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The Gendered Context of System Experience and its Impact on Girls in the Juvenile Justice System

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The Gendered Context of System Experience and its Impact
on Girls in the Juvenile Justice System

by
Vanessa Patino Lydia

An Applied Dissertation Presented to the
Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and
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Approval Page

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Statement of Work

I declare the following:

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____May 29, 2020_____
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Abstract

The Gendered Context of System Experience and its Impact on Girls in the Juvenile Justice System. Vanessa Patino Lydia, 2020: Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, College of Education, School of Criminal Justice. Descriptors: gendered context theory, girls, juvenile justice, grounded theory.

As girls are becoming a rising share of the juvenile justice population, responses have not focused on applying the pathways research and context for girls' offenses. This study examined the ways girls described the context for their justice system involvement (arrest, probation, court). Using grounded theory, this research elevates the experiences of 32 participants, girls ages 13-18 who were incarcerated in commitment programs in Florida.

The findings of this grounded theory suggest that the gendered context of girls' system involvement includes her lived experiences, coping strategies, delinquent behaviors, as well as her system experiences. Regardless of her path into the juvenile justice system, the common theme shared by girls was unfairness in the process and feeling judged or silenced. This theoretical framework provides further evidence that when the context of girls' experiences are not taken into account and coping behaviors are criminalized, further disconnection, distrust and gendered strain are experienced by the girls. Experiencing additional strain from people who she believes have power to make decisions (e.g., child welfare investigators, police, defense attorneys, probation officers, judges) is an added layer to understand her gendered experience. The emerging theory places girls and their reactions to system experiences at the center of the gendered context theory equation. The theory can be further tested to see if the extent of disconnect between girls' expectations and system response impacts girls outcomes and if there are differences by gender. Given the context of girls' lived experiences, the findings have critical implications for further research, new measures of gendered strain, and challenge systems to assess the impact of their policies, practices, and training of decision-makers.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Nature of the Research Problem

Incarceration rates for youth in the juvenile justice system have been declining, however, the rates for girls have been slower to decline. This results in girls becoming a rising share of the juvenile justice population that come in contact with law enforcement, judges, and probation officers. In 1992, girls comprised 20% of referrals to the system increasing to 30% of referrals by 2008 (Sherman, 2013). A one day snapshot count in 2017 showed there were 3,604 girls incarcerated in the United States (Sickmund et al., 2019). Specific to this research, there were 264 girls incarcerated in Florida on that given day (Sickmund et al., 2019). Additionally, girls of color are overrepresented at each point along the juvenile justice system from arrest to incarceration.

The research has documented problematic practices that result in disparate disposition outcomes for girls while there are gender differences in their life experiences and types of offenses they commit. That is, girls are committed for less serious offenses, more likely to have family related offenses and have more extensive trauma and sexual victimization than boys in the juvenile justice system (Zahn et al., 2010). Studies show that as many as 50% of girls in juvenile justice systems have experienced physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse (Pasko, Okamoto, Chesney-Lind, 2014). Further, research suggests that family conflict is related to the increase in girls' disproportionate involvement in the juvenile justice system for assault offenses (Chesney-Lind, 2002; Sherman & Balck, 2015; Strom et al., 2010; Vaughn et al., 2010). Compared to their male peers, girls are more likely to be charged with offenses against family- both in aggravated and simple assault charges against adult family members, most usually

mothers (Zahn et al., 2010).

The "paths" of girls into the system is not a linear process. The emerging picture shows that there are disparate system responses by key decision makers to girls at both the front and back end of the system (Sherman & Balck, 2015). Family related incidents resulting in first formal contact with criminal justice system contribute to net widening (Strom et al., 2014). Sherman (2013) provides descriptive examples of the mechanics of the juvenile justice process such as: use of warrants, charging of technical violations of probation, valid court order (VCO) provisions, and policies that exercise discretion in decision making but that leave room for gender bias in practice. Sherman (2013) documents patterns including girls charged with assaults and domestic battery arising from family violence (new status offenders), increased charging of misdemeanor and home-based offenses, tough sanctions for runaway girls including locked detention and incarceration for fear about safety and arrests for prostitution-related offenses (new status and violation of probation). Complicating this more, Sherman (2012) describes several dynamics that result in overuse of detention for girls, including, "paternalism among decision-makers; detention to obtain services for girls with significant needs; detention to protect girls from sexual victimization; fear of teen pregnancy and its social costs; fear of adolescent girls' expressions of sexuality which violate social norms; and intolerance of girls who are non-cooperative and noncompliant" (p. 11).

As a result of these responses, girls can be incarcerated for behaviors that are often related to their victimization but are instead criminalized as family related offenses or violations of court orders (Sherman and Balck, 2015; Saar, Epstein, Rosenthal, Vafa, 2015). The removal of girls from their communities and families may perpetuate more

trauma, disconnection and distrust of systems. The gendered context of girls'

involvement in the juvenile justice system is critical to understand but has been largely

ignored (Chesney-Lind, 1989).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to better understand social control processes based

on how girls describe the impact of interactions on their juvenile justice system

trajectories. Using grounded theory approach, this qualitative research sought to build

theory about the concept and processes of social control exerted over girls that end up in

the juvenile justice system grounded in the experiences and interactions of girls with the

justice system decision-makers. This research is distinct from previous research

conducted by this researcher in that it focuses on girls' narratives to provide context to

the "black box" of understanding the various factors related to girls' deeper system

involvement or to build theory of the ways that girls describe and perceive responses by

people with social control (e.g., police, probation officers, attorneys, judges). This

research provides more empirical support for the gendered context of girls' system

involvement that is relatively incomplete in the field.

Background and Significance

There are many decision and intervention points in the trajectories of girls into

and away from the system. What can we learn from girls who have been incarcerated in

the juvenile justice system about their offenses and related paths into the justice system?

Advocates for girls have called for system responses that are based on the individual

needs of girls and which address the gendered context for the offenses they commit.

Researchers and advocates have also called for a systematic review of the response to girls by agents of systems (education, child welfare, and juvenile justice).

Feminist theory suggests there are problematic paternal practices that serve to retain control over girls' behaviors (Chesney-Lind, 1989; Pasko, Okamoto & Chesney-Lind, 2014). Feminist theory argues that the juvenile justice system and courts ignore how relationships, experiences of abuse, victimization, and social location impact girls. The gendered pathways theory maintains that girls and women's behaviors and justice system involvement is survival based, tied to childhood or later experiences such as trauma, abuse, mental health problems, and substance abuse (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006). This feminist theoretical approach has been qualitative in nature and seeks to give girls a "voice" in describing their life experiences and paths into the justice system (Akers et al., 2017).

Chesney-Lind (2002) notes that girls are at an increased risk of arrest in assault incidents because of the social control combination between law enforcement (formal) and parents (informal). For example, when parents fear that a girl will hurt herself or need help to control girls' behavior and/or gain her obedience, they call and rely on the police (Acoca, 1998). When there is conflict in the home, mothers primarily serve as informal agents of social control over their daughter's actions (Davis, 2007). The most marginalized families may rely on the help of police and the justice system to "detain" their daughters because of the lack of resources available (Davis, 2007). The types of options available to families vary and are impacted by their social location—mainly their race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class (Davis, 2007).

Studies have been conducted to examine gender disparities in types of offenses and risk factors (see generally Zahn et al., 2008; Zahn et al., 2010), examine differential processing by race/ethnicity (Moore & Padavic, 2010); to conduct qualitative reviews of probation officer attitudes towards girls (Gaarder et al., 2004), experiences of girls (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Davis 2007); as well as systematic reviews of policy and practice (Feld, 2009; Sherman, 2012). This researcher completed an exploratory study to elevate the experiences and input shared by girls in the juvenile justice system from one community in order to guide the development of community-level interventions (Patino Lydia & Moore, 2015). The girls in the study had experienced extensive trauma (e.g., homelessness, parent incarceration, victimization) and 50% of the girls were incarcerated for a non-law technical violation of probation (Patino Lydia & Moore, 2015).

While much of the pathways literature has been qualitative in nature, no study exists that examines the gendered context of girls' experiences (e.g., processes of social control) that contributed to first encounters with system decision makers and paths to incarceration. The significance and innovation of this study lies in its attempt to better understand social control processes (i.e., attitudes, decision making) that are nuanced, but which can help explain why more girls end up detained and/or incarcerated for less serious offenses and technical violations. More attention is needed to unpack the ways that social control (e.g., parents calling police, police making an arrest) help explain/provide context to the ways the system responds to girls' behaviors. This is critical because the system's response can ignore the trauma that drives behavior or even exacerbate the trauma by being punitive. The research to date calls for policymakers and system decision makers to examine their practices for gender impact, structural gender

bias, and net widening effects particularly for girls of color into the juvenile justice system (Sherman, 2013). The police response and system response demands our attention from legislation and policy, arrest practices, detention and violation criteria, to service provision that addresses victimization that is happening in the home, community, and across institutions.

Significance of the research. As girls are becoming a rising share of the juvenile justice population that come in contact with law enforcement, judges, and probation officers, juvenile justice reform has not focused on applying the emerging research on different pathways that lead to girls' arrest, admissions into detention and incarceration. This research can serve as the basis for an action agenda for community and juvenile justice practices that improve responses to and outcomes for girls coming to the attention of decision-makers. The impact of breaking the cycle of deeper justice system involvement for girls reduces health and mental health problems, additional trauma inside institutions, further strain on relationships, employment and education barriers, risk of intergenerational poverty, etc.

This research inquiry has significant implications for the importance of paying attention to gendered context and social controls placed on girls. The present study expands on existing feminist pathways literature by providing more empirical support for the gendered context of girls' system involvement that is relatively incomplete in the field. This research analyses can uncover examples of nuanced patterns of social control found in the interview data to provide a more complete picture. The research can also lend support for the theoretical basis of interventions for girls that apply a gendered context lens. From a practice standpoint, the research can assist with development of

better assessment measures to capture critical information about system response and social control mechanisms that impact girls. The research can help inform training curricula for decision makers. Further, grounded in the experiences of girls, the research can offer alternative strategies to incarceration that can be implemented and evaluated.

From a macro lens, translating theory and research to practice could help offer pragmatic policy solutions to reverse trends that may be impacting the disparate treatment of girls in the juvenile justice system. That is, implementation of strategies informed by research can result in the reduction of: initial arrests for girls' status and family-related offenses; adjudications to probation; violations of probation; and commitments for violations of court order and for technical violations of probation for these types of behaviors. It can also help address the punitive responses towards girls' coping behaviors and reduce disparate treatment of girls of color. Likewise, it can lead to improved system responses that take into account the "context" for girls' behaviors.

Definition of Terms

In the context of this study, the following terms are defined as follows:

Social control. The system responses by informal agents of social control (e.g., parents/guardians) and formal institutions (e.g., foster care parents, school administrators, law enforcement, judges, probation officers) to decide what is best for the child. Upholding their status over children, social control can be punitive or protective to address girls' behaviors that do not conform to the ideals or who have been labeled as "incorrigible" (Pasko et al., 2014). Incarceration of girls is often a system response to protect her safety, control to punish and/or to mandate and provide treatment (ABA, 2001). Police, courts and corrections exercise use of confinement to "treat" girls

behaviors such as sexual experimentation or exposure to other dangers on the streets (Pasko, 2010).

Gendered context approach. This approach focuses on the gender expectations, specifically the attitudes of key decision makers about the behaviors of girls which can subject them to more informal and formal social control. This context also refers to the ways girls may respond/perceive experiences (e.g., family conflict) that may be different than for males (e.g., internalizing coping behaviors).

System decision-makers. Key decision-makers that have the power and influence to respond to girls and who represent the many points of the system that she may interact with including schools (principals), child welfare (child protection investigators, foster parents), police, and the juvenile justice system (state attorney, public defender, juvenile judge, and/or probation officer).

Noncompliance. Noncompliance is a critical intermediate outcome that has been linked with disparities in system outcomes such as lock-up and/or recidivism. Violating the terms of probation court order or lack of progress can result in noncompliance. This is a discretionary process. Some research has shown that violations for non-compliance are not only dependent on the youth's behavior, but also related to probation officers' workloads, experience, and ways of handling and responding to youth on their caseload (Smith, Rodriguez & Zatz, 2009).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Historical Overview

There is growing attention on the pathways of girls into the juvenile justice system. Early feminist theories explain criminal justice decisions as reflective of male dominance and bias; which function to support patriarchy by reinforcing paternalistic gender and family roles for females through interpretation and labeling of their behaviors (Chesney- Lind, 1989). The *paternalism hypotheses* within the feminist literature suggests that the reason for gender difference in crime rates is because girls receive leniency in the name of protection, but on the flip side, they can receive harsher punishment in the name of control (Chesney-Lind, 1989; Akers, Sellers & Jennings, 2017). Research also suggests that incarceration of girls is often a system response to protect for safety, control to punish and/or to provide treatment (see ABA, 2001; McNeece and Ryan, 2014). Today, girl advocates and juvenile justice system reformers are calling attention to the ways that teenage girls' behaviors (e.g., chronic disobedience at home, court, or in programs) continue to "frustrate" child welfare and juvenile justice system workers who end up using social control tactics rather than true social welfare strategies (Sherman, 2013; Chappell, 2018). The gendered context approach within feminist pathways literature focuses on the gender expectations, specifically the attitudes of key decision makers about the behaviors of girls that can subject them to more informal and formal social control. Feminist theory argues that the juvenile justice system and courts ignore how relationships, experiences of abuse, victimization, and social location impact girls. The gendered pathways theory maintains that girls' and women's behaviors and justice system involvement is survival-based, tied to childhood or later

experiences such as trauma, abuse, mental health problems, and substance abuse (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006). This gendered context also refers to the ways girls may respond/perceive experiences (e.g., family conflict) that may be different than for males (e.g., different coping behaviors).

Girls' behaviors and strategies may be criminalized in relationship to the operating myths and stereotypes about girls' behaviors (Pasko, Okamoto, Chesney Lind, 2014). Javdani et al. (2011) discusses institutional policies and practices that contribute to gendered social forces. For example, processing and sentencing decisions, relabeling and responding to youth status offenses, arrests for drug offenses, and pro arrest and dual arrests for domestic violence incidents specifically affect arrest and sentencing decisions of girls and women (Javdani et al., 2011).

The historical context for punishment of girls' behaviors is important for understanding social control processes of today. Early studies of girls appearing in the courts (family courts) were charged with immorality or "waywardness." In the early juvenile courts much of the child saver movement involved "policing the behavior or working-class and immigrant girls to prevent their straying from a moral path" (Pasko et al., 2014, p. 509). Judges institutionalized girls more frequently than boys for sexual delinquency or immorality—and created dichotomous image of girls; either as a "victim or an errant," "good girl versus sexualized demon" that was a danger to herself and to society (Pasko et al., 2014). From the 1940's through 1970's, more girls were referred to the family court for status offenses (running away from home, not going to school, truancy, curfew violations, unruliness at home) as compared to boys. More recently, the dichotomous images/sentiment about girls in the juvenile justice system continues, if they

are not seen as "needy, they are seen as increasingly aggressive-acting more like bad boys" (Sherman, 2013, p. 9). For Black girls, there is emerging research suggesting an "adultification" effect where Black girls even as young as five years old are perceived by adults as needing less protection and nurturing than White girls (Epstein et al., 2017).

There are three important movements that provide historical context to the social control practices impacting girls' system involvement particularly for family-related conflicts. First, the child-saver movement of the 19th century essentially created institutions and a system of government to have authority to intervene in the lives of families and particularly youth (Davis, 2007). Through the use of family courts and training schools, practices served to intervene with families of children that were perceived to need values, structure, obedience (Davis, 2007). Girls were deemed in need of control who did not conform to the ideals; they were labeled as "wayward" or "incorrigible" (Pasko et al., 2014). The second movement was in the 1970's when domestic violence arrest laws were created across states to protect "battered women" by requiring standardized police responses to domestic assault (Buzawa & Hotaling, 2006). Domestic violence laws allowed for warrantless arrests and extended the substantive grounds for making an arrest (Strom et al., 2014). Domestic violence laws that were intended/designed to address adult intimate partner violence have been extended to include other members in a household and are routinely applied to intra-family conflicts (e.g., child on parent violence) (Sherman, 2012). The third movement, in 1992, was the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Act that recognized the need for deinstitutionalization of youthful status offenders. Status offenses are behaviors that are not law violations for adults, such as running away, truancy, and

incorrigibility (Hockenberry, 2016).

In the past, girls' arguments with parents were considered status offenses (e.g., incorrigible). The "relabeling" of behaviors to assault is a form of "bootstrapping" that now makes girls eligible to be detained (Pasko, Okamoto & Chesney-Lind, 2014). Since the JJDP Act was passed, more girls in the juvenile system have been classified for other offenses instead of status offenses through processes such as issuing contempt of court or violations of valid court order. Further, not attending school is a behavior that is a violation of terms of probation. It does not take into account the reasons why girls may not attend or feel safe at school. These practices essentially relabel offenses and thus circumvent the deinstitutionalization intent of the JJDPA Act (Feld, 2009; Sherman & Balck, 2015). Focusing on individual level behaviors instead "blame and pathologize girls instead of recognizing the roles that society and criminal justice play in girls' crime" (Hubbard & Matthews, 2008, p. 232).

Given the historical background on social control and emerging juvenile justice involvement trends for girls, this literature review examines the (a) gender bias and differential system processing, (b) attitudes and perspectives of key juvenile justice agents of social control (police, attorneys, judges, probation officers) in addition to the role of parents, and (c) the perspectives of girls about their experiences in the juvenile justice system.

Gender Bias and System Processing

The research has documented gender disparities where girls are incarcerated for less serious offenses, more likely to have family-related offenses and have more extensive trauma and sexual victimization than boys in the juvenile justice system (Zahn

et al., 2010). Further, research suggests that family conflict is related to the increase in girls' disproportionate involvement in the juvenile justice system for assault offenses (Chesney-Lind, 2002; Sherman, 2013; Strom et al., 2014). Research also draws attention to the forces that influence length of time in commitment (Espinosa & Sorensen, 2016) and mechanisms for girls returning to the system (Sherman, 2013). Disparate practices and gender bias impacting girls are being documented at various stages along the juvenile justice system including arrest, petitions, disposition to commitment, and other decision making points.

Arrest. The rate at which girls experience first formal contact with the system and the reasons is an important consideration to system involvement. Strom et al. (2014) assessed the influence of domestic violence arrest policies on arrest outcomes in family-related incidents committed by juveniles against their parents and found that girls had fifteen percent higher odds of being arrested in a state with mandatory policies and sixty-two percent higher odds if the state had a pro-arrest policy related to domestic violence. Situational contexts that appear to increase the likelihood that the girl was arrested included: whether the assault is towards her mother or mother figure (e.g., grandmother), whether the parent requested an arrest to be made or if there were other younger children in the home (Strom et al., 2014). Vaughan, Pollock, and Vandiver (2015) looked at differences by gender in arrest likelihood among juveniles involved in assault offenses using the National Incident-Based Reporting System. The research found that girls committed a greater proportion of offenses against older family members. The girls had significantly higher odds of getting arrested than boys even when controlling for victim, offender and offense characteristics (Vaughan et al., 2015).

Petitions. Early research concluded there may be gender disparities for girls with less serious offenses in the petition to court. In a seminal study, Bishop and Frazier (1992) found that compared to any other criminal offense, referrals for contempt of court for females were more likely to be petitioned to the court than for males. Discrimination patterns were seen by gender with the application of contempt. In a sample of 162, 012 cases in Florida between 1985-87, the incarceration probability rate for a typical female was four percent but increased to almost thirty percent if she were held in contempt of court (Bishop & Frazier, 1992). Guided by the feminist framework, Spivak et al. (2014) examined the relationship between gender and juvenile justice processing outcomes for status offenders to better understand the paternalistic effect for girls. In Oklahoma, girls were more likely to have a petition filed for a status offense, their petitions to court were more likely to be dismissed once filed but once later in the system (i.e., adjudication for placement), there was no difference by gender in likelihood of commitment (Spivak et al., 2014).

Dispositions and differential treatment within gender and race. The research on gender bias and system processing for girls suggests that there are differences by gender and within gender. In schools, Black girls experience high rates of suspension, pushout and criminalization (Morris, 2016). Although numbers are fewer, Black girls were suspended at six times the rate of White girls (US DOE, 2014). Of arrests at school, Black girls represent 43% of arrests of female students even though they make up less than 17% of the student population. Among girls and young women of color, disparities exist throughout the juvenile justice process. In 2014, Black females were almost three times more likely than their White peers to be referred to juvenile court for a delinquency

offense (Puzzanchera & Hockenberry, 2017). Similarly, Black females were 20% more likely than White girls to be formally petitioned and detained. American Indian/Alaska Native girls were 40% more likely than White girls to be detained (Puzzanchera & Hockenberry, 2017).

To better understand how courts might punish girls' behaviors based on offenders' race/ethnicity, Moore and Padavic (2010) found that even after taking seriousness of offenses, prior record, and age into account, Black girls received more severe dispositions compared to White girls. Harsher dispositions could be imposed if a girl fails to confirm to the expected behavior expectations of what the juvenile justice system thresholds based on membership in different racial/ethnic groups (Moore& Padavic, 2010). Using an intersectionality perspective, Leiber and Beaudry-Cyr (2017) examined the interrelationship among race/ethnicity and gender and the treatment of probation violators in the juvenile justice proceedings. Interestingly, they found that if a probation violation occurred, girls were more likely than boys to be involved in a new crime than a technical violation whereas female youth were more likely to be adjudicated (Leiber & Beaudry-Cyr, 2017). Further, White females were more likely to be held in secure detention than White males but at judicial disposition they were less likely to receive the more severe case outcome than White males. Black females however, were more likely to be adjudicated delinquent than Black males (Leiber & Beaudry-Cyr, 2017).

Espinosa and Sorensen (2016) examined the length of stay in post adjudicatory facilities to determine the influence of gender and exposure to trauma based on similar offenses. They found that girls with histories of trauma served longer periods in

confinement than boys through the violation of probation court order effect (Espinosa & Sorensen, 2016). The interaction effect of experiencing trauma and receiving a violation of probation disposition showed that referred females were 33% more likely than males to have experienced both (Espinosa & Sorensen, 2016).

Mechanisms that return girls to the juvenile justice system for contempt and non- compliance. Smith, Rodriguez, and Zatz (2009) examined whether noncompliance is affected by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class in Arizona. Their analysis found that Black youth were significantly more likely to have documentation of noncompliance (related to guardianship status or family factors), that neighborhood socioeconomic status strongly affected noncompliance documentation for youth on community supervision, and that youth with documented noncompliance received more severe court outcomes (Smith et al., 2009). Chappell (2018) argues that charges for noncompliance may serve as "mechanisms to regulate the noncriminal behavior of youth" and her research suggests that juvenile justice decisions are influenced by offenders' status, social integration, literacy, respectability, and alternative social control (i.e., parents). Specifically, prior detention and/or probation status is associated with adjudications. For girls with prior adjudications, they had increased odds of detention whereas girls living with both parents had decreased odds of detention (Chappell, 2018). For example, when girls run away, *tougher* sanctions may reflect fear that the girls will become victims, especially given the growing awareness of the connection between running away and commercial sexual exploitation. It may also reflect frustration on part of system decision makers when girls *disobey* court-mandated rules or sanctions. This is all in the context of documentation that a large proportion of technical violations are due to runaway behaviors which require that

probation officers file petitions and issue detention orders. This practice can result in detention for mandatory court issued order but of low-risk offenders who are not a public safety risk (Chappell, 2018). And as Sherman (2013) argues, running away is a disproportionate "trigger" for girls' system involvement and the charge of running away is often undercounted because girls' are instead brought into custody for absconding, violations of probation, or for warrants when they run away (Sherman, 2013).

Gehrig (2018) points out that failure to comply with pretrial requirements (i.e., going to court) may be the cause of women cycling through the system. As part of the pathways theory, Gehrig (2018) explored a childhood victimization model to determine the interrelationships between childhood abuse, mental health issues, and substance abuse on the pretrial outcomes of failure to appear (FTA) and new arrest for both men and women. Gehrig (2018) path analyses found that childhood abuse indirectly influenced FTA's and new arrests through mental health and substance abuse issues but also a distinct pathway for women showing childhood abuse led to history of mental illness which contributed to substance abuse and later pretrial failure (p 127). For men, there was no distinct pathway that influenced their pretrial failure.

While the research is mixed about whether girls receive harsher punishment based on offenses (see Spivak et al., 2014; Leiber & Beaudry-Cyr, 2017), there is evidence to support that girls of color may receive differential treatment (Moore & Padavic, 2010). There is also research advancing the bootstrapping hypotheses—that through system mechanisms such as violations of probation or court orders, girls enter and stay in confinement for reasons that are not criminal offenses (Sherman, 2013; Espinosa & Sorensen, 2016). Additionally, the system processing research suggests differences in

arrest patterns for status and/or family-related offenses (see Strom et al., 2014) and presence of judicial paternalism of the chivalry hypothesis or the harshness of the evil woman hypothesis (see Spivak et al. 2014).

Informal and Formal Social Control Processes

Key decision makers can influence girls' trajectories through the justice system. This includes the responses by informal agents of social control (e.g., parents/guardians) and formal institutions of control (e.g., foster care parents, school administrators, law enforcement, judges, probation officers) to girls' behaviors. Exerting their status over children, social control can be punitive or protective to address girls' behaviors that do not conform to the ideals or who have been labeled as "incorrigible" (Pasko et al., 2014). Social control processes include the ideologies, attitudes and decision-making of these system representatives. The resulting social control can be based on differential standards for girls' behaviors, gender and racial stereotypes in addition to the complex web of problematic practices (arrest, relabeling of status offenses), and other methods that punish girls experiencing family conflict (arrest and detention). In the detention reform work with girls, Sherman (2012) summarized several dynamics that result in overuse of detention for girls: "paternalism among decision-makers; detention to obtain services for girls with significant needs; detention to protect girls from sexual victimization; fear of teen pregnancy and its social costs; fear of adolescent girls' expressions of sexuality which violate social norms; and intolerance of girls who are non-cooperative and noncompliant" (p. 11). The emerging picture shows that there are disparate system responses by key decision makers to girls at both the front and back end of the system (Sherman, 2013). Some research suggests that court official's ideologies may play a role

in interactions that yield harsher dispositions based on behavior expectations of girls and their racial/ethnic groups (Moore & Padavic, 2010).

Informal social control: the role of parents. Chesney-Lind (2002) notes that girls are at an increased risk of arrest in assault incidents because of the social control combination between law enforcement (formal) and parents (informal). Increased police involvement in family disputes places an expectation on police to respond. Acoca (1999) noted that parents call police out of fear that a girl will hurt herself or to use the police to help control girls' behavior and/or gain her obedience. According to Davis (2007), mothers primarily serve as informal agents of social control over their daughter's actions. When there is conflict, parents can form "collaborative arrangements with the justice system to either threaten the girls into obeying parental authority or having the girls removed by detention if they do not act accordingly" (Davis, 2007, p. 413). Critically important is the social location of families—their race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class that intersect to impact the mechanisms or options that families will use when there is conflict (Davis, 2007). That is, the "most marginalized along these hierarchies are less likely to have resources others than appealing to police and the justice system" (p. 431). Through their role as first responders, police can rely on measures of social control to remove "unruly" daughters and help parents "seek a restoration of order" (Davis, 2007, p.422).

Formal social control: the role of police and courts. Police become key juvenile justice system players (along with courts, probation officers, etc.) to enforce ideologies that can lead to the arrest and detention of girls. Every interaction between the police and citizens "involves the use of formal social control" (Schulenberg, 2015,

p.245). From a social control perspective, police serve as gatekeepers since they are generally the first contact with the justice system when youth are victims or delinquents (Jaggers et al., 2014). Police have discretion with juveniles; their responses depend on state laws, agency procedures that guide actions, but their interactions and use of discretion to arrest, refer, release can also be influenced by personal bias and predispositions (Jaggers et al., 2014).

Buzawa and Hotaling (2006) argue that police take parents' complaints seriously resulting in arrest of girls. Research shows that police will more likely arrest the juvenile than the parent and the likelihood of arrest of girls remains high even when there is some discretion (Strom et al., 2014). Situational contexts that appear to increase the likelihood that the girl will be arrested include: whether the assault is towards her mother or mother figure (e.g., grandmother), whether the parent requests an arrest to be made or if there are other younger children in the home (Strom et al., 2014).

When police arrive on the scene, a girls' status as a minor often leaves the girl "powerless" to explain or define what happened to law enforcement (Davis, 2007). Accepting the parent or guardian's definition of the situation is part of the social control and tradition of authorities "upholding parental authority over the rights of children" (Davis, 2007, p. 425). In some situations, parents are really asking for a " break" and their intent in calling police is for police to intervene by removing their daughter for a short period of time to "teach her a lesson" (Davis, 2007, p. 426). This can backfire and lead to further criminalization if when a girl comes before the judge for sentencing disposition. A girl can be incarcerated if the judge uses the information to make a determination that the family has no control or authority in the home (Davis, 2007).

Stereotypes and social control. Media sensationalism of girls' violence further complicates and influences the way police may respond (Strom et al. 2014; Irwin & Chesney-Lind, 2008). Sealock and Simpson (1998) studied how "type scripts" are used in processing and decisions by law enforcement. They found less tolerance for girls' behavior that violated gender norms; that is, behaviors that were judged by law enforcement as being "atypical" for girls meant that they were "in need of more control" compared to boys who showed that same traits and committed the same behavior (Sealock & Simpson, 1998). The attitudes and perceptions of police, probation officers, and courts play a critical role in social control.

Gaarder, Rodriguez, and Zatz (2004) conducted interviews with juvenile probation officers and reviewed case files of girls on probation. They found a gap between the realities of girls' lives based on case file review (e.g., experiences of abuse and victimization) and probation officer and court official perceptions of girls. The interviews and case file reviews revealed many gendered stereotypical images including depictions of girls as sexually promiscuous or described as "whiny" and "manipulative" (Gaarder et al., 2004, p.556). While some probation officers understood that the majority of girls on their caseload had histories of sexual and/or physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect and made connections between past victimization and offending behavior, some believed that girls' accounts of abuse were untrue or exaggerated and that the girls were to blame for their victimization. Researchers argued that there is a difference between recognizing girls' strategies including manipulation and the context for such behaviors rather than describing them as personality traits by nature that make girls in general difficult to work with. As one probation officer noted, "girls are involved with the

court process more for their best interests, not necessarily because she is a danger to the community, but for her own safety" (Gaarder et al., 2014; p. 566). Researchers also noted that in psychological assessments which are used by probation officers and the courts to assess girls' background, behavior and delinquency issues, girls behaviors were described in terms of 'properness' of her behavior. Such findings are critical in unpacking the nuanced relationship between girls' behaviors and harsher treatment. Documents such as case files and psychological assessments exert influence in contributing to overall "image" of a girl in both working with her and making decisions regarding incarceration.

At the intersections of gender and race/ethnicity, White girls have been stereotyped to be in need of protection and amenable to treatment while Black girls are stereotyped as independent, aggressive, deserving of violence, crime prone, and Hispanic girls seen as dependent and submissive, family oriented and highly sexual (Moore & Padavic, 2010). Interestingly, they also found differential behavioral expectations of judges towards girls in the juvenile justice system based on their racial ethnic group membership. That is, judges expected high levels of deviance from Black girls; when White girls surpassed considerable acceptable behavior, it became more punitive (Moore & Padavic, 2010).

Epstein, Blake and Gonzalez (2017) found significant bias and evidence of "adultification" attitudes towards Black girls by key stakeholders. Among survey respondents, there were perceptions that Black girls seem older than White girls of same age, are more independent and need less protection and support (Epstein et al., 2017). These adult perceptions about girls were consistent not only for Black girls in the 10-14 age group, but also towards Black girls in the 5-9 age group, suggesting attitudes that

may be related to harsher punishment of Black girls start at a young age. Such perceptions about girls and particularly girls of color can affect probation officers' assessments of the risk a girl poses, as well as their recommendations for disposition and sentencing (Sherman & Balck, 2015).

Girls Experiences and Perspectives of System

Feminist pathways literature discusses the importance of "giving voice" to experiences of girls in the system (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006; Davis 2007, Akers et al., 2017). Several studies have included girls and young women who have been system involved as participants. The research has inquired about the perspectives of the system and their situations from the girls themselves. Seminal studies/works have documented how girls report their experiences in community that were degrading and frustrating and instances where they did not feel respected by people who have "power over them" (Belknap, Holsinger & Dunn, 1997). Some studies indicate levels of victimization and strain experienced by the girls in their homes, community as well as in their interactions with the criminal and juvenile justice system. Other studies are beginning to document coping, survival and other resistance behaviors of girls when there is conflict. The gendered context within the feminist pathways literature includes reference to the ways girls may respond/perceive experiences (e.g., family conflict) that may be different than for males (e.g., coping behaviors) as part of understanding their justice system involvement.

The relationship between victimization as a stressor is a particularly important factor in understanding girls' response to their victimizations and how their response can impact their delinquency and subsequent incarceration. Broidy and Agnew (1997) posit

that gender differences in types of strain help explain gender differences in types of crime. Female strains (e.g., family stressors, gender-based discrimination, behavior restrictions) are conducive to family violence, to escape attempts such as running away and types of behaviors such as substance use that are more self-directed. Conversely, male strains (e.g., financial, peer conflict or competition) are more conducive to serious violent and property crimes. Both males and females may experience anger in response to strain but they differ in their emotional response. That is, females are more likely to engage in self-destructive and escapist offenses because they experience depression, guilt, anxiety with anger. For women, this reduces the likelihood of aggressive or confrontational crimes, whereas for men, they may be more likely to a respond with serious property or violent crime because of differences in coping, social support, opportunities, social control, and the disposition to engage in crime (Broidy & Agnew, 1997; p. 287).

Research by Francis (2014) found that depression/anxiety was associated with delinquency that was *less aggressive* for girls (running away, substance use, suicidal behavior) and amplified the effect of strain and anger on nonaggressive maladaptive outcomes. That is, internalizing negative emotions interacts with multiple strains (e.g., exposure to violence, sexual victimization, loss of loved ones, and fear of violent victimization) and anger to influence likelihood of different gendered problem behaviors. Grothoff, Kempf-Leonard and Mullins (2014) also found that boys and girls experience and react to the same situation/strain differently. Gender was not a significant predictor of initial drug arrest but it was significant for recidivism. Living situation appears to be an important measure of strain for girls. Researchers note that the impact of vicarious and

anticipated strain of living environments (e.g., vulnerability in the environment and uncertainty of future) particularly in institutional or foster care settings should be further investigated (Grothoff et al., 2014).

Research examining girls' victimization against family has documented gender differences for girls including 1) prior victimization in home, community or school, 2) social learning when girls watching family assaulting other women and each other, and 3) different coping mechanisms such as internalizing (e.g., depression, anxiety) or externalizing (e.g., using violence in self- defense to prevent further attack or because of anger) behaviors (Zahn et al., 2010). Girls' family violence is multi-dimensional—"for some it represents striking back against what they view as overly controlling structure; for others, it is a defense against or an expression of anger stemming from being sexually and or physically abused by members of the household" (Zahn et al., 2010, p. 15).

The manner by which family conflict is addressed is particularly important for girls, especially if there is a history of sexual abuse. There is room for research to build on understanding whether the response by family (e.g., mother) and/or system to the victimization can further impede reactions and sense of fairness/injustice that may be a particularly important measure of strain theory for girls. McGrath, Nilsen and Kerley (2011) systematic review of the research concluded that children who are sexually abused are most likely to run away compared to other abused or neglected children and non-victims. Additionally, sexually abused children have higher rates of arrests regardless of gender. Voith, Topitzes and Reynolds (2016) found that exposure to frequent family conflict significantly increase the risk for violent victimization in early adulthood. Girls are at significantly greater risk for victimization in early adulthood based on their

exposure to frequent family conflict in childhood whereas boys were not (Voith et al., 2016).

Girls' attitudes and negative perceptions of police. The manner by which domestic disputes are handled and the potential gender and racial bias of police officers further complicate girls' attitudes and perceptions of police (Chesney Lind, 2002; Hurst, McDermott, & Thomas, 2005). Girls' perceptions of unfair treatment during family conflict can result in more experiences of strain and lack of trust in systems meant to protect them from victimization. Only one-fourth of Black girls surveyed were satisfied with police in their neighborhood and only 22% of Black girls agreed with the statement that "in general [they] trust the police" (Hurst et al., 2005). Girls who believed they were treated poorly by law enforcement were less positive in their attitudes towards police. Interestingly, vicarious experiences of police misconduct—seeing or hearing about police mistreating someone, hearing of officers covering up another officers' wrongdoing and hearing of officers not performing their duties—had a stronger influence on girls' attitudes towards police. This was more pronounced among Black girls—less than 30 percent agreed liking the police, trusting the police or being satisfied with the police (Hurst et al., 2005). Girls' fear of victimization was found to be a determinant of attitudes towards police (Hurst et al., 2005). These attitudes towards police are important because they can impact girls' decisions about whether to seek help and involve law enforcement.

Interaction with system contributes to strain. The relationship between strain and system interactions is aligned with the feminist literature that views women as oppressed, and that coping strategies such as crime may be an effort to reduce their strain or manage negative emotions (Broidy & Agnew, 2007). In one study, focus group

participants identified themes such as abuse and neglect, boyfriends, and fighting that led them into trouble due to coping with relationship strain (Garcia & Lane, 2012). Acoca (1999) documents the extent of abuse that girls who have already experienced victimization prior to juvenile justice system involvement continue to experience through arrest, detention and other settings. Abusive behaviors towards girls have been observed by researchers in juvenile justice settings. For example, Acoca describes foul and demeaning language, inappropriate touching, pushing and hitting consistently by staff towards girls. Additionally, the use of isolation and/or depriving clean clothing for girls was also mentioned. Practices such as strip searches of girls being conducted in the presence of male officers exacerbate prior victimization histories (Acoca, 1998).

As part of the National Girls Institute, researchers conducted listening sessions across the country to better understand the issues impacting girls' system involvement. A total of 607 stakeholders participated in listening sessions across the country including 313 girls who were impacted by the justice system. When asked about their experience, girls noted several differences in how they were treated as compared to boys and discussed what they considered to be fair and unfair treatment by decision makers (e.g., use of restraint). Fair treatment was described as being treated with respect, care, and leniency. Conversely, girls named myriad ways in which they were treated unfairly, including examples of racial bias (Ravoira et al., 2012).

Garcia and Lane (2013) conducted focus groups with girls in shelters and in detention and found that a common theme was that girls wanted a "voice" in court proceedings and to play a more active role in their cases so they could be heard. Another theme was the expression of futility with the system and lack of focus by the system to

address the problems in a girls' environment. One girl in a shelter commented, "The kid has a story and the parent has a story, and a person or a social worker is looking through 'em. The parent is always right. I mean always!" A girl in detention center commented, "This should be court, everybody gets a chance to say what they want to say and they get their chance in court. 'Cause they only hearing one side, the bad side. They should hear both sides and come to a conclusion." In regards to building relationships with people in the system, girls recognized the importance of the role of probation officers, counselors, and case workers to listen to them. A detention center girl commented that she learned early on not to tell staff when she was having problems because that information would eventually be used against her. She commented, "You learn early, don't talk, don't tell, don't trust" (Garcia & Lane, 2013, p.553).

Morash (2016) research with girls involved in court suggests that girls' perceive their histories of exposure to violence not be recognized or addressed by the court's response. Interview questions asked girls to describe obstacles and difficulties as well as *why* they occurred and whether and *how* the problem was solved. Morash (2016) found pervasive histories of violence experienced by the girls along with detention being perceived as a negative experience. The experience of detention promoted depression and low self-worth in girls who were already emotionally distraught due to their childhood victimization and trauma (Morash, 2016). From the perspectives of girls, interventions that were seen as helpful addressed trauma and negative emotions while interventions that focused only on changing behavior were seen as not helpful (Morash, 2016). Interestingly, the importance of relationship and continuity of key juvenile justice staff cannot be overstated, as girls disclosed experiencing new trauma as a result of

termination of relationship with staff who had been helpful (Morash, 2016).

Using a feminist framework, Morash, Stevens and Yingling (2014) documented in a previous study how a juvenile court responds to girls (punish, criminalize survival strategies, control sexuality) who are charged with delinquency or status offenses and how the girls experience outcomes of various court interventions. Girls were asked whether they felt understood by court personnel and about the effects of court involvement. Morash et al. (2014) found that for court interventions involving house arrest or returning to the home after placement out of state, girls found these unhelpful if there was no intervention to address their destructive families. Positive outcomes among girls who experienced family interventions during placement were identified. Within destructive families, court interventions allowing girls to live independently from their caretakers also had positive outcomes (Morash et al., 2014).

Coping, survival and resistance behaviors. Using an intersectional framework, Flores, Camacho and Sanchez (2017) investigated how racial, cultural, gender, and neighborhood differences shape the lives of Latinas who are on the run and the various decision-making and survival strategies they employed. They found that girls were kicked out of their homes for violating culturally prescribed expectations for Latina women. Girls reported experiencing violence while on the street and trying to find safe place to stay and while attempting to escape punitive consequences from people they saw as "agents of social control" (police, probation officers, schools) (Flores et al., 2017). This research describes how young women engage in cost-benefit analysis before deciding to go on the run. Girls' behaviors can be understood as a form of resistance against a system that threatens people of color through criminalization and incarceration.

Contrary to the emerging gendered pathways perspective for girls' system involvement, Jones, Brown, Wanamaker, and Greiner (2014) found that while almost half of the girls' sample (48%) followed the *gendered pathway* (e.g., status offenses, incorrigibility, kicked out of home; abuse history, family-level poverty, runaway attempts, child neglect, substance abuse, and mental health issues), the other half did not. Fifty two percent of girls followed a more antisocial model of entry into crime (e.g., previous felony-level complaints, defies parental authority, antisocial peers, school suspensions, manifestations of violence, impulsivity, inadequate parental supervision, criminal attitudes) suggesting complexity in the application of gendered pathways for all girls (Jones et al., 2014).

Tasca, Zatz, and Rodriguez (2012) examined girls' experiences as *both victims and perpetrators* of violence to better understand the gender dynamics of violence in girls' lives and the ways relationships shape girls experiences and their options. Tasca et al. (2012) found that 27% were the victims of violence (but not perpetrators), 38% committed violent acts (but were not victims themselves) and 35% were both the victims of violence and perpetrators. The *doing gender* framework seems to better explain violence by girls who were not victims of violence. While they had similar experiences of poverty and other problems in the home, they sometimes fought because they saw violence as a means of gaining respect or some other desired outcome. To give these findings context, qualitative research by Belknap, Holsinger and Dunn (1997) provided examples of how girls' victimization experiences were related to their behaviors. For example, one girl "talked about being so severely sexually harassed by a boy at school that she began to carry a knife for her own safety. This led to her involvement in the

system when school authorities found the knife. The research involving girls as participants is limited, but suggests that context is critically important to understanding behaviors (family conflict and other) and the consequences and response to those behaviors.

Conclusion

Feminist theorists such as Chesney-Lind and Pasko have helped provide a framework for assessing how girls' behaviors are interpreted, labeled and responded to. This literature review explored a brief history of problematic practices negatively impacting girls in the juvenile justice system and introduced complex social control processes. These problematic practices and existing gendered stereotypes suggest there are mechanisms operating within the juvenile justice system that are hard to measure but may impact girls' incarceration rates. The literature review also summarized the research suggesting the existence of differential system processing for girls and the attitudes and decision making by key agents of social control (police, courts, probation officers) resulting in arrest, petitions, detention and incarceration of girls.

The combination of increased use of social control practices and law enforcement's low tolerance for female delinquency impact girls (Acoca 1999; Belknap et al., 1997). Gender and racial bias in processing, coupled with girls' experiences of re-traumatization, and distrust of systems require more attention. Specifically, this review suggests more research is needed to understand the social control processes by which differential outcomes happen, how it impacts girls' further strain and their overall experiences (Francis et al., 2014). The attitudes of police, courts, probation officers become critically important as they can affect assessment of risk (Sherman & Balck,

2015), juvenile justice disposition (Moore & Padavic, 2010), and girls' probation experiences (Gaarder et al., 2004).

Girls' perspectives of system experiences are a critical component of the feminist literature regarding gendered context and pathways theories. Girls have shared that they do not feel their trauma and situations are understood by people who make decisions in the juvenile justice system (see Acoca, 1998; Garcia & Lane, 2013; Morash, 2016; Ravoira et al., 2012). The biggest gap in the literature is how girls themselves describe their experiences, specifically the system responses by key system actors. Given the overrepresentation of girls of color in the system and the emerging gender and racial stereotypes of girls' acceptable behaviors, more research is needed that includes the perspectives of being a girl and being a girl of color in the system.

From a gendered lens, giving context or meaning to what girls impacted by the justice system understand is happening or has happened has not been explored. Tasca et al. (2012) points to the need for transdisciplinary team approaches to develop deeper understanding of structural and family risks experienced by girls as victims of violence, perpetrators of violence, and both victims *and* perpetrators. Grothoff et al. (2014) calls on more research to explain the structural factors that affect girls and boys differently. Likewise, Jones et al. (2014) suggests more research is needed to understand whether social control processes apply to all girls or only those with gendered pathways. In conclusion, the research calls for policymakers and system decision-makers to examine their social control practices for gender impact, structural gender bias; and net widening effects for girls into the juvenile justice system (Sherman, 2013).

Research Questions

Building on feminist theory, this research seeks to generate theory to better understand the ways that social control may operate to impact girls' deeper system involvement. Through analysis of interviews with girls who were incarcerated, this research explores a knowledge gap in the field:

Central research question. "How do girls describe the context of their justice system involvement?"

Sub-questions.

1. How do girls describe the reason for first arrest and how they ended up in lock-up?

2. How do girls describe interactions with key juvenile justice system decision-makers (e.g., police, judges, attorneys, probation officers)?

3. Based on their own experiences, how do participants describe an alternative and improved response by the system for the future?

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provides justification for why grounded theory was selected to answer the research question about how girls describe the context of their juvenile justice system involvement. The gendered context of girls' system involvement is relatively incomplete in the field. Using a grounded theory approach helped increase understanding of the nuances related to their interactions and pathways into the juvenile justice system. A section is devoted to data collection, original interview procedures, and the data analyses of archival interview data with girls and young women who were incarcerated.

Qualitative Research Approach

Girls' perspectives of system experiences are a critical component of the feminist literature regarding gendered context and pathways theories. In previous qualitative studies, girls have shared that they do not feel their trauma and situations are understood by people who make decisions in the juvenile justice system (see Acoca, 1998; Garcia & Lane, 2013; Morash, 2016; Ravoira et al., 2012). Girls' experiences and perspectives about their system involvement can help to both describe and explain a phenomena—in this case—the phenomena of social control and how interactions with key decision-makers may occur and how girls may be impacted. A constructivist approach "acknowledges that the theory depends on the researcher's view and cannot stand outside of it" (Charmaz, 2014, p.239).

Grounded theory. Grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) was selected as the preferred strategy of inquiry because it offers a systematic way to explore an important and complex issue such as girls' pathways into system that is more than simply describing phenomenon. The intent of grounded theory is to discover a theory that can

offer an explanation for a process or action (Charmaz, 2014). Further, this grounded theory approach acknowledges participants as experts of their experiences (Charmaz, 2014). The girls' exploration of pathways and their lived experiences do not lend themselves to quantitative measures or analyses. Grounded theory design allowed for generating theory about the relationships between themes as they emerged from the data and constant comparison (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, the context and conditions under which the theory that emerged operate are useful to inform juvenile justice system decision-makers (e.g., law enforcement, judges, probation officers).

Participants

No active participants were part of this study. This research included the archival transcript interview data of a targeted sample of 32 girls who were in lock-up facilities in Florida. Participants previously participated in a study examining the common pathways of girls into the juvenile justice system from the Northeast Florida community (Patino Lydia & Moore, 2015). Participants were selected from a list generated by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) of girls who met the criterion sampling 1) resided in a county from the target community (Duval, Nassau, Clay, St. Johns, or Baker County), and 2) incarcerated in a girls' residential program that had agreed to participate in research at the time of census data extract. The girls' residential programs represented a range of security levels (low-risk, moderate-risk, and high-risk facilities). Girls with less than 30 days remaining before release were excluded due to scheduling constraints. The use of purposive sampling for that study was appropriate.

Based on the identification and number of girls who met the criteria at each of the DJJ residential program sites, this researcher arranged a site visit date with each program

administrator. This researcher also coordinated the information materials (e.g., protocol for securing consent, parent/guardian consent forms) for DJJ staff at each site to provide to parents/guardians of selected research participants in order to secure their consent to ask girls to participate in research. Two girls in the target sample did not have consent of their parent/guardians and were excluded. On the day of the scheduled visit, interviewers were provided with a list of all selected participants that had secured parent/guardian consent (via DJJ program staff). From this list, girls met with research interviewers and were informed of the study procedures and invited to participate in the study. A total of 32 girls agreed to participate across nine residential programs. At the time of the site visit, two girls who had parent consent chose not to participate (one was taking the GED at the same time). The girls in this sample identified themselves as Black or African American (47%), Caucasian (34%), Mixed/multiple race (12%), Native American (3%), and Hispanic (3%). Participants' age ranged from 14 years to 18 years old. Nearly half of the participants were first arrested at the age of 13 years old or younger (44%). Half of the participants were committed for a violation of probation as their most serious offense (50%); the remaining participants were committed for misdemeanor assault or battery (13%), felony aggravated assault or battery (9%), auto theft (6%), burglary (6%), escape from secure detention (3%), obstruction of justice with violence (3%), sexual battery (3%) or vandalism (3%).

Instruments

A semi-structured interview protocol developed by this researcher approved by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice Institutional Review Board (IRB) was utilized to collect the data. The interview protocol consisted of existing measures validated on

adolescent girls and questions created by the researchers to better understand the life experiences of girls, their experiences along the juvenile justice system continuum and their feedback and insight about how to improve services for girls in their community. Various constructs were included in the interview protocol; the initial study was focused on assessing commonalities in pathways into the system, availability of services in the community, and girls' recommendations for improving the juvenile justice system. The current dissertation study differs in that it conducted a deeper analysis with this data to better understand girls' narratives and perspectives about system interactions within the context of their life experiences. The dissertation research focused on the qualitative data and notes gathered from the Pathways, Family History/Life Experiences, Identity and Discrimination Experiences, and Experiences with the Juvenile Justice System construct sections of the protocol. A summary of the types of questions for each of these constructs is below.

Pathways. This section explores how girls got involved with the system and how they ended up in lock-up. Questions included family offenses and runaway behaviors, as well as open-ended questions about what happened the first time they got in trouble with the law and challenges they have overcome.

Family History/Life Stories. This section explores family dynamics including who they lived with before lock-up, caregiving responsibilities, and grief and loss experiences.

Supports. Questions ask participants to identify particular adults who supported them and to describe how. Similarly, there is a question for girls to identify adults that let them down or violated their trust and to explain how.

Identity and Discrimination Experiences. Data gathered from this section focused on the notes provided by girls regarding perceived discrimination because of their ethnic identity or gender.

Experiences with Juvenile Justice System. This section provided participants an opportunity to describe treatment by police officers, attorneys, judge, and probation officer(s) and their overall court process experiences.

Insight/Recommendations. This section provided girls an opportunity to share what they have learned in their life that they want to share with younger girls as well as a question regarding what they want adults (the world) to know that will help girls/young women with similar experiences.

Data Collection Procedures

The original interviews were conducted face-to-face in private spaces at the girls' residential programs. Interviews were conducted by two female interviewers with master's degrees who were trained by this researcher on the nature of the structured and semi-structured interview questions and transcribing procedures. Face to face interviews with participants ranged in length from 45 minutes to one hour and half. Interviewers transcribed notes and direct quotations where possible on hard copy paper. There were additional spaces on the interview protocol for the interviewers to record any observations, body language, reflections, additional comments, etc. Interviews were not audio recorded due to the preference of the Department of Juvenile Justice. In order to ensure accuracy of recording, interviewers typed and transcribed their notes immediately after each interview.

After approval from the Nova Southeastern University's Institutional Review

Board (IRB), previously collected interview transcript data from study participants were provided to this researcher. As described above, the specific responses to constructs were provided in order to answer the new research questions for this dissertation study. The transcript data was completely de-identified. Girls were previously assigned an identification code so that their name was not on any interview instrument. The interview data was secured and stored following the agreement by the organization and any previous IRB requirements. The interview data was reviewed to ensure the responses to the questions were all included and followed the original interview protocol guide.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data analyses plan proceeded on multiple levels. Creswell (2014) outlines a practical way for getting organized that was followed. First, the archival transcript data was organized, assigned ID numbers, and re-typed for each study participant in order to extract the major sections for analyses. The process of retyping allowed for an added layer of being reintroduced to each of the study participants and initial notetaking. To answer research questions about how girls describe the impact of interactions with juvenile justice decision-makers on their trajectories into the system, the researcher focused on related open-ended responses and excerpts. The researcher read through all of the individual interview data and looked for passages that discussed points shared in girls' narratives about interactions with parent/guardians, law enforcement and court system. All related passages were prepped for inclusion into separate primary documents.

In order to be able to find the essence of girls' perspectives and experiences, the next step was line-by-line coding relative to each research question. This is known as first

systematic step of grounded theory to generate categories/themes of information (open coding) (Corbin & Straus, 2007 as cited in Creswell, 2014). Each segment of data was coded (open coding). Line by line coding helps to see patterns and remain open to the data and the nuances contained within (Charmaz, 2014). Specifically, it helps "take a compelling event apart" and see processes (Charmaz, 2014, p. 125). This resulted in a total of 84 initial codes. This was followed by more focused coding (Level 2) to sort and "frame" the most frequent and relevant codes. Attention was paid to code data as "action verbs" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 116). This resulted in development of a codebook that positioned the emerging themes within the gendered context of feminist theory to explain girls' system involvement (axial coding). The initial codes resulted in certain words without prompt. For example, the word "talk" came up 35 times. The word "should" came up 44 times. Spontaneous mentions came forth regarding "judgement" or the experience of "it [judgement]." The analysis paid special attention to how girls described interactions and experiences along the system and if any links or relationships were being made. An iterative process of inductive and deductive analyses to observe relationships among themes and within and across participants was followed. The researcher followed the guide by Charmaz (2014) for being critical of the data: identified process that was at issue, how it developed, how the participant acted while in the process, how the research participants thought or felt while involved in process [of system involvement], when and if the process changed, and assessment of the consequences of the process (p. 127). The recommendations for other girls were very much aligned with recommendations for adults around behaviors but also about self-identity interpretations and helping adults understand not to judge. Following a structured approach, the researcher continuously

memoed codes and kept notes of the emerging themes and changing/expanding definitions as part of narrowing the information to a central category (Creswell & Poth, 2018). There was a dual sense of girls discussing their behaviors but also of placing accountability on the actions or behaviors of people during their interactions.

That category then becomes the major or central feature of the theory of the process (Charmaz, 2014, Creswell & Poth, 2018). It was clear that girls' experiences of victimization or stressors could not be separated from her behaviors and therefore this researcher wanted to show construct of gendered strain across participants. The aim of this analyses strategy was to develop a list of major forms of strain experienced by the girls and a list of types of behaviors (coping, survival, and delinquent) for each participant. This was aligned with emerging literature on girls' behaviors to cope with trauma by substance use, running away from homes (Anderson & Walerych, 2019). A total of 13 forms of strain (witnessing violence, sexual assault/abuse, physical abuse, sexual exploitation, homelessness, parent incarceration, mother/caregiver death, remove from home/foster care placement(s), victimization in school, victimization in foster care, racial discrimination, fighting/conflict with mother, other trauma) were identified. A total of 8 types of behaviors (running away from home, running away from foster care, daily substance use, fighting with others/ sibling/father at home, fighting with others at school, other survival strategies, not going to school, dropping out of school) were identified. Together, these resulted in a cumulative count of "gendered strain" for each participant.

Once the interview data was analyzed, selective coding was used to highlight example pathway(s) showing an interconnection and interpretation of themes. Creswell and Poth (2018) note that the evaluation standards for grounded theory methodology

generally present the theoretical model in a figure or diagram and help to "advance a storyline or proposition that connects categories in the theoretical model and presents further questions" (p. 282).

Although some girls reported fair treatment by police or by their probation officers, the overarching system experience was unfairness of the "process." Their descriptions or examples were all *about the process.* Specifically, it was about how things were handled, the impact on them (feeling blamed, wrongly accused), along with a disconnect with what they expected out of the people/process. This theoretical underpinning is described in more detail in Chapter 4. Another major theme was the interplay of all study participants having received violations of probation. There were various reasons for violating, but it was *how* these were handled, *how* they ended up in lockup that they emphasized. Many had recommendations for changing policy and terms of probation. It became clear that focusing on terms of probation and reasons for noncompliance were an important part of the context for system involvement.

The third layer was use of theoretical coding to describe relationships between the categories from the focused codes. These were interconnected, and essentially comprised the additional layer of "context." As a result, it was realized that what the girls were specifically recommending regarding better responses and changes to process and policy would have changed the individual trajectories of their juvenile justice outcomes.

These interpretations help describe ways the participants' narratives generate context for underexplored research and opportunity to examine how it mirrors or differentiates from the existing literature. This methodology and analyses steps allowed

for the creation of a theoretical model of gendered system experience for girls to emerge (see Chapter 4).

Ethical Considerations

Many of the participants of this research have experienced childhood victimization and trauma. In addition, because of their age (under 18) and system involvement, they are a protected and vulnerable population group that required Institutional Review Board approval to conduct research. In addition to participant's assent to participate in research, parent/guardian consent was obtained for all of the girls who participated in this research study. No identifying information about the participants was provided. Additionally, the researcher was mindful to remove any reference to stakeholder names (facility names, probation officer or judges' names). It should be noted that participants often remarked about the experience with particular person by name (with the exception of law enforcement). All interview transcripts were secured by password protected file. Specific quotes that were included in the narrative as excerpts or example text deliberately contain only fictitious names and were aggregated composites within themes.

Trustworthiness of the Method

Safeguards were implemented to mitigate threats to this research that could impact its validity and reliability. To improve the reliability of coding, the researcher shared samples of narrative and asked two independent colleagues to cross-check whether they would agree on the coding used for the sample text. To check for the accuracy and credibility of the findings, the researcher triangulated data from perspectives of multiple participants and multiple questions, as well as assessed the

findings with other qualitative studies that have described girls' narrative accounts and/or that have described key juvenile justice officials' attitudes and decision making towards girls (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, the researcher shared her interpretations and findings with her dissertation committee and with girls' experts in the field to get feedback about the strength of certain themes (particularity or generalizability) to the broader development of gendered context theory. As previously stated, a methodological journal was kept to document ideas or questions raised, analyses plan as it emerged, and deeper investigation of interesting information to assess its possible relationship. Additionally, all of the coded transcripts, Excel spreadsheet tables and codebook were available for review. These strategies allow for presentation of discrepant information that ran counter to the themes provided and allowed for new themes to emerge.

Potential Researcher Bias

Creswell and Poth (2018) note the importance of researchers to convey their work experiences and pertinent background as part of methods section, as well as to disclose what they have to gain from the research. There are a few noteworthy assumptions by this researcher. First, system reform is needed particularly as it relates to girls in the justice system. Second, an action agenda that is informed by the voices of girls with lived experiences is a transformative framework that can be benefit communities. These assumptions are based on 20 years of professional work experience examining policies and practices that negatively impact girls. These researcher assumptions are also informed by over 10 years of listening to the experiences of girls and young women involved in the justice system.

Qualitative research is interpretative research (Creswell, 2014). It is critical for researchers to identify their biases, values, personal background (e.g., gender, life experiences, culture, socioeconomic status) which are brought into the qualitative research process and may shape interpretations and direction of the study (Creswell, 2014). This researcher applied her systemic and policy perspective with her gendered lens research expertise to explore how the paths into the system were related to girls' experiences and recommendations. To manage potential bias, the researcher engaged in reflexivity. She had conversations regarding potential gaps and holes in her data and honest dialogue to check her interpretations and assumptions. Additionally, she incorporated feedback on the theoretical diagram and made revisions to simplify and improve clarity. Constant comparison of the data and the literature allowed for other themes to emerge and the linking of concepts and ideas that were compelling. This researcher values the insights from girls' as experts of their lives; and is biased towards need for system improvement. However, the interpretation of how girls experience the system was eye-opening and the research implications are grounded in what the girls shared.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter introduces the grounded theory of the impact of gendered system experience for girls that emerged from the interviews with girls who were incarcerated in the juvenile justice system The theory provides an in-depth understanding of how girls' describe, perceive, experience, and wish to improve the response to girls by key decision-makers with systems. Participant quotes illustrate the interactions with key decision-makers (principals, child protection investigators, police, public defenders, judges, probation officers) and the cumulative impact of system responses to her. Girls' lived experiences, coping, survival and non-compliant behaviors are described to show paths into juvenile justice system and system mechanisms that result in recurring involvement and lock-up. The finding among participants was the importance of fairness in/of the process for the girls. The disconnect between girls expectations and actual experiences of the system response to them are related to her recommendations for changes to process/practice. The chapter concludes with a summary of the theory and results.

Grounded Theory of Gendered System Experience

Girls' juvenile justice system involvement is a complex web of the intersection of lived experiences, coping behaviors, survival behaviors, delinquent behaviors, and "noncompliance" (behaviors that violate the terms of probation court orders). These behaviors occur along the juvenile justice continuum from arrest, detention, court hearings, disposition and incarceration. Of equal importance are the actions/responses by system decision-makers along the continuum (i.e., police officers, state attorney, public defenders, judges, probation officers, etc.) to recognize or respond to the needs of girls through a gendered lens. Through the narratives of participants, this research uncovered

cumulative impact of gendered strain by the multiple systems they encounter. This includes families as well as the responses by representatives of the child welfare system (specifically child protection investigators) and education system (specifically teachers or principals) emerged as important considerations of the context for girls' justice system involvement. The theory explains how the system response to girls becomes an additional layer to understanding the gendered context of her behaviors. This theory of gendered system experience centers the focus on the disconnect experience between girls' expectations of people who made decisions on her behalf and the reality of the system response to her that emerged. This disconnect impacts her view of the system, her reaction, and her juvenile justice system trajectory (see Figure 2).

As with feminist theory, this grounded theory does not focus on the gender expectations, specifically the attitudes of key decision-makers about the behaviors of girls which can subject them to more informal and formal social control. It is aligned with feminist theory that argues the juvenile justice system and courts ignore how relationships, experiences of abuse, victimization, and social location impact girls. This theory is aligned with the gendered pathways theory that maintains girls and women's behaviors and justice system involvement are survival-based and in this case, tied to their childhood or adolescent experiences such as trauma, abuse, mental health problems, and substance abuse (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006).

However, this research found that regardless of the initial "paths" into the juvenile justice system, the context of violations of probation were a consistent element in the trajectories shared by all the participants who were locked up. In addition, the very experiences of "noncompliance" while on probation are interconnected to girls' initial

system involvement, family context, and their coping and survival strategies, which must be framed/understood through a gendered lens. The girls describe the system response to them and how it "the juvenile justice system process" is experienced. They express feeling abandoned, frustrated, blamed, judged, silenced and misunderstood by the juvenile justice system but also a cumulative impact of previous responses by the education and/or child welfare systems. There was a "disconnect" between what the girls expected to happen or wanted to happen, and what actually happened in practice, their narratives focus was on the *process* being unfair, the requirements being unfair, the treatment being unfair, and the judgement being unfair.

Understanding girls' perspectives allows for a grounded theory to emerge that explains how the system response to girls becomes an additional layer to understanding the gendered experience and context of her behaviors. The girls' story matters to her, as do her expectations, system experiences, and her calls for change (see Figure 1). If girls sense others are judging who they are or their actions without understanding the context, this is experienced as a form of punishment (or additional strain). The grounded theory has two distinct yet interrelated layers that are critical to understanding the gendered context of the behaviors of girls impacted by the justice system: (a) The lived experiences, delinquency, coping, survival skills of justice involved girls and (b) the impact of the response by agents of social control to the behaviors (that creates a disconnect from what she expected).

Figure 1

Gendered Context of Girls' System Experience

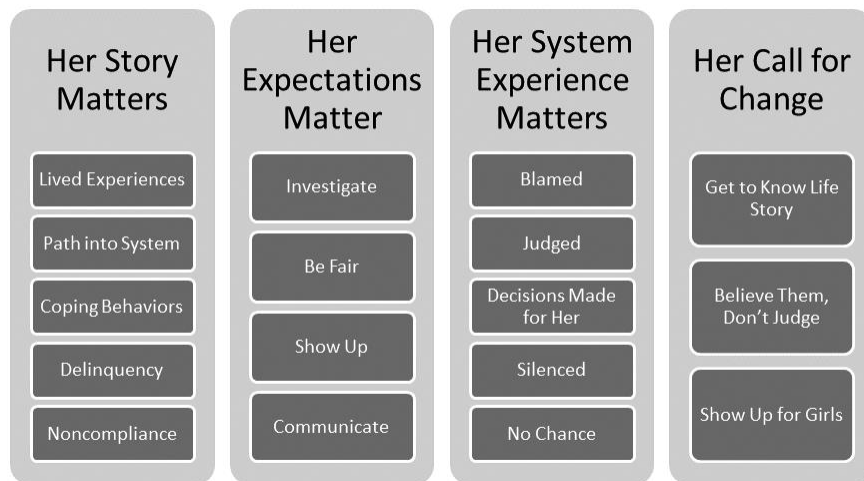| Her Story Matters	Her Expectations Matter	Her System Experience Matters	Her Call for Change
Lived Experiences	Investigate	Blamed	Get to Know Life Story
Path into System	Be Fair	Judged	Believe Them, Don't Judge
Coping Behaviors	Show Up	Decisions Made for Her	Show Up for Girls
Delinquency	Communicate	Silenced	
Noncompliance		No Chance	

Figure 2

Girls' System Experience

Moving clockwise, this emerging theoretical model is described starting with "Her Story" at the top and center (see Figure 2).

Her Story

The first section explains how girls describe their initial juvenile justice system involvement and what actions return them to the system. This includes the lived experiences, trauma, victimization, coping strategies, delinquency, social control, and noncompliance. Regardless of the initial path into the system, girls experienced stressors or strain (e.g., victimization, conflict in home, parent incarceration, death of mother). Girls responded to their life events (including arrest and being put on probation) using different coping mechanisms or survival skills. This research defines coping mechanisms as the way girls respond to trauma or their life experiences especially when there is conflict or victimization. Garcia and Lane (2012) found that girls coped by using drugs, running away from home, and having unhealthy relationships with delinquent boyfriends or older men when there was relationship strain within the family. Their research also provided examples of fighting at school or not going to school due to relationship strain (e.g., bullying). This research found a pattern where the more experiences of gendered strains, the more and different coping mechanisms/responses to the life events were employed by the girls. These coping mechanisms were related to system mechanisms for their deeper system involvement. The coping mechanisms return them or place them at risk of noncompliance with the terms of their probation (e.g., go to school, not use substances, stay home, no new charges including fighting at home or in school). Coping mechanisms that are not understood in the context of her lived experiences clash with the system mechanisms to respond to and often criminalize their "non-compliant" behaviors.

The mechanisms of social control that contribute to girls' first encounters and recurring system involvement are highlighted below through girls' narratives (all names are fictitious). They include parents or foster parents calling police, violation of probation for noncompliance, judge warrants for arrest, use of force by police. They give context to how girls end up detained and/or incarcerated for less serious offenses and technical violations than boys. The nuances of these social control processes have been a gray area of understanding and evidence.

Paths into the System and Mechanisms of Social Control. Three initial "paths" into the juvenile justice system emerged. The characteristics of the family-related path, child welfare system path, and education system path are defined and evidence of the findings are provided through girls' quotes.

Family (N=17). The family path into the justice system was most common. In this path, the family was related to the girls' initial offense, often by contacting the police. In this path, the violation of probation was for running away from home or a domestic violence charge against family member. In many of the narratives, family conflict with mother or abuse resulted in domestic violence battery charges and/or running away as both the initial charge and reason for violation related to girls' runaway behaviors.

The experiences of these two participants below shows the interplay of family calling on the police to intervene and how running away from home was criminalized.

> Isabella was charged with felony battery against grandma. Her grandmother had called the police to take her to mental health facility and during the time they were coming, she "got upset and threw some things not directly at grandma." When police arrived, "grandma was just telling them that [she] wasn't herself and had mentioned [she] threw stuff." The police charged her with battery on an elderly person which is a felony. Grandma never intended to have her get in

trouble. She is here now because she violated probation for fighting with her dad-"he started the fight but called the cops when [she] defended herself." She also violated by running away. She says she ran away because she was addicted to drugs and adrenaline. (14, W) (Participant ID, Race/ethnicity)

Imani was charged with domestic battery at age 14. "Mom physically abused me, I pushed her, she called the cops and turned the story on me. Here now for a violation of probation (VOP)" Her VOP was for curfew violation and running away. She explained she ran away from home due to abuse (23 abuse reports) and considered herself homeless. Her mom was abusive, it was biggest life challenge she's overcome—"I prayed to God. I was hopeless; I thought she would kill me, [I] didn't think I would make it." Imani also hit mom's boyfriend (jumped in) after he beat her mom. (15, A)

Foster Care Path (N=8). For girls in the child welfare system, this played a role in their initial offense and/or system involvement. Girls received initial charges against foster parents (e.g., theft or battery) or for running away from foster home. They also received violation of probation for running from her foster home or getting in trouble at school.

Jasmin's first arrest was for credit card fraud in foster home. She heard her foster mom read the credit card number and then used it to pay her phone bill. She couldn't get in contact with case manager after the first month of being on probation and then said she didn't successfully complete the program. The second arrest was for running away from adoptive house because kept getting into fights with mom. Mom called the police and she resisted without violence. Violated probation three times, "all for running away and then I asked to be placed in this facility" (8, M).

Grace was arrested three times. "On probation for beating the principal at the alternative school. I ran late to school and was out of dress code and tried to talk to the principal. He said no and took me to his office. He stepped up to me (after I had previously been sexually assaulted and I don't like men roughing me or stepping weird). He was taunting me and then I pushed and punched him. Then I ran away from foster care (after dad got arrested and mom moved)."Arrested because running away from foster care which was a violation of probation. (9, W)

School Related (N=7). This path was related to initial arrest being an incident at school (e.g., fighting) or a violation of probation for not going to school, or fighting while on probation. Many of the girls experienced victimization at school by peers and/or by

teachers. Often this was related to not going to school and/or dropping out of school.

> Vicky was arrested over 100 times. "First arrest was for disturbing the peace when I was 13 in school and girls were bullying me all year and then fought with the girls. I got on probation. Then I violated because I didn't want to stay home. Second arrest was for disturbing the peace again for a fight. Then VOP misdemeanor for running away. Violations were always for running away: don't want to follow rules of mom and didn't get along. Most recent arrest was for prostitution, third degree felony. Escaped from two DJJ programs. Also got charged with petit theft. I am here because of the escape from residential following the "prostitution" charge." (26, M)

Girls' Lived Experiences, Coping, and Delinquency. Girls' lived experiences, delinquent behaviors, noncompliance and coping strategies are interconnected within participants' initial paths into the system and recurring reasons for return. Table 1 below shows the types of lived experiences/stressors, and types of coping, delinquent behaviors for a sample of participants (see Appendix for summary of gendered strains for all participants). Her story matters. Regardless of the initial pathway into the system, the girls violated probation and thus were "non-compliant." The essence for her system involvement was attributed by the girls to people's decisions, unfair or ill-informed responses, family conflict, running away, to her and/or peers behaviors. They often did not link their lived experiences to their behaviors (e.g., grieving/hurt, reason for running away/coping, substance use, reason for not going to school). However, the behaviors linked to noncompliance while on probation are due to technical violations (running away, not going to school) or new charges (fighting at home, fighting at foster care, fighting at school, using substances). These findings are consistent with feminist literature on system control mechanisms (e.g., bootstrapping practices) that pull girls deeper into the system for running away or for not going to school (which are part of their court sanctions) but really set them up, given these are their coping mechanisms too.

The coping/delinquent behaviors are related. Running away was a behavior regardless of the path into system. For example, participant number 13 who was in the foster care path ran away from foster care, used substances including cocaine with older friends or alone because "she wanted an escape from her life." She was sexually abused by a teacher in elementary school and had a history of suspensions for "arguing with teachers" and for not going to school. She would rather take a beating at home than go to school. Thus, mandating going to school as part of the terms of probation was not taking into consideration the reasons she likely would not go to school.

Table 1

Life Experiences, Coping, Delinquency, and Gendered Strains

Participant ID	26	13	29	7	6
Race/Ethnicity	Multiracial	Black	Multiracial	Black	White
Path Into System	School	Foster Care	Family	Family	Family
Type of Stressor/Strain					
Witnessing violence	x				
Sexual assault/abuse		x			
Physical abuse	x	x			x
Sexual exploitation	x	x	x		
Homelessness	x	x			
Parent incarceration			x		
Mother/caregiver death					x
Removal from home/foster care placement(s)	x	x	x		
Victimization in school	x	x		x	
Victimization in foster care	x	x			
Racial discrimination		x		x	
Fighting/conflict with mother	x		x		
Trauma/unspecified	x		x	x	
Total Strain Count	9	8	5	3	2
Type of Coping Strategies					
Running away from home	x		x	x	x
Running away from foster care		x			
Daily substance use	x	x	x	x	x
Fighting with other at home (sibling, father)			x	x	x
Fighting with others (at school)	x	x	x	x	x
Not going to school		x		x	x
Drop out of school	x				
Total Coping Count	4	4	4	5	5
Total Gendered Strain and Coping Count	13	12	9	8	7

Note. Author's Table

For example, Sophia's story provides an exemplary narrative to illustrate how family experiences, school experiences are interwoven with conflict with her mom, coupled with social control of police (to arrest for domestic battery at police station when family is seeking intervention) and probation officer (unwillingness to modify terms of probation regarding how to complete school requirement). From her perspective, she

doesn't feel treated fairly because she wasn't able to give input and everyone seems to

think they know what is best for her and not taking into consideration the context for her

behaviors and why she leaves home.

> Sophia was initially arrested for domestic battery after getting into fight with mom at police station. Mom had taken her to the police station when she was 14 years old because she didn't want to go to school. She shoved her mom and was cursing at her in the police station. At school, she was frustrated because even though principal and teachers knew she had been arrested they still made her do all her work. She expected not to be charged with domestic battery and not to be "sent to lock-up for not going to school because she is not a threat to anyone." She didn't like school, and she wanted to give input for how to be successful with terms of probation regarding school. She wanted the option to do online school because she knew she would be more successful. This option was not considered by the probation officer or the courts. She coped with her family situation of an alcoholic mom and abuse. She was violated on probation for leaving home without permission, missing school, and crossing the state line to see her friends. She turned herself in after being on the run and was sent to lock-up. She questions the logic/fairness of commitment for not going to school. She recommends that "girls should be able to tell what they need (instead of adults telling them what they need)." (4, W)

Her System Experience and Expectations

The next section will explain how 1) girls describe the experience of the process

and their interactions with key decision-makers and 2) the impact of the disconnect

between her experience and expectations. This finding suggests/provides evidence that

for girls, social control processes coupled with experiences and interactions with agents

of social control through the process add more strain and distrust of system. Participants

felt they had "no chance in court," felt it was a "set up."

Girls' experiences of the process and system response. Descriptions by girls of

how the juvenile justice system process was experienced along the process of arrest(s),

being on probation, and court experiences are included. Regardless of the initial path into

the juvenile justice system (family, foster care, school), the participants expressed an

experience of unfair treatment. The failure to include them or investigate further was what the girls' perceived as the unfairness of the system. Their focus was on the process being unfair, the requirements being unfair, the treatment being unfair, and the judgement being unfair. For the most part, what the girls expected to happen or wanted to happen, did not. The resulting impact were feelings of abandonment, frustration, blame, judgement, strain in being silenced, and being misunderstood by people who girls believed had decision-making power: law enforcement, probation officers, public defenders, judges, and child welfare investigators (see Table 2).

Table 2

Essence of Justice System Experience

Girls' Perspective of Self in Involvement	Girls' Perspective of System Response
Doesn't comply with terms of probation	Feels 'set up' by parents and probation officers. Not understood, behaviors are punished.
Family frustrations, don't like or agree with rules	Frustration not being listened to, their side not investigated
Questions outcome (arrest, violation, lock-up)	Sense of unfair treatment
Doesn't understand process, lacks information about court, what to expect, potential consequences	Not enough communication, making time or effort to sit with them and explain or ask questions
Reflects and observes behavior of staff	Feels judged
Needing/wanting attention, communication	Feeling no one "showed up" for them
Loss of control/powerlessness when not allowed to talk	Decisions are made without her voice or input

Note. Author's Table

Disconnect between Girls' Expectations and Multiple System Responses to Her

This research sought to better understand how girls describe the context of their juvenile justice system involvement. Participants attributed their reason for lock-up to violations of probation or to picking up new charges. This led to examining the

narratives of what brought girls into the system, patterns for recurring involvement and also how the girls themselves experienced the interaction with system decision-makers. There was a striking disconnect between what the participants described they experienced and what they expected from adult system decision-makers (child protection investigators, principals, police officers, probation officers, public defenders, and judges). Use of the words, "should" were recurring. The girls believed people should show up for them and assume responsibility to understand their side of story and make things "better." The disconnect itself, the way they experienced the reality of the process and the response to her had an impact on her perception of the system. This theory of gendered system experience features the emerging disconnect between systems response and girls' expectation is a central measure of the additional strain that must also be considered as part of the gendered context of her system involvement. Examples of girls' expectations of adults to show up for them and/or investigate versus the reality of the system response to her are illustrated. The pattern of disconnect is seen across all the decision-making points from their interaction with child protection investigators, law enforcement when they were arrested, through experiences with public defender, probation officer, and the judge in the court process that led to their lock-up.

Expected further investigation. This was a theme around girls wanting or expecting to have voice, to talk and share their side of the story and expecting adults to ask more questions. When decision-makers did not investigate further, girls felt silenced, with no voice in process or decisions, and feeling blamed.

> Jasmin was in lots of foster homes, shared being hurt by adopted mom who put her back into the system ages 6-12. Reflected that there "should be better screening and backgrounds for caseworkers and parents. She expected more people to be like her guardian ad-litem. Case managers should visit every week or

every 2 weeks because so much can happen." She wanted an on call therapist so she can talk anytime. Jasmin says, "there should be investigations before sentencing to figure out what was really going on regarding me and my mom-in court, it was me versus mom and not hearing child's side." (8, M)

Aiyana wished child welfare investigators would do more than ask questions. "If there are reports of physical and sexual abuse, they should do something before it's too late, the kid is hurting." (16, NA)

From Gabriella's perspective, probation can be improved by "investigating the parents or the people calling to make report to violate rather than believing them right away." (30, H)

Tasha described wanting "to be able to tell my side of the story and explain why, what happened, and what they were going through" in court. She wants world to know, "it is not easy for a teen girl to lose their mom and do things grownups have to do; it's not fun either." Instead, the judge made an example of her in the courtroom. She expected that her case shouldn't be in front of other people. She also didn't feel public defender was helpful because 'he was an older white man" (and she was Black). (5, A)

Expected fairness. Participants expected juvenile decision-makers to be fair, for the process to be fair but decisions were often experienced as judgement or unfair punishment because decision-makers did not take circumstances into account.

Participants talked about unfair and hostile verbal and physical treatment by law enforcement.

Tiana shared that because she was Black, cop pulled over while she was walking arrested her and called her ""N word." (7, A)

Grace felt treated "like shit" by police at school, she was scared, thought she was pregnant and he shoved her against the gate and it scared her. (9, W)

Tasha described her experience of law enforcement treating her "nasty." She expected that she would be read her rights (but was not). (5, A)

Participants were frustrated with unfair terms of probation that they felt should change so they weren't set up to fail.

Brianna recommends that probation not be as long; "I "should" be able to change where [I'm] living if something happens where I'm at." (13, A)

Imani expected the adults making decisions to know "when someone is charged with domestic battery, they are most likely being abused." Her probation terms included 6pm curfew, going to school and not disrespect mom. She believed "the terms of probation should be realistic, make it step by stop, and if parents are unwilling--know there is only so much a kid can do." She expected more from her probation officer, "My probation officer knew I was being abused but she was buddy buddy with my mom and wouldn't help." (15, A)

Tasha felt her probation officer did treat her fairly. However, she felt that terms of probation needed to change. "Probation curfew should be changed to align with city curfew time, shorten probation time, fewer sanctions and stick to one goal," she said. (5, A).

Participants shared perspectives of unfair court outcomes and what "should" have

happened.

Michelle recommends that kids be "let to talk and explain situation… " I had to sit in detention on a charge that wasn't true." (19, W)

Briana believed "court should give more chances, I pled guilty to petit theft to go home rather than case to go to trial. I spent two months and one week in detention before going to placement [residential lockup]." (13, A)

Jasmin talked about unfair court decision and what should have happened based on her charges, "I should have been put in mental health facility first, then in a low risk instead of a lock down because I don't have enough points to be here." (8, M)

Monique had to go to court in handcuffs and they " don't let anyone speak" She wanted her public defender to believe her that she didn't steal, wanted to tell judge she didn't need to go to program because she didn't do anything. Wanted them to give her lie detector test and DNA test so she could prove herself. (25, A)

Expecting someone to show up for them. The girls described expectations of

adults who they see as having power within systems (principal, probation officer, public

defender, judge) to care and speak up or show up and make effort to do the right thing on

their behalf. What they experienced instead was a feeling they did not matter.

Tiana**'s** probation officer "never came and didn't do anything." She expected probation officers to "actually come talk and work with kids and care." She had the same expectation for child protective investigators who had come to her

house, "that they have more contact with them to actually try to help." (7, A)

Kiara believes attorneys and judges can make a lot of positive difference in lives of girls. However, she felt she was not treated fairly. "[My] public defender was not helpful, there was more he could have done before sending me to a program. " I was only on probation once and could've gone on probation again, then see how it went from there." Likewise, she didn't think her probation officer was helpful either. Kiara expected more, " I only saw him once, and only talked to him one time before coming to program….he's not trying to get me out of program [residential lockup]." (10, A)

Gabriella experienced victimization in school by teachers. One day "teacher was talking poorly about my mom." She reported what happened to principal and principal "did nothing." From her perspective, probation can be improved by "investigating the parents or the people calling to make report to violate rather than believing them right away." She had two different public defenders. The first one treated her fairly. She expressed frustration with the second public defender, "they shouldn't lie and tell you something is going to happen when it doesn't and they should let you talk in court." In court, "hear them out before you jump to conclusions…you don't know their story, everyone is not the same" (30, H)

Jada expressed that it was not fair that she only spoke to public defender five minutes before court and he told her to plea or she would be charged as an adult. She also had a warning for adults, "don't tell girls it is the end of the road--it is not. We still have a chance to start over." (27, A)

Expected better communication. Participants expected better communication

from the people representing the system and interacting with her. Often times the process

was not explained which contributed to frustration and distrust.

Melissa explained that her biggest life challenge has been dealing with her son's caseworker in the child welfare system. She does not have custody of her two year old son and he was being adopted. She was frustrated with lack of communication but also that "if they actually explained things it would improve the court process, they didn't let me ease" [into understanding what it meant for her to be going to a residential lock up program and away from her son]. (24, A)

Juliette did not feel treated fairly in court because of her public defender. She recommended it would have been better by "not having so many court dates and needing more helpful public defenders and more communication." (22, W)

Summary

The system experiences of girls cannot be separated from her life experiences or her perceptions about the system response and treatment. The intersection of lived experiences, coping behaviors, non-compliant behaviors and the system response to her and her behaviors is all part of the context for her system experience which can impact behavior. The pathways context is what participants experienced and wanted agents of social control to know about them or give her a chance to explain the "why" of her story, the why of her actions (the why she was fighting, the why she ran away, the why she was using substances). The participants who were in lock up have shared what matters to them about the process and their expectations. The participants have shared the impact of feeling judged and/or punished. The failure of adults to show up for them was experienced as the punishment. The experience of having no voice, being victimized, discriminated and/or misunderstood along the process is the nuance—that can impact "noncompliance" and/or coping strategies are part of the gendered context of her behaviors. Additionally, the context for her calls to improve the process are what she wanted decision-makers to do better; these recommendations and insights are directly grounded in the disconnect that resulted between what she expected and the response she received (see Table 3).

Table 3

Impact of Disconnection

Girls' Expectations	Impact/sense of unfair treatment
Someone to show up/effort	Feels she doesn't matter
Be fair	Discriminated against, no chance
Investigate	Invisible, powerless, judged
Let her give input	Decisions made for her
Ability to explain context, give her side of story	No voice/silenced
Fair terms of probation	Feels set up by parents and probation officers. Not understood, behaviors are punished
Communicate	Frustration, distrust
Believe her	Blamed, judged
Understand her and her "why"	Misunderstood

Note. Author's Table

Girls' Call for Changes in the Process

　　Participants had specific recommendations about the processes that should change. The very core or "essence" of the processes she wanted to charge were directly related to how they experienced the responses by the system. Table 4 below summarizes the participants' call for changes in the process to help girls. They are about ensuring their voice, story being heard, having opportunities to share what happened and why or input in decisions/outcomes, investigating their claims, communicating more, getting to know them and building a relationship, and ultimately believing them rather than judging them. These themes illustrate hope for how people who work with girls can "do better by girls."

Table 4

Girls' Perspectives: A call for change in process

Girl	Change
1	Better preparation by system people
2	Don't give up on girls
3	Better follow up and investigation by child protection investigators
4	Reporting of child abuse by mother cases should have been reported, further investigated and not closed out. Investigate her charges and the context. She questions the logic/fairness of commitment for not going to school.
5	Wanted to tell her side of the story, the way, explain what happened, and the context for what going through. Don't judge/make example of her in court (shaming)
6	Change the terms of probation
7	Give kids chance to speak and use terms kids can understand. Probation officers to "show up" for them
8	Child welfare case managers to visit foster children weekly or bi-weekly because so much can happen. Want access to therapist anytime. Questions fairness of being sent to high risk placement and need for alternative mental health that is not a lock down setting. Important to hear the child's child and investigate what is really going on. Believe the child.
9	Doesn't believe she matters. Wants more of a voice in what is going on. And also for her family to have had opportunity to explain (more sympathy for families)
10	Believes there was more that public defender could have done to keep her out of commitment program, opportunity to tell judge it wasn't her fault and explain herself. Wants the system to be willing to help them and see beyond "acting hard."
11	Keep on long term probation instead of sending away, get more chances on probation.
12	DCF to investigate how a situation started and how it happened; to see both sides of the story (not just what parent says) or assume all the blame is on her in court.
13	Child should have someone to go to [for help] without the foster parent knowing.
14	Recommends having access to someone while in foster care without foster parent knowing. Give more chances in court and explain the process of what is happening
15	Change the assumption of the court by which they operate for them to know that when someone charged with domestic battery, they are most likely being abused. Decision-makers need to know that only so much a kid can do if parents are unwilling.
16	Process should include getting to know the people's stories more because it matters
17	Court system to give more chances
18	Wanted someone to sit down with; more support with/along the court process. Someone to "show up"
19	Let kids talk and explain the situation, charge was not true
20	Say goodbye to guardians as part of the process before being sent away
21	Be able to share story with court
22	Not having so many court dates, needing more helpful public defenders and more communication from the system
23	Pushed/rushed into commitment program and getting more time in lock up instead of being helped.
24	Explain things to her, let her ease into and understand what was going to change
25	Had to go to court in handcuffs, no one allowed to speak. She wanted them to give her lie detection test and DNA test so she could prove herself
26	Public defenders to listen. Change everything from the way that officers come at juveniles, to judges' procedures, and whey they send some kids off (to lockup)
27	Chance to talk in court, not fair that she only spoke to public defender five minutes before court and he told her to plea or she would be charged as an adult.
28	Pay attention to foster parents, explain the court process to kids, and bring in restorative justice process.
29	Let her share her side of the story
30	Public defender shouldn't lie; tell you one thing then it doesn't happen. They should let you talk in court. Investigate parents that are calling to make reports.
31	Be able to talk to judge and for public defender to be more supportive.
32	Able to talk as part of the court process

Note: Author's Table

Participants' messages to adults were related to the impact of the response (e.g., feeling down or unsupported by adult decision-makers along the system). These changes were directly related to the expected behaviors/actions by system decision-makers and what she wanted them to understand and do differently for other girls in the future. Participants' recommendations for improving the court process had an underlying perception that if they had opportunity to share what happened or have their story heard in court, that the outcome may have been different.

Get to know them and their life story. For example, one participant said, "put yourselves in our shoes. You don't know what we've been through, then could work better with us…research our diagnoses to help us and know us, doesn't mistreat us." Similarly, another participant said she wanted the adults to know "it was hard, I felt like no one loved or cared." Eventually, she cared for herself and "her past made her who she is but she can change." Another said, she needed people to know, "it is not easy for a teen girl to lose their mom and do things grownups have to do; it's not fun either." And why developing a relationship with girls is so important to girls, "develop relationship so that girls feel safe to open up. Be patient." Another girl who had overcome homelessness, said "get to know our stories more."

Believe them, don't judge. One participant wanted to remind, "It isn't always as it looks. It is not "right" to judge her." Another kept saying "I am not a bad person, don't judge." One girl who felt like the system could "break you," had a message to decision-makers to stop the blaming, "You don't know their story. Everyone is not the same. Hear them out before you jump to conclusions." Another participant who had recently

overcome discovering information about her life, pled for adults not to judge girls, "there are always two sides to the story."

Show up for girls. In general, girls wanted the system to help and "make it better" for other girls/young women that have experienced what they have. One participant warned, "Don't tell girls it is the end of the road--it is not. We still have a chance to start over." One girl who experienced sexual violence remarked about her expectation of adults to understand, "Each girl is different, some heal fast some don't; some understand, some don't; some are respectful, some aren't; it is up to you [the adults/staff] to have patience to help them." Another girl who the system wanted to charge as an adult at the age of 13 for battery on school employee, wanted decision-makers to know, "even though we act hard, we are emotional. They should be sensitive and willing to help us." Another participant who was frustrated she had no chance to talk commented, "I see why girls reoffend: because no one is helping them."

Summary of Theory and Findings

Girls' perspectives provide context to understanding the mechanisms and system responses that result in commitment for girls' noncompliance. These mechanisms include:

- violations of probation
- criminalization of coping behaviors
- criminalization of offenses that are family or child welfare system related
- discrimination
- lack of investigation
- interplay of parents with police and/or probation officers

- public defender lack of time or communication

- lack of girls' input or voice

Often, the responses by parents, schools, law enforcement, probation officers, and public defenders were described by girls as unfair treatment. The responses did not meet girls' expectations of someone to show up for them, allow them to have voice, investigate their side of the story, or care about the context of their behaviors. When the "why" doesn't matter, she felt she didn't matter. This "judgement" appears to be a gendered construct that is internalized (described in relationship to being judged of their identity and of their behavior/actions). It is experienced as additional strain.

This suggests that both the social control mechanisms and the "process" itself, or the juvenile justice system response to her is an added layer to understanding the gendered context of her behaviors. All of the participants' recommendations for improving the system tie back to some aspect of their self- identity, value/self-worth. They are asking adults to understand impact of "it," referring to judgement (and strain on their lives) and requesting them not to do that. They are helping adults understand that her story matters (lived experiences, coping strategies and noncompliant behaviors, system responses to her) and the harmful impact when agents of social control judge them. Further, participants' perceived that if they had opportunity to share what happened when decisions were being made, that the outcome may have been different. This potential change is depicted in the alternative theoretical model that suggests when the central measure of "disconnection" changes or is aligned, the impact and outcomes for girls' trajectories could be different (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Improve Outcomes: Alternative Theoretical Model
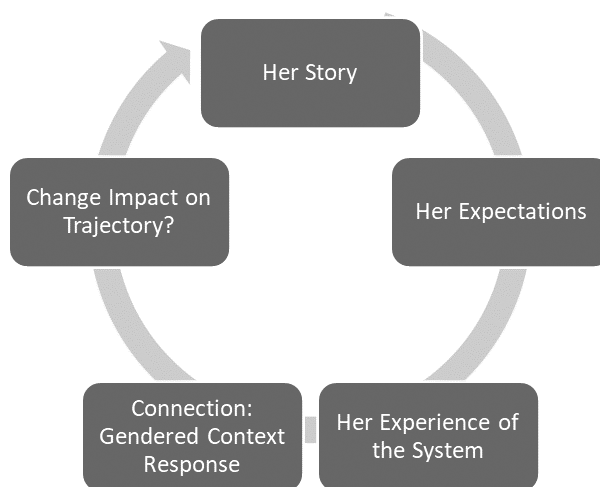
Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

This chapter provides an explanation of the study results, including a discussion of how the expanded gendered context theory of girls' system experience presented fits into existing understandings of both strain and feminist pathways theories. Included is a discussion on how the theory expands current thinking on gendered context theory and places the girls' experience at the center of the theory. This is followed by a section related to the practical implications of these findings and offers transformative policy considerations aligned with a feminist action agenda. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the study limitations and raises additional research questions for future research.

This research is one of the few to include the voices of girls who were in locked residential facilities sharing their experiences about their juvenile justice system involvement including their interactions with system decision-makers. The findings provide insight into girls' family, child welfare and school trajectories and mechanisms at play from initial system involvement to experiences of lock-up as described by the girls. This dissertation shows the impact of the *system response* to girls as part of understanding the gendered context of her system involvement. It has implications for shifts in practices to see different system outcomes. This theory responds to participants' feeling judged for their behavior and their identity. It responds to participants' calls for a different process where they have a voice in court, share their story or explain the "why," interact with system decision makers (child welfare investigators, police, probation officers, public defenders) that show up for them, communicate better, get to know them, believe them and investigate their claims further and not judge them. Instead, girls

experienced unfair treatment that was different from their expectations. Many were pushed out of school, victimized in school, victimized in foster care and silenced in court. They felt they had "no chance." or felt "set up." The essence of girls' recommendations for improving the system were directly tied back to how she experienced the system response and the impact that going through the process had on her. The way participants described their experiences and interactions with decision-makers that resulted in judgement without knowing their life story was experienced as punishment (as gendered strain). Girls' self-identification with "judgement" (other's judgement of them) then becomes part of girls' gendered experience. This makes it part of the *context for their juvenile justice system experience* and their insights are ultimately about breaking free of that judgement or calling on adults to be mindful of the impact. This theoretical framework provides further evidence that when the context of girls' experiences are not taken into account and coping behaviors are criminalized, further disconnection, distrust and additional trauma and strain are experienced by the girls.

Theory Application-Existing Theories

The research findings complement existing feminist pathway theories/and strain theories as well as recent qualitative studies focused on girls in the juvenile justice system (see literature review in Chapter 2). The findings help improve understanding of gendered context theory within feminist literature.

Feminist pathways theory. Feminist theory examines control over the behaviors of girls and women through paternal practices, including judicial paternalism (Chesney-Lind, 1989; Pasko, Okamoto & Chesney-Lind, 2014). Feminist pathways literature suggests the importance of understanding girls' trauma and how that is linked to

trajectories into juvenile justice and how their behaviors to trauma are criminalized (Wattanaporn & Holtfreter, 2014). Belknap and Holsinger (2006) found that girls indicate their delinquent behaviors were related to their experiences of abuse. Today there is a growing body of qualitative research providing context to girls' juvenile justice system of the ways that trauma impacts girl's delinquency and responses that inform feminist pathways theory (Anderson & Walerych, 2019; Wattaporn & Holtfreter, 2016; Morash 2016; Zahn et al, 2010). The narratives of the lived experiences of girls from this research complement feminist pathways theory. This theory expands definition of a gendered pathway to include not just girls in the system for family related offenses but examines the paths of all of the participants in lock-up (e.g., foster care and school). Rather than a focus on the offense types, the analysis allows for a more complete picture of girls' non-compliant behaviors in the context of her life and the responses to her. To some, these could be portrayed as antisocial behaviors and different paths (Jones et al., 2014) but this research argues that all participants, including those with felony offenses had some form of strain and/or trauma and initiated coping and survival behaviors that deepened their system involvement (violations for battery, robbery, theft).

The feminist perspective also suggests there are mechanisms at play that impose social control of girls' behaviors through parents (Acoca,1999; Chesney- Lind, 1989), through police decisions to arrest (Strom et al. 2014, Davis, 2007), probation officers decision to violate, and courts that impose court orders (Sherman, 2013; Espinosa & Sorensen, 2016; Chappell, 2018). Literature has documented how some responses can serve to create girls' trust or distrust in police (Hurst et al., 2005), in the system (Garcia & Lane, 2012), in court responses (Morash, 2016). Equally, research has paid attention to

the potential attitudes of decision-makers towards girls in probation (Gaarder et al., 2009) in juvenile court (Anderson & Walyerch, 2019). In the latter and most recent study, Anderson & Walerych,(2019) found that juvenile court officials were able to describe girls' histories of victimization and their juvenile justice system trajectories but were unable to describe a response or differing roles of the system that take these into account in their sanctions. Morash and colleagues (2016) found an indirect effect between the experience of a punitive non-supportive relationship with probation officer that was related to anxiety and reactance, contributing to high recidivism among women. While this research did not focus on the perceptions of agents of social control, the girls' interactions and experiences with each of these key decision-makers help to paint a picture of the cumulative impact of individual responses across multiple systems.

Gendered context theory. This research gives voice to girls' experiences which are central to feminist methodology. When looking at the "context" of what gets girls into trouble, often the focus in the literature is on experiences of childhood physical and sexual abuse, parental incarceration, and school problems that are not taken into account in the response by the system. This research expands that view by offering an additional layer that also needs to be taken into account by the system response to girls. For girls, this research suggests that it is not only the system response (getting suspended, receiving a violation, getting arrested, getting sent to lock up), but it is the *actual experience of system process and response* to her that results in her system experience. When there is a difference or "disconnect" between what she expected would happen and the actual response that she deems unfair, it results in additional strain and/or trauma that must also be considered as part of the equation. This additional strain of continuing to feel judged

or misunderstood offers context to explain why some girls run away from treatment programs, and/or choose not to attend court ordered therapy or treatment. Failing to follow the terms of her court ordered probation that she deems unfair results in noncompliance. Fighting back with someone in her household who may be physically abusing her is a violation of probation that does not take into account the circumstances that led to the behavior(s). Further, when the gendered context of her experience is not taken into account and all blame is placed on her, the assumption is that she is the one that needs to change. This presents negative reaction and/or frustration with the system.

Strain theory. Broidy and Agnew (1997) call attention to expanded definition of "strain" for girls and note that both gender and race are relevant in responses and reactions to strain. When faced with stress, emotions such as anger, guilt, depression, and anxiety have been noted for females whereas males more likely to experience anger (Agnew, 2006). Most interestingly, one of the basis for expanding the theory were the noted gender differences in the literature. Specific to current dissertation research findings, the literature noted differences in *conceptions of fairness* where females were more concerned about the fairness of the process and the treatment of people involved in the interaction for outcomes while males were focused on the fairness of the outcome of the interaction (Broidy & Agnew, 2006). The definition of strain includes failure to be treated just and in fair manner by others (e.g., family, partners, employers). This research argues this extends to others such as teachers and system decision-makers.

Garcia and Lane (2012) point out that a deeper read of the literature uncovers that girls experience and process negative stimuli distinctive from boys (p. 201). They posit that relationship strain is what leads girls' to delinquency and that because of girls'

extensive focus on relationships as part of their adolescent development, relationship strain results in more emotional strain and behavior consequences for girls than for boys (Garcia & Lane, 2012). Relationship strain is expanded and defined to include loss, chaotic and abusive homes, sexual abuse, relational aggression (Garcia &Lane, 2012). This dissertation theory is aligned with this strain theory direction, and suggests that guilt or experiences of judgement may be internalized and experienced as emotional strain by girls where the stimuli (or response) by adults in the system when they make decisions on their behalf that are considered hurtful or unfair. Further, it suggests that delinquency coping can be resilient in light of the abuse and/or stressors. In this way, it expands the view of strain theory that the stressors lead to delinquent behavior and centers girls' experiences and reactions as forms of protection and seeking sense of power in a patriarchal society that may restrict her behavior.

The most significant difference is that this theory of gendered system experience is not a blanket approach. It is individualized because the system response looks different for every girl (e.g., sense of fairness in process and treatment) and girls' expectations differ from one another. Further, an intersectional perspective allows for differences by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, culture, lived experiences, etc. to further inform differences in girls' expectations of the system. Understanding her lived experiences, her coping and protective strategies, her previous system experiences, and her expectations of adults to respond to her needs are critical in responding to her behaviors. Working from this gendered context of her behaviors can help shift the trajectory to a different outcome. There are many points of intervention along the juvenile justice continuum that can positively impact girls' trajectories. This theory puts girls back

at the center of gender-context theory and at center of the equation. It is not only the events that happen to her, it is equally important that decision-makers/agents of social control also understand their role and her expectations of them to experience a more fair process.

The biggest gap in literature is how girls themselves describe their experiences, specifically the system response by key system players to their actions. Few studies have asked girls about their recommendations for system improvement (Patino Lydia & Moore, 2015). This is the first study to build theory linking girls' recommendations back to the context of their lived experiences and interactions along multiple points in the system including education, child welfare and juvenile justice.

Practical Applications/Considerations

The findings help us shift our knowledge and understanding of how girls who end up incarcerated have experienced the multiple system processes and intervention points along the way. The findings challenge systems (education, child welfare, juvenile justice system) to examine their policies and practices and the impact they are having on girls. They provide considerations for how agencies and individuals working with girls in schools, child welfare, and across the juvenile justice system continuum can better support girls. Girls' messages to adults are the "frame" for understanding an alternative decision, process/outcome. From a practice lens, they are also a frame for practitioners to understand how their actions impact the experiences of girls. These are the girls' perspectives of how adults could be more supportive to girls coming in contact with them (that would make a difference). Not all the girls felt their court treatment was unfair, but they all had recommendations for how the system experience could alleviate the impact it

has had on her. This means that it is less about "fixing her" and more about attention on the response to girls who are enmeshed in cycles of trauma and strain. Girls come with their lived experiences *and with expectations* of what they need, or at the very least reactions to what doesn't feel fair or what feels like judgement without someone with decision making power taking the time to understand the whole context. This finding creates an opportunity for schools, child protection, law enforcement, and courts to be safety nets. The attitudes and values of practitioners and decision-makers in these settings about girls' behaviors are places of examination through organizational training and individual self-assessment.

Relationships with Girls. The girls want child protection investigators, public defenders, and probation officers to "show up" for them. They should understand and be trained on the importance of girls wanting to be seen/heard. Girls define their expectations of effort by adults which in turn holds individual people who make up that system accountable for their individual responses. This also helps create opportunity within systems to show practitioners that often it can be just one staff that recognizes that how they interact with a girl can impact her perception of her voice in the system. Staff should be trained to check the assumptions/preconceived notions they bring to the relationship and or how to use their discretion to make decisions in the best interest of girls.

- Get to know the girl, her circumstances, her story without judging her or making assumptions. Incorporate a process for checking "assumptions" and judgement and conclusions that adults/decision-makers reach without knowing the whole story, life story, explanation.

- Juvenile justice system decision-makers not to assume the blame/responsibility is all on the child.

- Emphasis on teachers or mentors as people who could have had positive impact on their life.

Prevention and Therapeutic Interventions. This theory challenges the field to reassess how we have understood the interventions to meet/address the lived experiences of girls. First, the interventions should focus on better understanding and responding girls' coping and survival strategies as well as her expectations and needs before she even comes to the attention of the juvenile justice system. Otherwise, if there is a disconnection, the interventions must first focus on the disconnect girls have experienced between her expectations of adults and the system response and the extent it has impacted her behaviors, feelings, and outcomes. This is the starting place of any intervention and underscores the need for applying positive responses to girls' behaviors in any practice or intervention.

- Girls reported daily use of substances and various types (marijuana, street drugs, prescription, etc.) before their lock-up. Understanding the cycle of addiction means that relapse is part of the process. It begs development of programming that is more effective to treat/help and address the reasons girls are using (stressed, worried, dealing with abuse). With young people, substance abuse programming must be specialized to account for brain development and how this impacts addiction especially when girls are reporting using substances with older partners.

- Better understanding of girls' coping strategies and ways protecting self (i.e.,
  taking beating so could avoid going to school; cutting/suicidal to get a break
  from being home or dealing with pain).

- The trauma of grief and loss or abandonment. Eight girls shared experiencing
  the loss of their mothers. The links to fighting in school are notable (see
  Appendix). This has implications for immediate and ongoing interventions
  when parents are incarcerated or when mothers or grandmothers die.

- The stressors of girls (e.g., instances of homelessness and not knowing where
  they will live) and the survival behaviors related to that (e.g., engaging in sex
  for place to stay or food, petit theft for clothing).

Training/Culture shifting among decision-makers. This theory has
implications for developing training curricula in partnership with girls and young women.
The training can provide examples of the nuance of how decisions are made and focus on
the disconnect between girls' expectations and needs versus responses and common
agency practices. Exercises should address the concepts that "decisions get made for
them" and they have no input even though they believe they have good recommendations
and more information. Girls describe the impact of this as experiencing loss of control
and feeling unseen/silenced. Knowing that having a voice is important to girls gives
public defenders and judges a frame to recognize this need. Therefore allotting time to
explain to girls the court process, what to expect, and the reasons they do not get to talk
in court in language they can understand would be helpful practice. Additionally,
building in a practice for public defenders to collect and introduce what girls want to be
able to say or share as part of their role in defending girls in court would be beneficial.

Juvenile court practices. There are implications for judges, public defenders and state attorneys regarding girls wanting to "talk" in court. Not understanding the concept of an adversarial system, girls feel loss of voice which is important to her adolescent development. Loss of voice is also critical component to a person who may feel out of control in their life as a result of trauma. What rights do juveniles have in court if they feel they are wrongly accused or being judged unfairly? Because their story matters to them. Their identity/judgement matters to them, the impact of juvenile court practices on girls should be further examined. Further discretionary practices such as terms of probation, bench commitments, court order violations, should be assessed in regard to how disconnected they are from girls' expectations. Do girls continue to be held to different standards and thus experience informal and formal social controls that perpetuate more strain?

Public Policy Implications

Listening to girls' stories is the transformative agenda. Chesney-Lind and Morash (2013) note that feminist criminologists must challenge damaging policies and advance policies to center the experiences of women and girls. There is intention not to "pathologize crime victims or girls in conflict with the law," but to describe mechanisms (or oppressive arrangements) that lead to victimization or harsh punishment of girls (Chesney-Lind & Morash, 2013). Acting on and applying and further investigation is the call to action.

System implications. For some girls, school is part of the initial and/or recurring system interaction. Similarly, foster care and child protection investigations are early part of system involvement—they are related to girls' initial distrust of systems. Themes

emerged around the need for thoroughness of investigations where girls are involved or feel wrongly accused (including by child welfare, schools, police, public defender, judge, and probation officers). These findings have implications for prevention and interrupting the trajectories of girls into the juvenile justice system. Girls are calling for a system process where agents of social control get all sides of the story as part of their decision-making. This calls for more oversight and attention to the rights of girls and of system failures to investigate and follow through.

Assessment tools. Girls' descriptions of the system were focused on the unfairness of the response to her behaviors. The way she understands and or describes juvenile justice system involvement is specific to her experience with it and her perception of what happened. There was less focus about the charge (offenses). Girls did not imply an understanding of the impact of the system on their future. They were worried about not being able to see their family and loss of freedom). However, this finding lends itself to re-evaluating measures of risk of recidivism for girls.

Reassess terms of juvenile probation and noncompliance. Girls' recommendations regarding probation lend themselves to specific policy recommendations. Specifically, girls raised the issue of parents/guardians calling probation officers to complain about their daughters and/or probation officers leveraging the calls to threaten girls for commitment. Are the terms of probation set up for kids to fail? Is 7pm or 8pm a realistic curfew time for adolescents? This has implications for policymakers, probation chiefs regarding implementing gender-specific grids to guide use of detention and/or violations of probation. It also has implications for probation policies

regarding the role of officers and mandated training regarding noncompliance for girls and responding to coping behaviors (running away, not going to school).

Implement safeguards to prevent crossover of girls from foster care into the juvenile justice system. Girls are running from foster care and are reporting abuse while in foster care or charges against their foster parents. They are calling for background screening of foster parents and a better process to be able to report and/or connect to someone to talk to about what is going on in that foster placement. Girls want more voice in where they live. Additionally, they were picking up charges at school.

Examination of school policies. Experiences of victimization or discrimination at school by peers and/or by teachers was the highest reported type of strain among the participants. Many of the girls experienced school suspension for fighting and/or arrests at school for battery on another student or on school employee. A number of girls reported being expelled from school in middle school and/or dropping out. The responsiveness of school policies and practices require further examination to be aligned with girls' reported experiences and expectations for fair treatment.

Limitations

There are several limitations. First, this study and findings are limited to girls who were incarcerated in Florida during a set time period. The participants in the study were from one specific community in Florida and not representative of the entire state. Therefore, it is possible that the responses to girls are reflective of the external and sometimes political environment of that specific community (e.g., norms, availability of alternatives, training and expertise of staff, leadership, media sensationalism). Those

factors are outside the scope of this study. However, the findings provide a frame by which to interpret girls' system experiences from other communities.

Another limitation is the use of archival transcript data that prevented the ability to ask follow-up questions as theoretical frameworks emerged. The details/context regarding the "why" or the order of events was not provided. For example, in regards to physical fighting at home, less was known about "who said what, who did what, why did they hit/push? What did they think about it afterwards?" While girls gave reasons why they ran away, and sometimes offered details for how long they were gone and where they went, the details about how they left, whether there was any contact with families, and if this was different behavior after being on probation than before justice system involvement is not clear. It appears running away was a pattern before probation but it cannot be confirmed with participants. Similarly, many of the girls violated probation for not going to school. Many shared not liking school and experiencing victimization. It is not clear why they did not go to school while on probation. There was not opportunity to ask them if the reasons they did not go to school were different while on probation than they were before. Similarly, few details were available about why they broke curfew, what they were doing and who they were with. And in these cases, how often did the parents call probation officer and/or police? While girls reported being in detention multiple times, the context for how she ended up there while on probation is not known (e.g., pick up orders, probation officer curfew checks, parents calling police, ankle monitors).

The girls' stories are continuous, they are never linear. While girls referenced how old they were when certain life events occurred, the interview data did not contain dates

or relative time points making it difficult to interpret when things happening (e.g., in/out foster care, abuse, multiple abuse, running away, use of substances, running again, domestic violence, foster care, chronic patterns, etc.). While the girls' stories may be subject to under-reporting of their behaviors and actions or of recall problems, the advantage of this study is that the girls were ages 14-18 at time of interview. Childhood and adolescent experiences were relatively recent and the responses by the system were likely being processed during the interview for the first time. In many cases, this was the first time they had a voice to share what they wanted to be different.

Future Research

The next step is to test the theory to see if the extent of disconnect between girls' expectations and system response impacts girls outcomes. Future research should partner with girls to develop research questions. These findings raise additional research questions regarding aspects that may impact the theory:

- Is there a gender difference in emphasis on process and specifically what "should" happen as a result of contact with the juvenile justice system? Do girls' have higher accountability or different expectations of system actors, sense of justice, and/or fairness?
- Do girls self-identify with "judgement" (other's judgement of them) in a way that is differently than for boys? Is this system experience part of the gendered context and what are the implications of this for working with youth on a larger scale?

- Is there a relationship between age of first arrest or age of first violation by the system and girls' experiences of connection, disconnection, coping strategies, preservation/survival strategies?

- Are there racial differences in system expectation, treatment, and internalized strain/impact?

- Does gender and race/ethnicity of judge, public defender, and juvenile probation officer matter in girls' experience?

- Is there a difference in treatment (outcome and experience) among girls with family offenses versus girls without family related offenses? Does it vary by jurisdiction and alternatives available in a community?

The findings suggest methodological considerations in future research. This includes developing a life story calendar to plot the age and critical events that happened in her life. The timeline of events in reference to point along the juvenile justice continuum along with her actions or related coping behaviors and any additional trauma during system involvement are important to understand. In what ways does trauma during life trajectory or at least while on probation add to or impact violation of probations and deeper system involvement consequences (see Espinosa & Sorenson 2016; Gehrig, 2018).

Quantitative analyses. This research provides evidence for the need to specifically assess the mechanisms at play for girls returning to the system for contempt or noncompliance. Specifically, researchers should look not only at number of violations of probation (VOP)'s, failure to appear (FTA), and valid court orders (VCO)'s but also by reason by gender and race/ethnicity. Longitudinally, how many of these girls end up in

the adult system and for what?

Quantitative measures. Develop a measure for sense of fairness that includes experiences in child welfare system, and/or school as part of understanding court system response for girls. There is a need for development of a measure for gendered strains (that includes runaway, substance use, and fighting with mother or sibling) that can be tested and validated as part of any gender analyses.

The next step from a qualitative perspective is to engage more girls about their life events to better understand how they made them feel and how they think they coped with each event or the accumulation of them. This will help connect the dots, create a life story calendar of gendered experiences and gendered reactions (internal/external).

Conclusion

The findings of this grounded theory suggest that the gendered context of girls' system involvement includes her lived experiences, coping strategies, delinquent behaviors, as well as her system experiences. When the actions or response by people who represent systems, such as a principal, child protection investigator, police officer, public defender, judge, probation officer (or all of the above) is different than what she expected, there is a disconnected impact. How she reacts to this experience can impact behaviors. The impact is often additional strain in the form of feeling blamed, judged, or silenced. In this way, the gendered context of girls' system involvement must include the disconnect as part of understanding and responding to her system experience.

This expansion of gendered context theory is significant because the system mechanisms (or mechanisms of social control) that contribute to girls first encounters and recurring system involvement are highlighted through girls' narratives. They include

parents or foster parents calling police, violation of probation for noncompliance, judge warrants for arrest, use of force by police. They give context to how girls end up detained and/or incarcerated for less serious offenses and technical violations than boys. However, it is not only the system outcome (getting suspended, receiving a violation, getting arrested, getting sent to lock up), but it is the actual *process* of the system response to her that results in her system experience. There is nuance in the process and how these responses by the system are experienced by girls (parents turning story on girl when police arrive, lack of investigation of girls' claims by child protection investigators, police, attorneys or judges). The expansion of gendered context theory assumes there are new measures of strain that should be taken into account. This theoretical framework provides further evidence that when the context of girls' experiences are not taken into account and coping behaviors are criminalized, further disconnection, distrust and additional trauma and stress are experienced by the girls. Therefore, experiencing additional strain or trauma from these system responses must be part of the gendered context equation. The emerging theory can be further tested to see if the extent of disconnect between girls' expectations and system response impacts girls outcomes.

This theory has implications for research, policy, practice, and training of decision-makers and the next generation of practitioners. Regardless of her path into the juvenile justice system, the common theme shared by girls is unfairness in the process and feeling judged or silenced. This results in disconnection since girls expect the system to ask, help and respond with understanding to what is happening in their lives. Applying a gendered context lens to current policies can help shift girls' individual trajectories to a different outcome. There are many points of intervention along the juvenile justice

continuum that can positively impact and show up for her. The findings should challenge systems (education, child welfare, juvenile justice system) to examine their policies and practices to assess whether they are really doing what they were intended to do. The girls expected system decision makers (child welfare investigators, police, probation officers, public defenders) to show up for them, communicate better, get to know them. Is this part of the role of staff or mission of their agencies? Are agencies assessing the impact on the clients they serve and the differences by gender? Are they monitoring this and making adjustments as needed in their planning and development, new initiatives, leadership, staff hiring, staff training curricula, policies and procedures?

This expanded theory puts girls back at the center of gender-context theory and at the center of the equation. Few studies have asked girls about their recommendations for system improvement (Patino-Lydia & Moore, 2015). This is the first study to build theory linking girls' recommendations back to the context of their lived experiences and interactions along multiple points in the system including education, child welfare and juvenile justice.

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Appendix

Gendered Strains by Path

Gendered Strains - Family Path

	Participant															
Participant ID	1	2	4	5	6	7	11	12	14	16	20	21	25	27	29	30
Race/Ethnicity	B	W	W	B	W	B	W	M	W	N	B	B	B	B	M	H
Type of Stressor/Strain																
Witnessing violence										x			x	x		
Sexual assault/abuse			x									x				
Physical abuse			x		x								x			
Sexual exploitation	x								x					x	x	
Homelessness	x									x			x			
Parent incarceration				x											x	
Mother/caregiver death				x	x		x				x					
Removal from home/foster care placement(s)															x	
Victimization in school	x			x		x	x	x	x				x			x
Victimization in foster care																
Racial discrimination						x		x	x			x	x	x		
Fighting/conflict with mother	x	x	x				x	x				x			x	
Trauma/unspecified						x				x		x			x	x
Total Strain Count	4	1	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	1	4	5	3	5	2
Type of Coping Strategies																
Running away from home	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Running away from foster care																
Daily substance use	x	x			x	x			x	x	x		x	x	x	x
Fighting with other at home (sibling, father)				x	x	x			x	x	x				x	
Fighting with others (at school)			x	x	x	x					x	x		x	x	
Other survival strategies												x				
Not going to school			x		x	x			x							
Drop out of school										x		x				
Total Coping Count	2	1	2	3	5	5	1	1	4	4	4	4	2	3	4	2
Total Gendered Strain and Coping Count	6	2	5	6	7	8	4	4	7	7	5	8	7	6	9	4

B=Black, W=White, M=Multiracial, N=Native American, H=Hispanic

Note. Author's Table

Gendered Strains - Foster Care Path

	Participant							
Participant ID	3	8	9	13	15	17	22	28
Race/Ethnicity	W	M	W	B	B	B	W	B
Type of Stressor/Strain								
Witnessing violence		x			x			
Sexual assault/abuse		x	x	x	x			x
Physical abuse	x			x	x			x
Sexual exploitation				x	x			
Homelessness	x			x	x			x
Parent incarceration			x					
Mother/caregiver death	x	x				x		x
Removal from home/foster care placement(s)	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Victimization in school	x			x				
Victimization in foster care		x		x	x	x	x	
Racial discrimination				x				
Fighting/conflict with mother	x				x			x
Trauma/unspecified								
Total Strain Count	6	5	2	8	8	3	2	6
Type of Coping Strategies								
Running away from home	x	x	x		x		x	
Running away from foster care			x	x				
Daily substance use	x	x	x	x				x
Fighting with other at home (sibling, father)								
Fighting with others (at school)		x	x	x	x	x		
Other survival strategies								
Not going to school				x			x	
Drop out of school		x	x					
Total Coping Count	2	4	5	4	2	1	2	1
Total Gendered Strain and Coping Count	8	9	7	12	10	4	4	7

B=Black, W=White, M=Multiracial

Note. Author's Table

Gendered Strains - School Path

Type of Stressor/Strain	Participant							
Participant ID	10	18	19	23	24	26	31	32
Race/Ethnicity	B	W	W	W	B	M	B	B
Type of Stressor/Strain								
Witnessing violence	x			x		x	x	
Sexual assault/abuse								
Physical abuse						x		
Sexual exploitation		x				x		
Homelessness						x		
Parent incarceration								
Mother/caregiver death								
Removal from home/foster care placement(s)						x		
Victimization in school	x	x	x			x		x
Victimization in foster care						x		
Racial discrimination	x							
Fighting/conflict with mother						x		
Trauma/unspecified						x	x	
Total Strain Count	3	2	1	1	0	9	2	1
Type of Coping Strategies								
Running away from home						x		x
Running away from foster care								
Daily substance use	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Fighting with other at home (sibling, father)	x				x			
Fighting with others (at school)	x				x	x	x	x
Other survival strategies			x					
Not going to school		x			x			
Drop out of school			x			x		
Total Coping Count	3	2	3	2	3	4	3	2
Total Gendered Strain and Coping Count	6	4	4	3	3	13	5	3

B=Black, W=White, M=Multiracial
Note. Author's Table