor recidivist group may be displaying a healthy sense of self-satisfaction, have appropriate perceptions of their own strengths and weaknesses, and be

well enough adjusted that further, more serious delinquency is not necessary for them to achieve their needs.

By obtaining lower scores on the Self-Reliance scale, serious recidivists may be experiencing feelings of irresponsibility, which is likely to diminish their motivation to achieve. In other words, they may have given up hope that they can solve their problems and feel that no one can depend upon them again. Such youth do not believe in their capacity to behave competently, and Kuperminc and Allen (2001) have found that such social orientation explains variance in problem behavior both jointly with, and independent of, social problem solving skills. By giving in to these negative self-perceptions, they may face more difficulties in meeting the challenges in their lives and further misbehave only because they have learned no better alternatives to committing these crimes (Long & Sherer, 1984). The other group of offenders, no/minor recidivists, still believe they are dependable, still believe they can get along with others, and still believe they can solve problems on their own. This has been shown in studies with stress-resilient children where they endorse effective interpersonal problem-solving skills, and demonstrated self-reliance and support-seeking behavior more so than stress-affected children (Parker, Cowen, Work, & Wyman, 1990). While they may feel guilt, they do not let it eat away at them, rather they rely on this strong sense of self that enables them to turn away from continued delinquency that could land them in even more serious trouble. Rutter (1987) states that an ability to maintain positive beliefs may empower young people to successfully "negotiate risk situations."

These adaptive skills are only a piece of the puzzle as to what separates these two groups of recidivists. While they were able to differentiate the two groups and explain the separation between them, not all of them held predictive power over who would recidivate with serious

crimes and who would not. The only scale to do this in a small way was the Relations with Parents scale. This finding further points to the importance of the family and the youthful offender's place in the family(Calhoun et al., 2001; Fergusson & Lynskey, 1996; Grossman et al., 1992; Werner, 1989). By looking at the scores for Interpersonal Relations, Self-Esteem, and Self-Reliance, one cannot say with certainty which type of score will lead to a juvenile offender who recidivates with a serious crime or lead to a juvenile who does not recidivate or does so only to a minor extent. While these three scales have been shown to be important in separating the two groups of recidivists, they cannot predict the level of recidivism. However, the Relations with Parents scale was able to predict this with some success.

With much the same reasoning and explanation used before, children and adolescents need to feel loved by their parent(s), feel appreciated within the family, know that there is genuine concern for their well-being, and the like. The findings show that a juvenile offender who does not feel these things from parental relationships will possibly become a serious recidivist, continuing to commit crimes against other people and against property. These crimes seem to meet the needs of a troubled teen that is not having their needs met through the family, and who feels that there is no concern and no love for them at home. Higher levels of satisfaction with parental relations can indicate with some certainty that serious levels of recidivism are not in the cards for other juvenile offenders (Carr & Vandiver, 2001). This predictive power is significant in many ways, but in particular for the implication that parents do matter when it comes to resiliency and protective factors (Fergusson & Lynskey, 1996; Grossman et al., 1992; Werner, 1989). This is very evident in the sense that none of the other three adaptive skills separating the two groups even came close to the prediction of membership like the Relations with Parents scale did. So out of all positive characteristics that a youth could

endorse, parental relations was the most important factor in protecting them from more serious crimes.

Adaptive skills, protective factors, resiliency variables, positive and desirable characteristics do matter and can be the focus of work with juvenile offenders (Calhoun et al., 1999, 2001; Carr & Vandiver, 2001; Kadish et al., 2001; Long & Sherer, 1985). By not focusing so intently on the disadvantages and the risk factors that put these youth at odds with the juvenile justice system, and instead focusing on the positive qualities that all of them are capable of, we can give each and every one of them hope (Carr & Vandiver, 2001). This hope will extend into their personal lives and their futures when they are expected to make it on their own. Adaptive skills, as they have been discussed throughout this study, can give them new perspective and new ways to think about their personal control over life's adversities and negative circumstances (Long & Sherer, 1985).

Juvenile offenders are not the same across the board, and some may lack in adaptive skills where others seem to have a handle on making such skills work for them (Calhoun et al., 1999). By working to identify areas of strength, rather than areas of deficit, we can strengthen the strengths thereby enabling that juvenile offender to learn new ways of dealing with adverse circumstances. As psychologists and other helping professionals, we must consider ways to build positive self-esteem in these youth, increase their sense of problem-solving ability, help them communicate better with peers and derive more satisfaction from their interactions with others, and help them to strengthen their relationships with their parents/guardians (Carr & Vandiver, 2001; Kuperminc & Allen, 2001). This study shows why we must focus our efforts on such tasks; those juvenile offenders who would continue to commit more and serious crimes may come to find a positive place within society and cease to destroy their lives along with the lives

of others. Punitive measures alone will not achieve these lofty goals of increasing the adaptive capabilities of such youth, we must focus on rehabilitation and therapeutic endeavors that take into account the individual needs of each adolescent (Calhoun et al.,1999, 2001). Remember, not all of them are the same; some have weaknesses where others have strengths, and vice versa. If we come to focus more on the individual needs through thorough assessment measures that take into account adaptive, as well as clinical, characteristics like the BASC, we can start to do more good than harm (Agee, 1995). However, if we continue to treat every offender in the same way, and think of him/her as having the same needs as their roommate, and having little if any capability to utilize adaptive skills, we as a society are doomed to continue to see the rise in juvenile crime as reported by the national crime statistics year in and year out. The fact is this: serious and violent juvenile crime is definitely on the rise (OJJDP, 1998), and by increasing the level of adaptive skills these youth have at their disposal, we can curtail this epidemic.

Obviously, a particular finding of this study shows that not everything can be placed upon the shoulders of our youth. That is, with the apparent importance of parental relations for inhibiting recidivism, parents and families must be held accountable in some way. Parent training through psycho-educational methods, parent support groups, and family therapeutic endeavors can be a significant key in the prevention of serious juvenile recidivism. Parents have a responsibility to pass on conventional values to these juvenile offenders, to make them feel loved and worth every minute of their time, and to shield them from the negative influences or risk factors that threaten their well being (Carr & Vandiver, 2001). By focusing on the re-establishment of families as positive forces, juvenile offenders will be less prone to feel the need to act out for attention and achieve their needs in delinquent and otherwise maladaptive ways (Long & Sherer, 1985).

All of this is not to say that we should forget about risk factors and the negative characteristics that bring so many of these youth to our attention. Rather it is a call to say that not enough emphasis has been placed upon and not enough research has been devoted to the contribution of adaptive skills to levels of juvenile delinquency. It is hoped that by increasing the positive characteristics and the desirable behaviors of these offenders entrusted to our care, the negative behaviors and risk factors will have less of an impact on their lives and eventually fade away. From a strength-based perspective, that has been the thrust of this study.

Recommendations for Further Research

Due to the significance of some of the findings of this study, it would be justified to repeat the methods of the study while expanding upon them to achieve even more useful findings for future work with juvenile offenders. It may be quite useful to compare and contrast the adaptive skills as measured by the BASC with another measure of adaptive skills. Another measure such as this could be utilized to determine if any other category of adaptive skill has predictive validity for juvenile recidivism, since only one adaptive scale of the BASC appeared to be a significant predictor.

Future research endeavors should consider the clinical scales of the BASC as well, to determine their relationship with levels of recidivism, in order to compare such relationships with those found of the adaptive scales in this study. It would be very interesting to note which clinical scales were best correlated with particular adaptive scales when it comes to the separation of the two groups of recidivists.

Other avenues for possible study could be comparing the adaptive skills of non-offenders (those youth never convicted of a crime) to one-time juvenile offenders and repeat offenders. After assessing the adaptive skills of several incarcerated juvenile offenders and devising an

appropriate therapeutic intervention focusing on adaptive skills, these youth could be part of a longitudinal study, which would assess the degree that they are able to incorporate these skills into their own unique circumstances and hopefully preventing them from any type of reoffense.

Methodological improvements could be to increase the sample size and expand it to include several geographical areas. Since this study relied solely on self-report data, it would be helpful to investigate this same type of data from secondary sources such as teachers and parents in order to gain a more complete and accurate picture of the individual. It also would be advised to interview the participants in order to corroborate the information on offense history gained from the Juvenile Tracking System. In this way, a more accurate picture of the level and type of recidivism could be gained since only crimes that are reported would show up in a juvenile's offense record.

This study focused only on male juvenile offenders, so incorporating the same type of methods to investigate recidivism in female juvenile offenders would be beneficial for the literature that, to date, displays a paucity of research for this population. It is hoped that adaptive skills can be more frequently utilized in juvenile delinquency research in order to better inform a strength-based framework for our work with these troubled youth.

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