

Ethnographic perspectives on youth justice supervision and the supervisory relationship

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Declaration

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Abstract

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The supervisory relationship is said to be the key territory in which children draw meaning and benefit from their community supervision experience within the youth justice system. Yet the intricacies of the supervisory relationship and the nature of everyday supervision in which it develops are little researched. It is therefore critical to deepen our understanding of supervisory interactions if we are to identify what is and is not effective, and develop practices to best support desistance accordingly. I sought to do so by means of a 17-month ethnographic study in two youth offending services (YOSs), involving extensive participant observation, interviews with 26 children and 46 YOS professionals, as well as ‘following’ ten of the children during their ‘supervision journeys’. Drawing on both psychosocial and criminological theoretical windows, I examine the nature and meaning of everyday youth justice supervision to the children and professionals involved.

Following introductory chapters which set the scene, the first data chapter comprises an in-depth examination of the children’s backgrounds and characteristics, and the implications of these for their engagement in involuntary supervision and the supervisory relationship. The second two data chapters consider the children’s and professionals’ perspectives, respectively, on what they perceive to ‘help’ in supervision; the chapters include discussion of the children’s narratives of offending, sanctions and ‘self’ and how these things impact on supervision. The final two data chapters provide an exposition of supervisory relationships, the constraints and enablers of their development, and what it meant to have a ‘helping’ relationship. I conclude that relationships with the greatest helping potential are characterised by two things: the *human nature of their boundaries*, insofar as they necessitate professional engagement that goes beyond the supervisory role; and *reciprocity*, premised on an attachment of mutual care and communication.

The final chapter draws out implications of the research for theory, policy and practice. I argue that although the supervisory relationship is valorised by both children and professionals as the most helping aspect of supervision, its primacy in practice is militated against by structural, organisational, ideological, financial, political, social and cultural contextual factors. Viewed through the lens of the Taylor Review, a recent major government-hosted appraisal of the youth justice system, the findings give credence to its conclusions and suggest the need to reignite public discussion about whether youth justice services are best configured to support children's desistance in the current context.

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Glossary

ABH	Actual Bodily Harm
ACE	Adverse Childhood Experiences
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
Asset	The standard youth justice assessment framework
AssetPlus	The revised version of Asset
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CSE	Child Sexual Exploitation
DTO	Detention and Training Order (a custodial sentence for under-18s, the first half of which is spent in custody and the latter half in the community)
EBD	Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties
ETE	Education, Training and Employment
FTE	First Time Entrant
ISS	Intensive Supervision and Surveillance (previously known as the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme - ISSP)
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
PSR	Pre-Sentence Report
PWITS	Possession with intent to supply (drugs)
RMP	Risk Management Plan
RNR	Risk-Need-Responsivity
RO	Referral Order (a form of community sentence)
ROSH	Risk of Serious Harm
UPW	Unpaid Work
VMP	Vulnerability Management Plan
YJB	Youth Justice Board
YJEPC	Youth Justice Effective Practice Certificate (previously known as the Professional Certificate in Effective Practice – PCEP)
YOI	Young Offender Institution (a form of youth custody)
YOS	Youth Offending Service
YOT	Youth Offending Team
YRO	Youth Rehabilitation Order (a form of community sentence)

Chapter 1: Introduction

Eight years ago I found myself in the lucky position of working as secretary to a youth justice review for a political think-tank. Again and again the professionals and children with whom we spoke emphasised that the *supervisory relationship* was the key territory in which children draw meaning and benefit from their community supervision experience. My interest was further sparked by seeing for myself the desistance-promoting potential of these relationships. But the youth justice literature had relatively little to say about the intricacies of such relationships. Much of what is known about supervisory relationships is drawn from probation research, which although likely transferable, leaves many questions unanswered. What do such relationships look and feel like? What factors help and hinder their development? Why and how do they harbour capacity for positive change?

Importantly, it became clear that the nature of everyday youth justice supervision in which such relationships transpire (or not) was a largely unexamined area.¹ This is despite the fact that community orders, of which everyday supervision is part, involved 17,500 children (68 per cent of court sentences for under-18s) in 2016-17 (Youth Justice Board/ Ministry of Justice, 2018a: 20). Our knowledge of everyday supervision is drawn from empirical studies that have examined related issues within youth justice, such as girls' offending (Sharpe, 2012) engagement techniques (Ipsos MORI, 2010) and intensive youth offending service programmes (Biehal et al., 2010; Gray, 2013a). There has been no study of everyday youth justice supervision in England and Wales, yet deepening our understanding of supervisory interactions is critical if we are to identify what is and is not effective, and develop practices to best support desistance accordingly (McNeill and Weaver, 2010; Trotter and Evans, 2010). To this end, the aims of my study have been two-fold: to understand what happens in supervision and what children and professionals perceive to be helpful or not with regards to promoting desistance, and to unpack what children and professionals consider to be a *helping* relationship.

¹ By youth justice supervision, I refer to the arrangements for supervising under-18s on court orders in the community by youth offending services (YOS). Relevant court orders include Referral Orders, Youth Rehabilitation Orders and Detention and Training Order licence. These typically involve meetings between the child and a YOS worker, which vary in frequency depending on the child's assessed level of risk.

Current events in youth justice arguably make such matters more salient. In September 2015, the Secretary of State for Justice announced a ‘departmental review of the youth justice system’ in England and Wales, led by Charlie Taylor, a former head teacher and government education adviser (Gove, 2015). As the first ‘official’ major review of youth justice for ten, and arguably 20, years² it was anticipated as a critical juncture in youth justice policy, due to the widely held expectation that its recommendations would be endorsed by government (Bateman, 2017). But when the review was finally published in December 2016, six months later than planned (SCYJ, 2017),³ it had been demoted to the status of a Ministry of Justice (MoJ) sponsored review, with a lukewarm Government response published alongside, of which more later.

The 1996 Audit Commission report *Misspent Youth*, arguably the last significant review of youth justice at the national policy level, was highly critical of what it saw as an inefficient, ineffective and excusatory model of youth justice. Under the New Labour Government in 1997, which had pledged to be ‘tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime’ (Blair, 1994), the report precipitated the radical reorganisation of youth justice by way of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (Home Office, 1997; Audit Commission, 1996). Reforms included the introduction of youth offending teams (YOTs⁴), the establishment of a national Youth Justice Board (YJB), and the heralding in of a new statutory aim to prevent offending⁵ (Crime and

² It should be noted that the Taylor Review initially excluded courts and sentencing from its terms of reference, but these were included following the interim report of the review in February 2016 (Taylor, 2016a: 1). Three official reviews of youth justice have taken place in the last 20 years. In 1996, the Audit Commission published the findings of its major review of youth justice, *Misspent Youth*. Following this were the Audit Commission’s follow-up review in 2004, which investigated the reformed system (Audit Commission, 2004); and the National Audit Office’s review of the efficiency and effectiveness of the system in 2010 (NAO, 2010), however neither made radical recommendations for reform. In addition in 2010, the Coalition Government published a Green Paper (consultation) on criminal justice (encompassing youth justice), which resulted in the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012. Major reforms relating to youth justice included a new remand framework, which included the transfer of the costs of custodial remands to local authorities; re-introduction of a system of cautioning; several reforms to youth sentencing, included the offence of threatening with a bladed/ pointed article or offensive weapon, which carried a mandatory minimum custodial sentence of four months for 16 and 17 year-olds (for a detailed overview of the implications of the reforms for children, see Hart, 2012). Several non-official major reviews of youth justice have been conducted over this time too, including: *Ten years of Labour’s youth justice reforms: an independent audit* (Solomon and Garside, 2008); *The Independent Commission on Youth Crime and Antisocial Behaviour* (2010); *Rules of engagement: changing the heart of youth justice* (Crossley, 2012); *Youth Justice* (Justice Select Committee, 2013); and the *Independent Parliamentarians’ Inquiry into the Operation and Effectiveness of the Youth Court* (Carlile, 2014).

³ Due to the departure of the Justice Secretary following the European Union referendum.

⁴ Throughout this thesis I use the term YOT and YOS (youth offending service) interchangeably. While a YOT is generally understood to refer to an individual team, while a YOS refers to a service that may encompass several teams, the two study YOSs treated the terms as synonymous.

⁵ Prior to this, work with children who offended was undertaken by social workers as part of children’s social care, in line with the duty to uphold the welfare of children in need, as specified in the Children Act 1989 (Audit

Disorder Act 1998). Significantly, the Act emphasised children's responsibility for their behaviour, replacing the flexible system of youth cautioning with a rigid two-strike rule (the third offence resulting in prosecution) and creating the Reparation Order and Parenting Order.⁶ The Act was widely criticised as regressive by academic commentators (Goldson, 2010; Pitts, 2001):

...it was as if we were entering year zero: a new dawn in dealing with children in trouble as the philosophies of diversion, decriminalization and decarceration were rejected in favour of early intervention aimed at tackling the risk factors, reinforcing the responsibility of parents and making young offenders 'face up' to the consequences of their behaviour. The message was that as far as youth crime was concerned there would be 'no more excuses' (Yates, 2003: 51).

What followed was a deepening of trends that had begun under the Conservative Government in the 1980s, including managerialism and the dominance of the risk discourse (Gelsthorpe, 2013; Goldson, 2007). This led to ever earlier (risk-targeted) intervention to 'nip crime in the bud' (Blair, 2007); the erosion of professional discretion, and an emphasis on standardised, offending-focused interventions to the detriment of relationship-based working (Farrow et al., 2007; Burnett and McNeill, 2005) and children's welfare needs.

Such events are characteristic of late modernity, a distinctive shift in society along economic, political, social and cultural lines, which has altered 'the pattern of risks, insecurities and control problems' (Garland, 2002: 7). This has had significant ramifications for crime and criminal justice responses (Garland, 2002; Daems, 2008). Garland (2002: 7-20) argues that 'a new culture of crime control' has evolved in light of such social changes, pointing to twelve key symptomatic trends in criminal justice since 1970. These include 'the decline of the rehabilitation ideal' (as coined by Allen, 1981); the re-emergence of punitive sanctions and expressive justice; the renewed primacy of the victim (although, I note, without acknowledgement that those who offend are often themselves victims); an emphasis on public protection; politicisation of responses to crime; the ascendancy of social control

Commission, 1996).

⁶ The Parenting Order aims to hold parents to account for their child's behaviour, providing both coercive requirements and support. The Reparation Order involves the child making amends to their victim or the wider community. This was built upon in the Referral Order (RO), which was introduced by the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, and is now provided for in the Powers of Criminal Courts Sentencing Act (2000). RO's require the child to agree a contract aimed at making amends, usually involving community reparation.

explanations for criminal behaviour, superceding psychosocial understandings, and the rise of managerialism.⁷

The rise of the ‘risk society’⁸ (Beck, 1992: 19) is a key explanatory theme for such developments (Garland, 2002; Gelsthorpe, 2013), brought about by the unpredictability and uncertainty of modern life, combined with the disintegration of trust in the face of community fragmentation and subsequent emphasis on individual responsibility (Becks, 1992; Giddens, 1991). Giddens (1991: 80) contends that the upshot is increased ‘ontological insecurity’ as individuals must continuously negotiate the ‘complex diversity of choices’ and yet do so in a society that ‘at the same time offers little help as to which options should be selected’. Viewing individualism as a defining feature of late modernity, Beck (1992: 135-136) argues that social conditions that impact on one’s own life (for example, lack of employment opportunities), must be ‘conceived of as ‘environmental variables’ that can be moderated, subverted or nullified for one’s personal life space’, with the costs of making a ‘wrong’ decision carrying the ‘pain of permanent disadvantage’. In contrast, focusing on the impact of late modernity on young people, Furlong and Cartmel (1997: 113-144) argue that enduring structural inequalities act as an *constraint* on children’s abilities to elude and overcome such risks, yet ‘the intensification of individualism means that crises are perceived as individual shortcomings rather than the outcome of processes which are largely outside the control of individuals’.⁹

Against this backdrop then, Taylor’s review strikes a progressive note. Asserted upfront are the enlightened maxims of ‘see the child first, and the offender second’ and ‘do less’, which

⁷ Also on Garland’s ‘list’ are: changes in the emotional tone of crime policy, the renewal of prison as a response to crime; the growth of crime prevention and community safety arrangements, the expansion of crime control beyond the state, to include civil society and private enterprises, and ‘a perpetual state of crisis’ in criminal justice services. Gelsthorpe (2013) argues that the list should place greater importance on the increasing role of technology (such as electronic monitoring), communitarianism, and restorative justice.

⁸ Beck notes that ‘risk’ is ‘not an intervention of modernity’ but rather that the nature of risk has changed from one of personal risk, associated with ‘bravery and adventure’, to the current era of ‘global danger’ characterised by universal, incalculable, and irreversible risks that ultimately carry the ‘threat of self-destruction of all life on Earth’ (e.g. as a result of nuclear war) (1992: 21-23).

⁹ They also suggest that the protraction of transitions to adulthood and heightened sense of uncertainty brought about by late modernity have had a deleterious effect on children’s mental health, duration of criminal ‘careers’ as well as fear of crime, potentially resulting in defensive behaviour, such as carrying weapons for protection. While their commentary is now over 20 years old, it remains relevant; The Good Childhood Report, which draws predominantly on a range of survey research of children’s subjective well-being in the UK, found that children’s happiness has decreased significantly since 2009-10, with girls much less happier than boys (The Children’s Society/ University of York, 2017). A substantial factor in lower well-being was fear of crime, found to be the most prevalent ‘disadvantage’ experienced by children, estimated to affect 2.2. million 10-17-year-

refers to minimising children’s formal contact with the youth justice system (respectively informed by Haines and Case’s (2015) model of positive youth justice and by the findings of McAra and McVie’s Edinburgh Study for Youth Transitions and Crime) (Taylor, 2016b: 3-4). With regard to YOTs, Taylor’s review proposes radical reforms, arguing for the abolition of the statutory requirement on local authorities to have a YOT (advocating its replacement with a simple duty for multi-agency cooperation) as well as the removal of the ring-fence for MoJ/ YJB funding to YOTs (which would allow this youth justice money to be spent on related services, such as social care)¹⁰ (Taylor, 2016b).¹¹

Taylor’s rationale for such recommendations is that while the creation of the YOT model has resulted in ‘much progress’, it has had the unintended consequence of sometimes facilitating a siloed approach to children who offend, whereby other services relinquish or raise the bar for their support if the YOS is involved (Taylor, 2016b: 6-7; see also, Carlile, 2014; Crossley, 2012; Chard, 2010; Solomon and Garside, 2008; Audit Commission, 2004).¹² The underlying premise is that ‘a criminal justice response alone is not sufficient to deal with children who offend’; more collaborative and creative approaches would be enabled by affording local authorities greater financial and structural flexibility (Taylor, 2016b: 13). The review further distinguishes itself in emphasising the importance of the quality of practitioners and positive working relationships in supporting children to move away from offending (Taylor, 2016b), which is rarely seen in contemporary government publications encompassing youth justice (perhaps with the exception of Ministry of Justice, 2010).

At slight odds with Taylor’s diagnosis, YOTs are often held up as a success story, accredited with driving the substantial reductions in the numbers of children in court and custody (Allen, 2018; Labour Party, 2015) and found to be of overall good quality, in stark contrast with the disastrous state of much of probation following Transforming Rehabilitation (Webster, 2017; HMI Probation, 2017a). The YOT model has accordingly been advocated as a way forward

olds UK wide (2017: 47- 59)

¹⁰ The Youth Justice Grant provided by the MoJ via the YJB traditionally comprises about a third of YOS funding, with the remaining 70 per cent contributed by local authorities and statutory services (Taylor, 2016b: 13).

¹¹ I only focus on the reforms relating to youth justice supervision here, but it should be noted that youth custodial provision is a major focus of the review, specifically the proposal to establish Secure Schools to transform the youth secure estate.

¹² The Audit Commission noted that the high thresholds of mainstream services prevented access to specialist support for YOS-involved children, but did not explicitly identify the involvement of the YOS as a further impediment.

for probation from the Transforming Rehabilitation experiment (Allen, 2018), as well as for young adults (Puffett, 2017; NAPO, 2017; Labour, 2015). However, a more complex picture of youth justice supervision is presented in this thesis, suggesting that although largely dismissed by the Government,¹³ Taylor's conclusions remain relevant and deserve to be the subject of genuine dialogue and action.

Recent developments in the youth justice landscape further attest to the need for research in the field. The youth justice context is one of significant contraction. Over the past ten years, the number of first time entrants to the system has reduced by 85 per cent, while the youth justice cohort¹⁴ has fallen by 81 per cent (YJB/ MoJ, 2018a: 2). This is explained by a decline in offending by children, combined with a decrease in recorded youth crime, engendered by a renewed government commitment to diverting children who have committed minor misdemeanours away from the youth justice system and prosecution (Bateman, 2017). One much publicised consequence has been the changed profile of the children in the system, with those remaining described as 'a smaller, more challenging cohort' (Taylor, 2016b: 7), 'more troubled, and they often have multiple and serious needs' (HMI Probation, 2017a: 94).¹⁵

Alongside these factors, resourcing of YOTs has reduced by 28 per cent over the past five years, (including a 40 per cent reduction in the MoJ/ YJB youth justice grant) and staffing has fallen by nearly 60 per cent (YJB/ MoJ, 2018c: F3, F6). However, as Bateman (2017) has argued, although such funding decreases have been justified by the shrinkage of the youth justice cohort, an increasing YOT focus on diversionary (out-of-court) activity, which comprises the body of work in some areas (HMI Probation, 2017a), has meant that 'workload has not accordingly fallen to the extent suggested by statutory caseloads' (Bateman, 2017: 17).¹⁶ Such pressures of decreasing budgets, substantial workloads and a reportedly more

¹³ The Government's response to the review, avowed its intention to retain the current arrangements, but loosely committed to look further at the possibility of affording greater flexibility to statutory youth justice provision in the community (MoJ, 2016).

¹⁴ The cohort refers to the total number of children who have been cautioned or convicted (i.e. those with formal system contact). It should be noted that the dramatic decline in the youth justice cohort has not applied equally across groups, with the proportion of BAME children having increased by 7 per cent in last ten years (YJB/ MoJ, 2018a: 13). The number of children given community sentences has reduced slightly less than the overall youth justice cohort - by 73 per cent since the peak in 2008 (2018a: 21).

¹⁵ Some also attribute the apparent changed demographics of the youth justice cohort to improvements in identification of need (Deloitte, 2015), as discussed in Chapter 8.

¹⁶ One may question why YOTs are focusing to such a great extent on, often non-statutory, diversion work when it may squeeze their capacity in other areas. As Bateman notes (2017), such work tends to fall to YOTs, in lieu of other services doing so, and without which the decline in the numbers entering the system risks being

complex caseload suggest a potentially challenging landscape with pertinent implications for practice, including the capacity and skills of the workforce.

Given the reports of the heightened complexity of caseloads, it is perhaps surprising that there is no ‘official’ data on the needs of the youth justice population. The available evidence, predominantly relating to those in youth custody, indicates a profile of significant vulnerability and need:

- 81 per cent of children supervised by YOTs, assessed as risk of serious harm, have experienced significant trauma (HMI Probation, 2017b: 16)¹⁷,
- Up to 50 per cent of children in custody at any point are, or have been, in care (Prison Reform Trust, 2016: 1451-7)¹⁸,
- 39 per cent of children in custody have experienced abuse or neglect (Jacobson et al., 2010: 52),
- 90 per cent of children in custody have been excluded from school and 42 per cent were 14 or younger when they last attended (HMI Prisons/YJB, 2017: 91), and
- Neurodevelopmental disorders are highly prevalent, with between 60 and 90 per cent of children in custody experiencing a communication disorder (Bryan et al., 2007)¹⁹ and 65 per cent of youth justice-involved children self-reporting a traumatic brain injury²⁰ (Williams et al., 2010).

Jacobson and Talbot (2009: 37) contend that child defendants are ‘doubly vulnerable’ because of their developmental immaturity coupled with their experience of multiple difficulties. For supervision work, this suggests the central importance of providing support with such difficulties, which are often associated with offending behaviour (Hughes et al., 2012; Loucks, 2007), and tailoring provision to their particular learning needs.

reversed.

¹⁷ Of 115 case files examined across 6 YOTs. Traumatic experiences include separation and estrangement from parents, the death of a parent or main carer; serial domestic abuse; sexual abuse, parental substance misuse. Children included in the sample had committed an offence assessed as presenting a risk to the public, which was typically violent or sexual in nature. The sample encompassed both children on community and licence from custodial sentences. (HMI Probation, 2017b: 57).

¹⁸ This includes children who are ‘looked after’ by dint of being remanded into custody under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act 2012.

¹⁹ Based on a random sample of 58 children in a youth custodial establishment in England.

²⁰ As defined by loss of consciousness for between 10 minutes and 6 hours. This figure pertains to a sample of 186 boys aged between 11 and 19 years of age detained in YOIs, attending a YOT and a special educational needs school. See Hughes et al (2012) for a detailed discussion of neuro-disability.

This indicates the need for a specialist workforce. In this respect, the training and skills profile of YOT staff is a mixed affair. YOT officers with case responsibility for children must have a relevant professional qualification, such as a degree or diploma in social work, probation or criminology.²¹ Unqualified workers are only required to have relevant professional experience of working with children or in criminal justice. Over the past 15 years, the YJB has been taking steps to professionalise and standardise the training of the YOT workforce, introducing a foundation degree and an effective practice certificate.²² However, one might question whether increased uniformity is desirable within a field that is valued for its multi-disciplinarity.

Research questions

Taking into account the current landscape, I sought to ask the following overarching research questions:

- What aspects of youth justice supervision, if any, do children and professionals perceive to be meaningful or helpful and why?
 - Who are the children on supervision?
 - How do children perceive their offending, sanctions and futures, and what implications does this have for supervision?
 - What is the meaning of supervision to the children involved?
 - What aspects of supervision, if any, do children and professionals view as helpful and what are the internal mechanisms by which they help?

- What is the nature, effect and context of supervisory relationships
 - What is the nature and role of supervisory relationships in contemporary youth justice supervision?
 - What do children and professionals perceive as a helping relationship?
 - What factors help and hinder the development and maintenance of helping relationships?

²¹ Workers who are seconded into YOSs from other agencies (such as police officers) and specialist workers (such as substance misuse workers) will have their own discipline-specific training and/or qualifications (Phoenix, 2011: 126).

²² The effective practice certificate (known as YJEPC) equates to a quarter of the degree. It was previously

I set about answering these questions via means of a 17-month ethnographic study in two YOSs, which I refer to as City YOS and Shire YOS.²³ The research comprised extensive observation, interviews with 26 children and 46 YOS professionals, and ‘following’ ten of the children for the duration of their community orders. I approached the study from a critical realist ontological position, which assumes the existence of a social world independent of our consciousness, but sees our capacity for knowledge of it as shaped by culture, history, beliefs and circumstance, as well as more or less credible depending on the methods and practices engaged (Archer et al., 2016).

Outline of the dissertation

Following this introductory chapter, I present a review of the existing body of research on youth justice supervision and supervisory relationships. The chapter begins with a critical account of the historical and contemporary aims of youth justice supervision, and the place of the supervisory relationship. I then discuss the evidence on children’s perspectives on their offending behaviour, in view of the important background this provides to their perspectives on supervision. Given the relevance of desistance thinking to the question of ‘what helps?’ and its recent popularisation in youth justice (despite its grounding in research with adults), I dedicate significant space to problematising this concept in relation to children. The final section of the chapter reviews the literature on children’s perspectives of supervision, focusing on theorising and defining helping relationships in this involuntary context. Due to the limited nature of research on the youth justice supervisory relationship, I draw significantly on the fields of psychotherapy, social work, and youth work, which offer rich transferable learning. Chapter Three details the research methodology employed. I pay particular attention here to my experiences of getting to know the two YOSs as well as the complexities of accessing one-to-one supervision and the children themselves.

Chapter Four provides an in-depth exposition of the characteristics and backgrounds of the children on supervision, and the implications of these for their engagement in involuntary youth justice supervision and the supervisory relationship. This reveals the acute complexity of the children’s lives, which were often replete with adversity at home, difficulties at school,

known as the professional certificate in effective practice (PCEP).

²³ These are pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

exploitation in various guises; and peripatetic existences, manifest in frequent displacement, relocation and episodes of going missing from home. Envelopment in street violence as victims and ‘offenders’, often simultaneously, was also a particular feature of children’s everyday lives in City YOS.

Chapter Five turns to the children’s perspectives on supervision. The first half of the chapter considers the children’s narratives of their offending, sentences and selves; an important background to their orientation towards supervision. The second half of the chapter focuses on children’s perspectives on the meaning and helpfulness of supervision, exploring the diversity of views held beneath the stock response that it was ‘just something to get through’. In Chapter Six I move on to consider the professionals’ perspectives. The chapter begins with an account of the professionals’ reflections as to *what helps* in supervision, revealing a miscellany of philosophies. The unifying theme was that there were perceived to be significant constraints on their creativity, an issue that is discussed further in the second section of the chapter, which considers the limitations of supervision. The final section of the chapter discusses the ways in which the professionals made sense of their work and conceptualised of success.

The final two data chapters focus on the supervisory relationship. Chapter Seven provides an exposition of its context, which include emotional pressures, financial constraints and modern managerialism as constraints on the potential for supervisory relationships, albeit in different ways in the two YOSs. Chapter Eight shines a light on the nature of supervisory relationships in practice, aiming to unravel unanswered questions about their operation and effect, and indeed existence. The chapter culminates in discussion about the definition of a helping supervisory relationship, focusing on the issues of professional boundaries and reciprocity. Chapter Nine (the conclusion) provides an overview of the findings and draws out the implications for theory, policy, and practice as well as avenues for future research.

Chapter 2: What we know about supervision and the supervisory relationship

The purpose and aims of youth justice supervision

To determine the nature and meaning of youth justice supervision (and supervisory relationships), we need to first begin by considering its aims, purpose and philosophy. As several scholars have convincingly shown, these are central determinants of the character of supervision and the position of relationship-based working (Canton, 2012; McNeill, 2009; Haines and Drakeford, 1998).

My starting point is the history of youth justice supervision in England and Wales as this informs both our understanding of its current form and thinking on future potential reforms. To date, no history of youth justice has focused on supervision and likewise no account of supervision has focused on under-18s. Thus, what follows draws on selected references from a variety of different sources. The intention is not to provide an exhaustive account, but rather a sense of the shifting philosophies and aims of youth justice supervision, and the role of the supervisory relationship within this, focusing mainly on the contemporary period (from the 1960's onwards).

A historical overview of youth justice supervision and the role of the supervisory relationship

Youth justice history is often portrayed as a 'pendulum' swinging between welfarist, non-interventionist and punitive philosophies (see for example Case et al., 2015: 3; Crossley, 2012: 26; Fonda, 2005: 37). Yet such characterisations overlook the multi-layered and negotiated nature of youth justice, meaning that these paradigms rarely exist in any 'pure' form (Smith and Gray, 2019; McAra, 2010). Thus, as Goodman, Page and Phelps (2017: 2) have argued as regards penal change more generally, the pendulum metaphor is incorrect: it 'blind[s] us to the blending of penal orientations, policies, and practices, as well as the struggle between actors within and beyond the penal field that limits wholesale transformations in regimes'. A more accurate story of supervisory history is one of a bricolage (and, at times, conflict) of differing philosophies, aims and purposes (see Haines and Drakeford, 1998; Pitts, 1999; Giller and Morris, 1979). This remains so in the present day.

Such tensions date back to the very early origins of supervision. As Vanstone (2004) has argued, while supervision is often understood as having purely humanitarian roots (through the advent of missionaries to the police court, who are frequently recognised as the forerunners to modern probation officers), this is actually one of many threads, with the imperative for maintaining social order also central. The 1907 Probation of Offenders Act marked the birth of modern supervision, insofar as it officially established probation (which had until that point only existed informally) (Rutherford, 1992: 51). Although the Children Act 1908 was passed the following year, creating a distinct court for children (Morris and Giller, 1979: 9),²⁴ early probation encompassed the supervision of *both children and adults*.²⁵ Notably, it was conceived as *instead of or a diversion from punishment* (i.e. imprisonment) (McNeill, 2019: 7; Vanstone, 2004: 22). The foundations of relational working can also be found in these early stages of probation development, with the role of police court missionaries being ‘a personal relationship with offenders’ (Jarvis, 1972: 9, as cited in Vanstone, 2004: 10) and probation defined as ‘friendly counselling’ (Vanstone, 2004: 33).

Fast-forward to the 1960s, the period typically identified with the dominance of welfarist and treatment philosophies and aims, and again the picture is more complex. The 1969 Children and Young Persons Act is often said to embody the welfarist philosophy,²⁶ due to its emphasis on responding to children’s offending on the basis of ‘need rather than deeds’ through new welfare-based sentences (Rutherford, 1992: 59).²⁷ Importantly, the legislation shifted responsibility for the oversight of supervision (away from probation for some children)²⁸ and determination of the length and content of orders away from magistrates to the newly established Social Services Departments, which opened the gateway for net-widening (Haines and Drakeford, 1998: 37). However, scholars at the time noted that the

²⁴ The court had jurisdiction over both children who had offended and those in need. It should also be noted the court was distinct only insofar as adults were dealt with separately; but the same court room was used for both adults and children.

²⁵ However, Rutherford writes that early probation was largely focused on juveniles, with four out of every five of the 10,000 probationers supervised in 1920 being aged under 21 (1992: 51). Vanstone (2004) makes no comment about this in his meticulous history of supervision.

²⁶ Although the Act was only partially implemented due to a change in government.

²⁷ The Act created new Care Orders and Supervision Orders, available for both children who offended and in need and introduced the concept of Intermediate Treatment (Haines and Drakeford, 1998: 36-37).

²⁸ However, it should be noted that social workers only gained responsibility for 10-13 year olds on supervision orders, and those aged up to 17 in some circumstances (with the agreement of probation). Thus probation officers continued to play a significant role in the supervision of under-18s (Owens, 1979: 48-49). However social workers also supervised children on care orders and in voluntary capacity (reference).

1969 Act was ‘an inconsistent mixture of “punitive” and “therapeutic” measures reflecting an ambivalent rather than a consistent underlying philosophy’ (Owens, 1979: 5). Moreover, Rutherford (1992: 59-60) argues that it was actually only a period of ‘six years or so’ that were clearly welfarist and, even then, the movement ‘was one of ideas more than practice’. Thus, while social workers practised welfarism (leading to criticism of net-widening and unjust sentences on the basis of need) magistrates lacked investment or confidence in the approach, effecting a significant decline in the use of supervision orders over the 1970s (with a consequent increase in custody) (Morris and Giller, 1979: 19-24).²⁹

While there was no stated purpose of either the Supervision Order or Intermediate Treatment³⁰ (IT) in the Act or accompanying guidance, Owens (1979: 49) notes that ‘the implication is that it should create an opportunity for a relationship with the supervised person in which the supervision may “bring to bear influences which are not punitive but will discourage further offences”’. The duties of the supervisor were thus to ‘advise, assist and befriend’ their young supervisees. Notably, at the time, the training of social workers and probation officers³¹ was centred on the social casework model³², in which attachment theory and psycho-analytic theory were particularly influential, and the relationship *was* ‘the treatment’ (Vanstone, 2004: 100-119). While often seen as a high water point for the centrality of relational working, Parker (1979) notes the existence of barriers to building such relationships. These include the tension between a social worker’s helping role and their function as court reporter and litigator, as well as the existence of an overt power differential, reinforced by their powers to enforce indeterminate care orders.

The 1980s is a law and order period typically associated with a shift towards a justice-based model, with a strong practice approach of ‘minimum intervention’, animated by an anti-custody philosophy (Bateman, 2011; Haines and Drakeford, 1998). This was a response to criticism of the injustice of the welfarist approach and concerns about high use of imprisonment amongst the academic community, combined with revelations that ‘nothing

²⁹ Although Morris and Giller suggest that at the heart of such magistracy behaviour was a concern with limiting social workers control over children (1979: 24).

³⁰ Intermediate Treatment was a ‘needs-based’ provision, available as an attachment to Supervision Orders as well to children not serving court orders (Haines and Drakeford, 1998: 36-37).

³¹ Up until 1997, probation officers and social workers completed the same training (Gregory, 2007).

³² Vanstone (2004: 107-13) notes that there is no hard and fast definition of casework as it was variously interpreted by stakeholders; however psychoanalytic thinking, including a focus on the subconscious and the influence of early parental relationships, were consistent across definitions. His account also suggests that

works' (Smith, 2007; Haines and Drakeford, 1998). While this practice model aligned with national policy objectives,³³ it is noteworthy that this developed against a backdrop of punitive government rhetoric, which saw the introduction of draconian measures for more serious offenders (such as the 'short sharp shock') (Smith, 2014). Divergent aims and philosophies were also evident in practice. Accounts indicate that IT had multiple and competing objectives in the mid-1980s as the new philosophy took root.³⁴ Yet, by the end of the decade there had been a transformation of IT into specialist juvenile justice teams,³⁵ whose primary aims were to reduce custody and increase diversion (Haines and Drakeford, 1998). However, such aims were not universally shared or uncontested, with some practice teams working to arguably more aspirational aims, including to reduce reoffending (Smith, 2007) and some system stakeholders (such as the police and magistrates) holding conflicting philosophies (Haines and Drakeford, 1998).

Although typically heralded as a time of success in youth justice (in terms of decriminalisation and de-penalisation [Smith, 2014]), by some accounts, direct work with children in the community suffered. David Smith suggests that such work was approached perfunctorily as 'their belief that nothing worked meant that many workers came to believe that it did not matter what they did, as long as they did little of it' (1999: 153-4). Meanwhile Haines and Drakeford contend that face-to-face work became narrowly focused on offending behaviour, as a reaction to critique of welfarist practices, rendering it 'professionally sterile' (1998: 66).³⁶ They argue that this undermined relational working because it disregarded children's day-to-day problems, hindering their engagement and inhibiting professionals' ability to engage. However, accounts of practice from the late 1990s suggest that concern

casework was not universally practised by probation officers.

³³ Although as Smith (2014) notes, it is not clear whether central policy shaped practice or vice versa.

³⁴ These included diversion from custody, reducing reoffending and promoting children's well-being.

³⁵ Over the course of the 1970s, some social workers developed a specialism in IT and it was these who later comprised the juvenile justice teams (Haines and Drakeford, 1998: 62-63). Haines and Drakeford note that simultaneously Children and Families Social Work shifted towards a specialisation in child protection owing to the 'explosion of child abuse onto the national agenda'. Of particular interest, they argue that a consequence of these twin specialisations was a gap in provision for the significant group of children in need who neither fell into the criminal justice or child protection categories (1998: 64). This continues to be a cause of concern in the present day.

³⁶ By their account, juvenile justice teams 'took a firm stance on excluding welfare matters' both from consideration in court and in their direct work with young people (with such issues referred to social worker peers). Although they concede that some juvenile justice practitioners likely did attempt to address such welfare issues themselves, they argue that they largely did not have the skills of training to do so (Haines and Drakeford, 1998: 65-66).

with children's welfare and the centrality of relationship had endured, at least to some extent (Bateman, 2011; Souhami, 2007).

The 1990s heralded an increasingly punitive stance on youth crime, following a backlash against what was viewed as the overly tolerant approach of the 1980s and a number of high profile incidents, in particular the murder of 2-year-old James Bulger by two 10-year-old boys in 1993 (for extensive accounts of the period see Smith, 2007, 2014; Muncie, 2014). More stringent and controlling community disposals followed, with additional requirements and stricter monitoring, increasing the likelihood of difficulties with compliance (Smith, 2014; Bateman, 2011). In parallel, the managerialist agenda, set in train in the 1980s, accelerated, manifest in a concern with the efficient, consistent and effective delivery of services. This was exemplified by the introduction of the first national standards in 1992, which prescribed procedures and principles for practice, curbing professional discretion (Smith, 2014; Haines and Drakeford, 1998). These developments culminated in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which resulted in the creation of the youth justice system as we broadly know it today, as summarised in Chapter 1.³⁷ For the first time, a central aim of youth justice intervention was specified and enshrined in law: to prevent offending (which was later clarified to include reoffending by the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008). This reflected the managerialist concern with consistency and effectiveness and the growing currency of ('What Works') risk-focused research, which appeared to show that risk of (re)offending could be readily identified (by means of the Risk Factor Prevention Paradigm [RFPP]) and remedied with evidence-based intervention (based on Risk, Need and Responsivity [RNR]). Means of identifying children's risks soon followed with the introduction of the *Asset* assessment, as did a preoccupation with monitoring YOT processes and outcomes (Haines and Case, 2015).

Accounts differ as to the extent to which the punitive turn penetrated practice philosophy. Bateman (2011: 128) argues, drawing on a small-scale survey of youth justice workers and breach rate data, that although there remained a commitment amongst practitioners to the anti-custody ethos of the 1980s (and regard to the child's welfare), this was subject to a

³⁷ For example, as noted in footnote 2, Chapter 1, the out-of-court sanctions introduced by the 1998 Act (reprimand and final warning) were replaced with a system of youth cautioning by the LASPO Act 2012. However, the YJB, YOTs (or YOSs) and the statutory aim of preventing offending remain.

‘progressive watering down’ over the 1990s, which solidified following the 1998 reforms.³⁸ Souhami’s (2007) ethnography of the transformation of a social services youth justice team into a multi-agency YOT between 1999-2000 provides evidence of a prevailing practice philosophy of ‘helping’ young people in which the supervisory relationship was viewed as the ‘central task of work with young offenders’. Yet, practitioners felt this was being marginalised by the 1998 reforms ‘whose bottom line is preventing crime, not looking at the well-being of [young people]’ and wherein the valorisation of quantifiable and standardised practice risked detracting from the supervisory relationship, which was ‘impossible’ to measure meaningfully (Souhami, 2007: 54-66). In contrast, Field (2007: 314), reflecting on interviews with 60 practitioners involved in Welsh youth justice between 2003-04, suggests that youth justice social workers ‘continued to stress concern for the young person’s welfare as a key aim’ and ‘had no difficulty in reconciling the new statutory aim of preventing offending with this concern for welfare’. However, practitioners conceded that ‘support for young people had to be more conditional than in the past’ and that the relationships they had with children were less voluntary in nature (e.g. due to more stringent breach guidelines), which was often viewed as a positive development (Field, 2007: 316).

Such shifts may have been compounded by the changed make-up and professional background of youth justice teams. Writing at the time, Pitts (2001: 8) predicted that the increasing recruitment of ‘non-professionals’ into YOTs, that is unqualified workers whose training ‘is essentially practical’, would:

spawn[s] a new division of labour in which non-professionals ‘deliver’ the ‘programmes’ and the dwindling number of professional workers become, essentially administrative, ‘case managers.

His concern was that this arrangement - which seems to have become reality in some YOTs, of which more later - would significantly diminish the professional discretion of the workforce because:

Non-professionals have little or no knowledge of alternative ways of doing things, as a result the potential for disagreement with, or deviation from, prescribed method or procedures is minimised (Pitts, 2001: 8).

³⁸ This was a survey of 22 youth justice workers who had worked in youth justice prior to 1998 and continued to do so at the point of the survey in 2008.

This would mean that the new cadre of unqualified workers may have been weakly placed to maintain the emphasis on the supervisory relationship and resist or mediate shifts to youth justice philosophy. Such issues may have been intensified by the multi-agency nature of the new YOTs as the traditional social work youth justice – typically associated with relational practice – was diluted with professionals from a range of backgrounds including the police, who may hold different views as regards the role and nature of relational practice, and focus of intervention (Field, 2007). This is all the more important if it was these workers undertaking the lion's share of face-to-face work rather than qualified social workers. Thus in the early 2000s, it looked to be a gloomy future for the place of the supervisory relationship in youth justice practice. Yet in the interim period there has been renewed emphasis on rehabilitation and relational work, as Chapter 1 outlined.

Contemporary youth justice supervision aims and the supervisory relationship

The above foray into supervision history paints a picture of a system whose aims have been relentlessly contested, mediated and resisted and in which the status of the supervisory relationship has fluctuated in both policy and practice. These themes have been carried forward into contemporary youth justice. At a rudimentary level, the principal (statutory) aim of youth justice supervision remains to *prevent reoffending*. However, a more complex set of aims underlie and potentially compete with this overarching objective, shaped by national policy, performance measurement, practice guidance, assessment, inspection frameworks, and local governance. In recent years, there has been a discernible shift in the philosophy and aims of youth justice at a national level, manifest in the movement away from risk-based policy, the ascendancy of desistance-focused thinking and, most recently, the advance of the 'Child First' agenda. However, conflicting statements, narratives and practices within and between national youth justice stakeholders are indicative of some ambiguity about the objectives of the system. There is some evidence that this is reflected in the organisation and delivery of local practice, with competing discourses and a range of practice models apparent (Smith and Gray, 2019).

As a 'distillation' of the range of influences on youth justice (YJB, 2013) and embodiment of the recent changes, the newly revised Youth Justice National Standards (MoJ/YJB, 2019) provide a useful case study of the system's shifting philosophy and aims. Comparing and contrasting these with YJB community sentence practice guidance and HMI Probation

inspection documents (given the critical role played, especially by latter, in shaping practice objectives) we find that the new standards represent a dramatic change in emphasis and tone on children's welfare, rights and rehabilitation (although there was some evidence in the 2012 standards of an increasing concern with these issues [Smith, 2016]). The new standards articulate a modified aim of the system as **'to enable children to live a safe, crime-free life and make a positive contribution to society'** (MoJ/YJB, 2019: 5, 12). This sits in contrast with the opening line of the two previous standards in which the principal aim of the youth justice system is restated (YJB, 2013: 4; YJB, 2010: 5). While arguably the desired outcome of the system remains much the same in both phrasings, the contemporary expression of the aim suggests a more just (McNeill, 2009) and personal, ethical approach (Canton, 2012).

This change in terminology, is reflective of the adoption of the 'Child First' philosophy, which is broadly based on the positive youth justice model developed by Haines and Case (2015). Key tenets of their model include:³⁹

- Treatment of under-18s in conflict with the law *primarily as children* (rather than offenders) and responses to the *whole child* (rather than only offending behaviour), with the according need for youth justice approaches to be embedded in universal support;
- *Child-specific* (not adulterized) responses to offending.
- *Diversionary* responses from formal youth justice processes that enhance access to universal services and promote positive outcomes; including privileging diversion over welfare-based responses, which they view as undermining children's agency and rights, as well as pathologizing.
- *Promotion* of positive behaviours and outcomes, rather than offence, offender-focused and risk-orientated approaches;
- Approaches that are *legitimate* to children (rather than stigmatising), fostered through participation and meaningful engagement.

³⁹ It should be noted that there are three other tenets of the model. These are: the need for the evidence-based academic-practice partnership, rather than programme fetishism that takes a 'one-size-fits-all' approach; systems management, 'which views the YJS as an interconnected, mutually reinforcing series of decision-making points' (2015: 71); and critical partnership with the state, rather than distrustful. While acknowledging Haines and Case's (2015: 61) point that their model is 'not a buffet-style menu where one is free to choose the tasty morsels, leaving some dishes untouched', I do not discuss these aspects of the model further here since they are not critical to the discussion.

- *Responsibilisation* of adults for children's outcomes (rather than children) and grounded in children's rights, with the central ambition of promoting maximum outcomes (rather than minimum standards) for all children (2015: 46-80).

While there is much to commend such principles, there remain questions as to whether such a holistic model can be genuinely implemented in contemporary youth justice, as later discussed. Nevertheless, the model is presented as the guiding light of the standards and translated thus:

1. *Prioritise the best interests of children, recognising their needs, capacities, rights and potential.*
2. *Build on children's individual strengths and capabilities as a means of developing a pro-social identity for sustainable desistance from crime. This leads to safer communities and fewer victims. All work is constructive and future-focused, built on supportive relationships that empower children to fulfil their potential and make positive contributions to society.*
3. *Encourage children's active participation, engagement and wider social inclusion. All work is a meaningful collaboration with children and their carers.*
4. *Promote a childhood removed from the justice system, using prevention, diversion and minimal intervention. All work minimises criminogenic stigma from contact with the system. (MoJ/ YJB, 2019: 12)*

Of particular note is the precedence given to prioritising children's '*best interests*',⁴⁰ which is reiterated in the sub-section specific to community supervision. The inclusion of the term, which is derived from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (to which the UK is a signatory), perhaps indicates a move towards a rights-based approach and represents a significant departure from previous standards, which have made no reference to the term. While not asserted as such, the prioritisation of children's best interests in the document suggests that it might be understood as an objective of youth justice agencies.

⁴⁰ Best interests is typically understood to mean their well-being or in the Children Act 1989 as their welfare.

Echoing this, the YJB (2019a) states that improving the *safety and well-being of children* in the youth justice system (YJS) and their outcomes is one of the system's core aims.⁴¹ While 'best interests' is only referenced once in the new HMI Probation YOT inspection framework, it is notable that it mentions the 'well-being' of children on 20 occasions (HMIP, 2019b).

The inclusion of *desistance* terminology in the new standards is another significant and key change, with potential implications for youth justice philosophy and aims. (This is aside from questions as to the applicability of desistance theories to the youth justice population, which is picked up later in this chapter.) Emerging thinking about how criminal justice agencies can aid desistance coheres around developing positive self-identity through strengths-based working, and relational practice, amongst other factors, of which more later. The term is referenced 14 times in the national standards, including as part of the Child First philosophy. Similarly, desistance is mentioned on 21 occasions in the YOT community sentence case management guidance (2019b). Assetplus, the updated youth justice assessment tool implemented in 2015, also draws on desistance thinking through placing 'more emphasis on strengths and on factors which support/hinder desistance from offending' (YJB, 2014: 6). Desistance features in HMI Probation work too, with a thematic inspection dedicated to the subject (HMI Probation, 2016) and as a theme within the new YOT inspection framework (referenced 25 times in the framework for court disposals) (HMI Probation, 2019b).

There is also remarkable emphasis on the *centrality of the professional relationship* to practice across national stakeholders. In a clear departure from recent previous versions, the new standards make explicit reference to 'all work [being] built on supportive relationships that empower children to fulfil their potential and make positive contributions to society' (MoJ/YJB, 2019: 6). A 'meaningful trusting relationship' between YOT worker and child is later reaffirmed as a necessity for an 'effective' community sentence (2019: 12). The introductory statement in the community intervention YOT case management guidance emphasises too that 'high quality relationships...are vital for effective interventions' (YJB, 2019b). Furthermore, for the first time there is entreaty in the YOT inspection framework that 'sufficient focus be given to *developing and maintaining an effective working relationship*'

⁴¹ The YJB's three other aims are to: reduce the number of children in the youth justice system; reduce reoffending by children in the youth justice system; and improve outcomes for children in the youth justice system (YJB, 2019a: 10).

(HMIP, 2019b: 16). In this new era of youth justice then, the supervisory relationship appears to be regarded as a crucial contributor both to reducing reoffending and to advancing children's well-being.

But how meaningful and all-encompassing are such developments? There are just five mentions of the child's 'best interests' and two references to their 'well-being' in the entire national standards document, raising questions as to whether it is indeed a priority.⁴² Related to this, despite the implication that advancing children's well-being should be a key concern of agencies, much of this is framed as an instrumental good in the standards; that is, for 'sustainable desistance from crime' to result in 'safe communities and fewer victims' (MoJ/YJB, 2019: 6). Likewise, the YOT case management guidance asserts upfront that 'the focus of your work is to prevent offending and reoffending...[and] respond effectively to the risks and needs of children in the youth justice system' (YJB, 2019b). Thus, while there is repeated reference to tailoring work to children's needs, this is predominantly discussed in terms of potential barriers to engagement (for example, speech and language needs). The overwhelming concern is 'reducing the risk of reoffending... [which should be] cited as the priority task on each [intervention] plan' (YJB, 2019b). Moreover, reoffending remains one of the three performance indicators of the system (alongside reduced first time entrants and reduced imprisonment). Thus, there is evidence that meeting the needs of children continues to be 'subsumed within the aim of reforming them' (Smith, 2016: 77).

In parallel, there is some evidence of 'episodes of relapse' into a philosophy of risk within the MoJ and YJB (Haines and Case, 2018: 134) and a preoccupation with risk at HMI Probation. Of the four YOT inspection reports published in the final quarter of 2019, 'risk' is the watchword, mentioned an average of 63 times (HMI Probation, 2019a).⁴³ While desistance and well-being are also frequently referenced (an average of 31 and 28 times respectively), these are narrowly interpreted. Well-being is almost always mentioned with respect to safety and risk of harm, rather than traditional understandings of children's social welfare.

⁴² In addition to eight mentions of 'positive' outcomes for children. Notably, 'best interests' is also mentioned just twice in the YOT community intervention case management guidance (YJB, 2019b).

⁴³ Analysis of the frequency with which the terms were mentioned excluded references made in the glossary and in headings. The four reports were inspections of Brent, Croydon, Leicester City and Leeds YOSs.

Desistance often appears to be used as a synonym for ‘reducing offending’ (a typical phrase being ‘the implementation and delivery of services to support desistance were done well’). Scant detail is provided as to *what* YOTs are actually doing to support desistance, we are just informed that they are doing it. Moreover, there are relatively few references to desistance-inspired approaches. For example, both ‘relationships’ with young people and ‘strengths’ are mentioned an average of just 6 times across the reports. Returning to the YOT community sentence case management guidance (YJB, 2019b), the concept of desistance is scarcely expanded upon here, often appears similarly narrowly construed and, puzzlingly, sometimes seems to be conflated with cognitive behavioural approaches:

For children with a lower level of support required for desistance, interventions are likely to focus on giving information, building on existing positives in their lives, building confidence to resist peer pressure and encouraging pro-social attitudes, values and relationships. For children assessed as having a medium, high or very high level of desistance support, a cognitive-behavioural approach is likely to be of use, to address the thinking skills, values and attitudes which have contributed to offending.

Related to this, relationship-based practice is mentioned only five times throughout the document, including a link to the ‘relationship-based practice framework for youth justice’, of which workers are urged to be ‘mindful’. This a one-page infographic that provides an overview of the relationship-based practice values (non-blaming; optimistic and hopeful; open and honest; empathetic) and activities (trust promotion; pro-social modelling; and problem-solving) that support engagement and desistance. This model accords with the evidence reviewed later in this chapter. However, the value of the document is arguably limited by its lack of accompanying explanation, research evidence or recognition of the importance of a supportive wider organisational and systemic context, which appears fundamental to effective supervisory relationships, as discussed later.

A critique of contemporary supervision aims

Considered in detail, at the national level there is some evident ambiguity regarding both the aims and philosophy of the YJS, with inconsistencies and contradiction. While preventing (re)offending continues to be the statutory aim of the youth justice system, there is new, albeit variable, emphasis on promoting children’s well-being, active participation and relational working. Should these be interpreted as objectives and, if so, do they sit in parallel

or beneath an overarching aim of preventing offending? Moreover, is the philosophy that animates youth justice objectives one of risk, child-first principles or desistance? This has important implications for practice. As McNeill (2009) and Canton (2012) have argued, the primacy accorded to the goal of controlling and reducing reoffending (as opposed to or alongside alternative rationales) is a significant determinant of the moral character of supervision, including the status of the professional relationship. In parallel, the importance of the overarching philosophy of the system ‘cannot be overstated’ as it ‘gives purpose to action...[and] shapes the way in which we use knowledge and skills to achieve certain outcomes’ (Haines and Drakeford, 1998: 69; see also Haines and Case, 2015).

In this regard, the apparent endurance of the youth justice aim of preventing offending and risk ethos might be seen as problematic. For Haines and Case (2015), the focus on prevention within a philosophy of risk engenders an ‘*offender first* and *offence first*’ approach’, which is deficit-focused, stigmatising, responsabilising and ultimately counterproductive (2015: 87). Relatedly, McNeill (2009), writing on probation supervision, contends that a system in pursuit of rehabilitation *solely as a means to an end* (to control and reduce crime) is likely to be counterproductive, because it often begets restrictive and punitive approaches that ‘identifies offenders with the worse aspects of themselves’ (McNeill, 2009:36). Instead he argues that rehabilitation must *also* be understood *as an end in itself*, which entails approaching rehabilitation on the basis of desistance evidence, in which strengths-based practice approaches and the active participation of service users are prioritised. Similarly, Haines and Case (2015: 60) do not advocate abandoning the prevention aim – ‘we believe that the prevention of offending is a proper, even the primary, goal of the YJS’ – but instead urge that a Child First approach is adopted, which focuses on promoting positive behaviour and outcomes, including measures to capture these. A theme in these scholars arguments is that a narrow concern with preventing and controlling crime, focused on ‘what works’ interventions and programmes, has been to the detriment of relational working (Haines and Case, 2015; McNeill, 2009). For them, an emphasis on promoting better lives for children and service users through Child First and desistance approaches, respectively – alongside current aims – would re-prioritise relational working.

Thus, current national youth justice developments are perhaps suggestive of a shift towards an approach which understands rehabilitation as both as *a means to an end* (reducing offending and protecting the public) *and as an end itself* (promoting the child’s interests). But

is it possible to have a system that genuinely operates to these dual ends? One potential obstacle is that contemporary youth justice supervision continues to be orientated around *measurable outputs* and *effectiveness* understood, in part, as reducing reoffending and increasing public protection. Reduced reoffending is, at least superficially, more easily quantifiable than some of the moral goods asserted in the national standards, such as ‘meaningful, trusting relationships’ and ‘active participation’. Thus, if preventing offending and managing risk remain the main objectives of the system, with the according performance measurement and inspection focus, there is a risk that practice will inevitably be orientated towards these goals. Haines and Case (2015) recommend the development of positive outcome measures, but what would these be,⁴⁴ how could they be captured without increasing the administrative burden on practitioners, and how could they be equally valued in an arena that continues to prioritise risk? This may have particular implications for the supervisory relationship which is less amenable to measurement or procedure (Canton, 2012; Souhami, 2007; Prior and Mason, 2010).

Reflecting on such matters, Canton (2012: 577) proposes that supervision⁴⁵ should be ‘grounded in human rights *rather than* on direct endeavours for effectiveness’. The premise of his argument is that a criminal justice system, and thus probation, is about more than crime control or reduction; it is a means of administering justice and thus should be equally concerned with acting justly (see also McNeil, 2009). For Canton, direct, punitive and instrumental approaches ‘can subvert the relationship and personal engagement on which effective work depends’ (2012: 588). Instead Canton implores us to harness the concept of *obliquity*, the idea that: ‘many of our goals are more likely to be achieved when pursued indirectly, while a direct approach can turn out to be self-defeating’. This entails a personal, ethical approach, centred on relational working and treating ‘offenders’ with dignity and respect, which should be understood as an *entitlement*. Crucially, this ‘must not be seen as an instrumental means of reducing reoffending’ (2012: 589). This perhaps also raises the question of whether the supervisory relationship should be conceptualised as a tool for directly contributing to the system’s aims.

⁴⁴ As an example of such a measure, they cite PLATE (perceived level of access to entitlements), used by the Welsh Government to assess whether provision is meeting children’s needs, with lower PLATE indicative of negative outcomes and higher plate indicative of positive outcomes (2015: 267-8).

⁴⁵ Canton makes this argument in relation to probation supervision, however it is relevant to the youth justice

However, Phoenix (2011) makes a compelling argument that a focus on system principles and aims as the main determinants of practice is misplaced. Such a perspective is reductionist and deterministic, flattening the ‘complex and highly diverse field of social relations, bureaucratic organisations, social actors and the ways in which power infuses these relations’ and the practitioner’s role in change (2011: 131). Moreover, she contends that aspirations for a more ethical system cannot be realised within the current landscape due to structural and age-based inequalities that punish children for behaviour that is shaped by conditions that ‘they are utterly unable to change or affect’ while simultaneously often failing to protect them from victimisation and exploitation (2011: 135). For Phoenix, existing conceptualisations of ‘youth justice’ as a neoliberal governmentality project and as a homogenous, standalone ‘system’ that is principally moulded by central government policy preclude full analysis both of current developments and the conditions for transformation. She is particularly critical of the latter approach for its “now-ism” that brackets off fundamental change’ (2011: 131):

...the focus is limited to identifying the principles and performance targets that are capable of producing a more caring, compassionate or ethical criminal justice response because governmental policy and targets are seen as determining the shape and quality of the system...therefore...critical youth criminologists have been calling for a youth justice system that is framed by and fulfils England’s and Wales’s obligations under the CRC⁴⁶...instead of, e.g. calling to abolish it altogether. In other words, once the system becomes the object of analysis, the politics that follows is necessarily one of reform (2011: 131).

Instead, Phoenix argues for a theoretical perspective of a ‘critical youth penalty’ rather than ‘youth justice’. This would entail shifting the object of analysis to the youth penal realm; that is, ‘the totality of those practices and social relations that make-up the social phenomenon of “punishment” of young people’, and enable responses to youth crime to be analysed within the wider context of:

...the types of control and power that operate across different institutions and agencies (state, local authorities, youth offending teams, courts, youth justice board,

context.

⁴⁶ Convention on the Rights of the Child.

education, social services and so on) wherein the objections are tensioned against each other and to what effect (2011: 134).

Such a conceptual framework also necessitates the assumption that ‘in societies marked by profound material and cultural inequalities, the ideals of justice are not capable of being realised’ as well the recognition that children are additionally marginalised by virtue of their young age (2011: 134).

Although Phoenix’s theorisation of ‘youth penalty’ and much of her critique of contemporary thinking is appealing, her thesis perhaps risks underplaying the role of central government, as well as the potential for different kinds of injustices to arise from non-penal responses. Moreover, one might argue that the politics of reform, of which she is critical, is significantly driven by pragmatism, rather than by the narrow and limiting conceptualisation of ‘youth justice’ alone. Nevertheless, her thinking suggests the need to approach the analysis of supervision and the supervisory relationship not only with reference to the aims and philosophy of the ‘system’, but also within ‘their broader social, ideological, economic, political *and importantly organisational* context’ (Phoenix, 2011: 137, author’s emphasis).

Perspectives on offending behaviour

Children’s perspectives on their offending behaviour may have important implications for their orientation towards youth justice supervision. Yet while there is burgeoning research on adult offender narratives, relatively few empirical studies have covered this ground with children. These have tended to focus on their reasons for starting and/or stopping offending, rather than narrative accounts of it. Nevertheless several common themes are evident in this narrow literature (France et al., 2012; Johns et al., 2017; Phoenix and Kelly, 2013; Barry, 2006). Children often characterise their offending behaviour as ‘a bit of fun’ and ‘excitement’, typically within a context of scarce local leisure opportunities. Such accounts appeal to notions of youth crime as associated with the emotional desire for ‘a euphoric thrill’ (Katz, 1988: 53) and the boredom of modern life (Ferrell, 2004). It is frequently framed too as providing a means of ‘survival’ and generating ‘kudos’, in reflection of their being few legitimate opportunities to attain protection or status, echoing general strain theory (Agnew,

2006).⁴⁷ Another recurrent theme is the role of external influences in inducing offending, including peers and partners, as well as the effects of drug and/or alcohol use.

A common thread in the above narratives is the situational context of children's law-breaking; a particular focus of France et al.'s (2012) political ecology of youth and crime. For the children in their study, low-level offending was widely regarded as 'normal' and an almost inescapable part of life in high-crime, deprived neighbourhoods. Fighting is something that 'just happens', but provides an opportunity to enhance resilience (for example, through showing loyalty to friends in need). Offending for 'a laff' is not only seen as a means to fill the time but brings 'street cred'. Importantly it may be recognised as 'wrong' but not as 'criminal'; it's 'just being a kid'. The authors emphasise that 'much about their lives is pro-social' and thus this 'is not indicative of a "criminal culture"...there is a strong sense of "ordinariness" about their lives rather than "delinquency"' (2012: 57-63). In this way, their work is redolent of Matza's (1964) thesis concerning the ambivalence inherent in 'juvenile delinquency', manifest in their 'drift' in and out of offending.

But France et al. (2012) go beyond individual-level, developmental and life course theories of criminality in that they view children's actions as 'nested' in their ecological environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and the power relations that are embedded within them (Bourdieu, 1977). The former is conceptualised as comprised of a number of interconnected settings referred to as micro (interpersonal relations), meso (social institutions e.g. schools, home), exo (settings that do not involve the individual but shape their experiences e.g. government, media) and macro (societal values and beliefs e.g. notions of criminal or antisocial behaviour) systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).⁴⁸ Seen through this lens, children's behaviour cannot be reduced to individual and/or social factors alone. But instead should be understood as shaped by wider discourses (and resultant policies) that see 'youth as a problem to managed', conceptualise their minor misdemeanours as criminal, structure the places and spaces they inhabit, and ultimately their life chances (France et al., 2012: 77). Crucially, this entails a view of children's actions that is neither deterministic nor as simply moral or impulsive, but rather as influenced by the wider ecological setting, in which the authors argue the concept of

⁴⁷ Strain theory, first developed by Merton (1938), recognised that societal inequalities create severe barriers to financial success, resulting in strain. He contended that one response to this was pursue illegal paths to reach this conventional goal. Agnew's (2006) general strain theory (GST) conceptualises goals and potential resulting strain much more broadly, including status, autonomy, and love.

⁴⁸ In his later work, Bronfenbrenner (1986) identified the cross-cutting structure of the 'chronosystem', which recognises both changes experienced by the individual and within ecological settings over time.

resilience is central. Resilience theory (Ungar, 2005) relates to an individual's capacity for healthy development in the face of adversity, which may entail drawing on resources that are not conventionally positive. Thus, to use France et al.'s (2012: 177) concluding words: 'they are "ordinary kids" just "doing life" to the best of their abilities in circumstances, not necessarily of their making'.

Yet while this may be so in many cases – such as where children have been criminalised for what is 'normal' youthful misbehaviour (e.g. trespassing on private land) – the same principle arguably cannot be applied to more serious offences, such as burglary. Such offences were little represented in France et al.'s (2012) considerable sample, a key limitation of their study.⁴⁹ That said, it remains the case that most adolescent lawbreaking is not of a serious nature (Newburn, 2007), with nearly 60 per cent of under-18 community sentences imposed for theft and summary non-motoring offences in 2016 (Ministry of Justice, 2018). This is highly pertinent to children's perceptions of supervision; it may have little legitimacy for those who feel that they have been unfairly penalised for behaviour that is a normalised means of enjoyment, status and protection. Drake et al. (2014: 27) accordingly argue that greater consideration needs to be given to how practitioners might 'balance a young person's autonomy with interventions that reduce harmful behaviours but do not advocate choices that conflict with the complex and profoundly challenging circumstances to which young people have adapted'. In other words, they acknowledge that there is an implicit tension in addressing the offending of children for whom it can be understood as a 'healthy adaptation' (Ungar, 2005).

The conventionality tales told in France et al.'s (2012) study speak equally to the wider theme of 'techniques of neutralisation' (Sykes and Matza, 1957) often apparent in children's offending narratives (Rajah et al., 2014; Jamieson et al., 1999), in which they seek to account for their behaviour in ways that are morally justifiable.⁵⁰ Although there is evidence that such narratives are more commonly elicited in correctional settings (Sandberg, 2009; Maruna and Copes, 2005) and subject to shifts over time in response to changing social conditions (Rajah et al., 2014), they have important implications for supervisory practice. Narrative desistance

⁴⁹ France et al.'s (2012: 14) study involved interviews with 110 children aged 11-18 (81 boys and 29 girls) drawn from youth offending services and local educational authorities across four sites. Just under a third of the sample reported contact with the youth justice system (a formal out-of-court disposal and/or court conviction).

⁵⁰ Proponents of neutralisation theory argue that such narratives are a manifestation of the broadly conventional

theorists suggest that while neutralisations may facilitate an individual's criminality by enabling its reconciliation with conventional moral values, they simultaneously operate to insulate one from deviant self-narratives, thus paving the way for desistance (Maruna, 2001; Sykes and Matza, 1957). This points to the importance of approaches that, at least partially, accept neutralisation, but ultimately focus on empowering the individual to change (Maruna, 2001). Yet, research with adult offenders has shown that neutralisation is often viewed as indicative of culpability minimisation, with negative criminal justice consequences (Maruna and Copes, 2005) or at least raises difficult questions for professionals about how best to respond such narratives to encourage positive change (Bullock and Condry, 2013). There is reason to think that similar such issues may exist in youth justice, particularly given the emphasis on responsabilisation (Phoenix and Kelly, 2013).

What helps in supervision?

Problematising desistance with respect to children

Given its concern with *how people come to stop offending*, the desistance literature has particular relevance to the question of *what helps*. Although this body of research primarily relates to adults, desistance thinking has tended to be transplanted into youth justice with little further thought of the distinct position and needs of the age group, and with remarkably little academic critique. Any question or challenge to the application of desistance to under-18s has tended to be made in passing reference (see for example, Case and Haines, 2020; Johns et al., 2017; Hampson, 2018). Moreover, such critique has typically centred on generic limitations of desistance thinking, such as the deficit-focus of the term (Hampson, 2018), its narrow focus on offending (Johns et al., 2017) and lacking emphasis on prevention (Nugent and Barnes, 2013). Thus, in what follows, I briefly outline the main strands of desistance thinking, before problematising it as regards children. This focuses on the evidence about delinquency over the life-course, Matza's theory of drift and labelling perspectives. I conclude with a critical review of the narrow literature on desistance during adolescence.

Definitions of desistance

Desistance, in its simplest form, entails the stopping of offending, although debate abounds as to how it should be defined, measured and conceptualised. The process of desistance is protracted, characterised by 'a pendulum of ambivalence' (Burnett, 2004b: 169). Maruna and

moral values held by those who commit crime (Matza, 1964; Maruna, 2001).

Farrall (2004) contend that there are distinct phases to this journey - primary and secondary desistance - with the former defined as a lull in offending and the latter understood as the assumption of a non-offender identity or role. Yet, King (2013b) has persuasively shown that identity change begins early on in the desistance process, while Laub and Sampson have argued that cognitive transformation is not necessary for cessation (2003: 279). McNeill (2014) has added the concept of tertiary desistance, which relates to how one is seen by others and one's place in society.

Desistance theories

There are four main theories of desistance: individual and agentic; social and structural; interactionist (Weaver, 2016; Barry, 2010; Maruna, 1997); and, the most recent addition, situational (Bottoms, 2014) (for a detailed review, see: Weaver, 2016; Farrall et al., 2014). Grouped into the first category are both 'maturational reform' theories, which view desistance as a symptom of the physiological changes of ageing (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Glueck and Glueck, 1974), and rational choice theories, which see change as a result of individual conscious volition (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009; Clark and Cornish, 1985). The second category encompasses social control theories, which explain desistance as correlated with life-course events, such as family relationships and employment, which provide a stake in conformity (Sampson and Laub, 2003). Interactionist explanations conceptualise desistance in terms of the interplay between changes to the individual's social context as well as their decisions and attitudes towards offending (King, 2014; Barry, 2010; Bottoms et al., 2004). Finally, situational theories posit that desistance can occur as a result of changes to the spaces and places in which an individual inhabits, such as avoidance of criminogenic environments, which may in turn inform narrative change and the development of social bonds (Bottoms, 2014; Bottoms and Shapland, 2016; see also, Farrall et al., 2014).

Theories of identity and narrative change cut across these paradigms. These argue that a shift in how the individual perceives their self and their world is crucial for desistance, although there are differing views as to how and when in the process this comes about. Three of the best known theories are summarised below. From a rational choice perspective, Paternoster and Bushway (2009: 1106-1126) propose that desistance hinges on 'intentional self-change', which develops out of a growing dissatisfaction with crime, culminating in 'a crystallisation of discontent', and vision of the 'feared self', the person they do not want to become. Change happens when the individual is also motivated by a positive (realistic) potential self and

successfully seeks out conventional social networks who can support their fledgling pro-social identity (2009: 1133). Giordano et al. (2002) similarly argue that agency plays a central role in desistance, but place greater emphasis on the interplay with the individual's social context, characteristic of an interactionist model. Drawing on findings from the Ohio Life Course Study, focusing on adult women's narratives of desistance,⁵¹ they outline a theory of cognitive transformation comprising four phases: a cognitive shift towards openness to change; exposure to 'hooks for change' (such as having children) which, crucially 'has meaning, salience or importance for the individual'; the envisioning of a conventional 'replacement self'; and finally, 'transformation in the way the actor views the deviant behaviour or lifestyle itself' (2002: 1001).

Maruna's (2001) theory of narrative change takes a slightly different perspective, based on analysis of life history interviews with a broadly matched adult sample of 20 persisters and 30 desisters⁵² from his Liverpool Desistance Study. He found that persisters employed a 'condemnation script', characterised by 'a sense of being doomed or fated in their situation', which translated into a lack of agency and self-efficacy (2001: 11). In contrast, desisters exhibited a 'redemption script', viewing themselves as essentially good persons, drawn into criminality as victims of society, and empowered to discover their true-self, usually 'with the help of some outside force, someone who "believed in" them (2001: 87). Often this process entailed 'making good' by using their past experiences to give back to society as 'wounded healers', which in turn reaffirms their prosocial life (2001: 11). Thus importantly, rather than 'knifing off' their past identity, those who desist re-construct their historical narrative in a way that accords with, and necessitates, their rehabilitated self.

Gadd's (Gadd and Farrall, 2004; Gadd, 2006) psychosocial work on desistance builds on this, offering insights into *how* one's personal identity develops, becomes *internalised*, and thus influences change.⁵³ He argues that one's personal or internal identity⁵⁴ is 'constantly formed,

⁵¹ Their 2002 article was based on the Ohio Life Course Study sample of 254 delinquent girls and boys (split equally) recruited in 1982 from state-level institutions, 85 per cent of whom (109 females and 101 males) were subsequently followed-up in 1995. The authors analysis is based primarily on the women's experiences of desistance (97 life history interviews), although they suggest that the findings will have some relevance to men's desistance(2002: 1005-9).

⁵² Both desisters and persisters had a criminal career of at least two years. Desisters were categorised as those who had not offended in the previous 12 months and did not plan to reoffend again. Persisters had offended within the previous three weeks.

⁵³ It should be noted that Gadd's psychosocial theory of desistance extends beyond identity and identification, providing in-depth insights into the role of unconscious motivations in the desistance process, including defence

revised, consolidated and (importantly) undermined’ through the psychic dimensions of *identification* in relation to others (Gadd and Farrall, 2004: 130). Identification refers to ‘those mental processes that involve imagining parts of ourselves to be similar to, or compatible with, qualities we perceive in others’, whether real or imagined (Gadd, 2006: 182). Applying Jessica Benjamin’s (1990) psychoanalytic insights to the case study of a Frank, a former far right activist, Gadd demonstrates that identification can lead to change through *recognition* – where one feels understood and appreciated for who they are by someone who they recognise as an ‘external, sovereign *other*’ (2006: 182-3; own emphasis). Thus, Frank’s subjective change was prompted when the young woman, with whom he identified, yet othered and had expected to disown him for his prior racist behaviour, was able to confer meaningful recognition on him as someone with worth, helping him to overcome his shame and disgust. In this way, Gadd contends that change is most likely to transpire when recognition ‘runs against the tide of expected power relations’ such that the subject is ‘confronted by the capacity of those they construe as other to survive their negative projections’ (2006: 197). In so doing, differences are bridged and new perspectives on others, the past and oneself become possible. Although Gadd’s (2006: 197) work focuses on relations between ‘aggressors and the aggressed’, such concepts are highly relevant to the dynamics of change in helping relationships, as I pick up later in this chapter.

Assisted desistance

A developing area of desistance research concerns the role that criminal justice intervention can play in assisting the process. I focus here on work regarding supervision, given my thesis focus. Leibrich (1994) conducted one of the earliest studies, interviewing a random sample of 48 (adult) probationers who had been under supervision in New Zealand in 1987 and not been reconvicted by 1990. She found that while only a third felt that probation had contributed to their reduction in offending, the supervisory relationship was cited as the ‘pivotal factor’ in whether probation was useful in this regard (1994: no page). Probationers also highlighted the importance of addressing the underlying causes of offending and their own motivation in change. The crucial role of relationships was echoed by a more recent study in Ireland of the impact of probation on 73 adult men under supervision, which commenced in 2003. Interviews with fourteen participants from the original sample between

mechanisms such as idealisation and denial (which are discussed later in this chapter). I have focused only on his work on self-identity here since it is most relevant to my thesis.

⁵⁴ Which he distinguishes from one’s social ‘presentations of self’ (Gadd, 2006: 181).

2009 and 2010 found that although few believed probation had a ‘direct impact’ on their behaviour, its influence depended on ‘the establishment of a reciprocal relationship between them and their supervising officer’ (Healy, 2012: 388).

The findings of Rex’s study (1999) of adult probationers’ experiences of supervision were more optimistic. She conducted interviews with 60 probationers, finding that 68 per cent said that they were less likely to reoffend or engage in behaviour linked to their offending as a result of supervision. Probationers’ decisions to desist appeared to be inspired by the personal and professional commitment shown by probation officers, which seemed to generate a sense of obligation to stay out of trouble (Rex, 1999: 371). King’s (2013a: 140) interview-based study of the early transitions to desistance of 20 adult males under supervision came to similarly positive conclusions about the potential impact of supervision, although he acknowledged that this may reflect selection effects. Virtually all of the sample gave positive appraisals of supervision, highlighting the beneficial relationship with their supervising officer and linking this to a reduction in offending. While probation appeared to provide little practical assistance with personal and social problems, probationers felt that it had increased their decision-making skills, self-confidence and empowerment such that they perceived themselves better equipped to negotiate their future. In addition, probationers’ narratives suggested the influence of one-to-one supervision, in particular, in re-orientating their moral agency and facilitating positive future orientation, which King argues are indicative of ‘the beginnings of identity change’ (2013a: 146). However, both studies lacked reconviction data so it is impossible to know whether such positive effects translated into desistance. Yet these findings align with Burnett’s (2004b) conclusions about the importance of professional relationships in fostering self-efficacy and optimism in one’s ability in change, qualities that she identified as critical conditions for desistance in her study of recidivism amongst 130 adult male property offenders, following their release from prison.

Farrall’s qualitative longitudinal study of 199 probationers’ (aged 17 -35 years) progress towards desistance and the impact of probation is amongst the most thorough research on the subject, with the particular strength of tracking probationers over the long-term (Farrall, 2002; Farrall et al., 2014). Farrall’s (2002) initial sweep of interviews (1997-1998) found that desistance could rarely be *directly* attributed to probation supervision (however where officers did provide practical help, probationers’ outcomes improved); instead, it was most clearly related to probationers’ motivations and personal circumstances. However, the most

recent (fifth) sweep of interviews (2010-2013) with 105 (53 per cent) of the original sample, substantiated emerging evidence from the previous follow-up (in 2004) that the positive impact of probation increases over time (Farrall et al., 2014: 70-87, 123). Some respondents highlighted the importance of having a probation officer who ‘provided practical help and a receptive ear’ and with whom they ‘felt accepted as people, and...persuaded...of the possibility of alternative lifestyles’, leading the authors to suggest that supervision ‘can “sow the seeds” of change in probationers’ minds’ (Farrall et al., 2014: 123-133).

This literature has a number of evident implications for supervisory practice, which have been helpfully summarised into eight principles by McNeill et al. (2012) as part of an Economic and Social Research Council-funded project. They are:

1. Recognising the complexity of the desistance process, including through ‘find(ing) ways to manage setbacks and difficulties constructively’ and understanding that ‘it may take considerable time for supervision and support to exercise a positive effect’.
2. Acknowledging the individualised and subjective nature of desistance, and the according need for supervision to support issues of identity and diversity.
3. Supporting and developing individuals’ motivation, self-belief and hope as key practitioner tasks;
4. Working *with* rather than *on* ‘would-be desisters’, and nurturing self-efficacy;
5. The centrality of relationships to support change, both between practitioners and offenders, and with those who matter to the offender.
6. Focusing on both the individual who has offended *and* their personal and social circumstances ‘through developing social capital and with it the opportunities to apply these skills, or to practice newly forming identities’;
7. Developing the individual’s own strengths and resources, and those in their social networks; and
8. ‘Striving to more clearly recognise positive potential and development, and should seek to avoid identifying people with the behaviours we want them to leave behind’ (adapted from McNeill, 2016: 275-7).

These messages and their pertinence to children are explored further later in the chapter.

Desistance and children

Over the past five years, desistance thinking has been increasingly popularised in the youth justice (policy) arena in England (and Wales). This is perhaps surprising given that the body of evidence on which desistance thinking is founded, primarily relates to adults. If one takes the most influential studies on desistance, their samples and/or study focus are predominantly those aged 18 or above. For example, of the nine ‘landmark’ studies on desistance critically discussed by Farrall et al. (2014), only one (Graham and Bowling’s [1995] *Young People and Crime*) explored desistance amongst children.⁵⁵ Likewise, only three of 29 qualitative studies of desistance summarised by Veysey et al. (2013) included children (see McIvor et al., 2004; Haigh, 2009; Pannuchio et al., 2012). The reason for this is obvious: desistance is typically something that happens in a person’s 20s or 30s (Farrington et al., 2006).

The age-crime curve

The relationship between age and crime is one of the enduring ‘truths’ of criminology. In Gottfredson and Hirschi’s words ‘the empirical fact of a decline in the crime rate with age is beyond dispute’ (1990: 131). The age-crime curve, an asymmetrical bell shape, reflects the steep increase in offending over the teenage years, which typically peaks between the late teens and early 20s, then rapidly decreases, flattening into a slower decline (McAra and McVie, 2017; Graham and Bowling, 1995). On this basis, there is good reason to question the relevance of desistance to under-18s since the evidence suggests it usually begins after childhood.

However, although there are similarities in aggregate age-crime curves, there are important shifts in the precise shape and peak of the curve dependent on a range of variables, including gender, crime type, jurisdiction, socio-economic group and time period (McAra and McVie, 2017; Matthews and Minton, 2017; McVie, 2004). For example, girls typically have a lower peak age of offending (14-16 years) than boys (18-21 years) (see for example, Graham and

⁵⁵ It should be noted that a further three of the studies’ encompass under-18s insofar as the longitudinal design recruited participants in childhood (Farrington and West’s Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development, Giordano and colleagues’ Ohio Life-Course Study [OLS], and Sampson and Laub’s re-analysis of the Gluecks’ Unravelling Juvenile Delinquency [UJD] data-set). However, in the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development desistance was defined as the absence of convictions after the age of 21 (Farrington et al, 2006: 27) and in the latter two studies the first follow-up took place well into adulthood (at an average age of 30 in the OLS and age 25 in the UJD, an average of 13 and 11 years after the first interview, respectively), suggesting that precise recall of key changes during in adolescence may be challenging; moreover, desistance was typically something that occurred in adulthood (Laub and Sampson, 2003: 62; Giordano et al, 2002: 1006). Thus, desistance during adolescence was not a focus of these studies.

Bowling, 1995; McIvor et al., 2004; Flood-Page et al., 2000). Other research has found a lower peak age of offending for both boys and girls (14-15 years) than is typical (McVie, 2004). There is significant variation too in peak offending age between offence types (McVie, 2004; Flood-Page et al., 2000; Graham and Bowling, 1995). As a case in point, Flood-Page et al. (2000: 20) found that although boys' peak offending age for all offences was 18, it fell to 15 if they excluded those who only committed fraud or workplace theft. In addition, as Loeber et al. (2016: 88) argue 'desistance processes are not limited to the down-slope of the age-crime curve, but evolve and take place throughout the course of that curve'. For example, Stouthamer-Loeber et al. (2010) found that in the youngest cohort of the Pittsburgh Youth Study, 31 per cent of those who began offending in middle childhood and 19 per cent of those who began in late childhood had desisted by early adolescence (as cited in Loeber et al., 2016: 88).⁵⁶ There is evidence too that when one considers conduct problems (such as physical aggression and stealing) from early infancy, peaks in such behaviour followed by desistance are key features of child development (Loeber et al., 2016). Thus, 'desistance from delinquency can best be conceptualised as a process that takes places between childhood and adulthood, and that is not solely taking place during late adolescence/early adulthood' (Loeber et al., 2016: 89).

There is ongoing debate too as to whether the curve is reflective of changes in frequency of offending by individuals (incidence) or the overall number of individuals offending (prevalence), or both. While the balance of evidence suggests *prevalence* is the best explanator (Laub and Sampson, 2003; Farrington, 1986; Nagin and Land, 1993; Blumstein et al., 1988, cited in McVie, 2004), other research has suggested a more complex picture (Ezell and Cohen, 2004). For example, self-report data from over 3,500 children in Edinburgh from ages 12 to 16 showed that *incidence* provided the best explanation for the age crime curve during adolescence, as prevalence remained relatively consistent (McVie, 2004). However, McVie (2004: 12) found that the patterns of the prevalence and frequency of offending varied significantly by offence type, leading her to conclude that 'it is too simplistic to identify one or the other as the primary contributor'. Thus, as Mulvey et al. (2004: 217) conclude 'either

⁵⁶ The Pittsburgh Youth Study followed a randomly selected sample of 1500 boys across three cohorts who were in the first, fourth and seventh grades of school from when the study began in 1987/88 (referred to as the youngest, middle and oldest cohorts). The youngest cohort was studied from 6-19 and then again at ages 25 and 28; the middle cohort was assessed from 13-25 and then again at age 23; and the oldest cohort was studied from 13-25 and then again at aged 35 (For further information see: <http://www.lifehistorystudies.pitt.edu/pittsburgh-youth-study>).

way, there must exist one or more processes during late adolescence and early adulthood that cause some individuals who engaged in crime when they were younger— even very serious offenders—to stop offending altogether or to slow down their rate of offending if they remain criminally active’.

Of particular relevance here is life-course developmental criminology, which has sought to understand age-related changes in individual offending. One of the most well recognised theories from this body of research is Moffitt’s (1993) identification of two main types of ‘offender’ – adolescence-limited (AL) and life course persistent (LCP). The former, comprising the majority of juvenile ‘offenders’, begin offending in adolescence and generally stop by early adulthood; while the latter are a much smaller group, characterised by early-onset and long-term offending (Moffitt, 1993). Many studies since have provided partial support for Moffitt’s thesis, although most have identified a greater number of groups, some of which do not match with Moffitt’s taxonomy (McAra and McVie, 2017). For example, Ezell and Cohen (2004) found an adolescent-limited group, but identified *five* persistent groups, none of whom offended across the life-course. Odgers et al.’s (2007) study found an adolescence-limited and persistent pathway, as well as a significant childhood-limited group, whose level of antisocial activity⁵⁷ was similar to the persistent group at age 7, but consistently declined during adolescence and had ceased by adulthood. Meanwhile, McVie (2004: 12) argues on the basis of ‘looking simplistically’ at self-report data across the first five sweeps of the Edinburgh Study that those who might be termed adolescence-limited ‘form a far more complex group than Moffitt contends and require much more scrutiny. They span the range of one-off offender through to sporadic but serious offender’. While the trajectory modelling methods typically used to identify such groups mean that one cannot simply interpret them as a reflection of distinct types of offenders,⁵⁸ such work clearly indicates that many children stop offending at or before young adulthood. Furthermore, the conceptualisation of desistance as a process would suggest that the foundations of this reduction or withdrawal from offending may begin in adolescence, at least for some children.

⁵⁷ Measured by the construct of conduct disorder, which included items such as physical fighting, stealing, and destroying property.

⁵⁸ One should ‘instead view trajectory groups as providing approximations for a more complex reality’ (Nagin and Odgers, 2010: 134). As Piquero (2015: 340) argues ‘the jury is still out on the issue of different groups of offenders, whether they exist in the real world, whether they are useful heuristic, whether they follow the paths predicted for them, and whether they are characterized by particular risk and protective factors, and so forth’.

Delinquency, Drift and Desistance

While there is evidence that some children stop, or begin to make-steps towards reducing, offending in adolescence, there is question as to the applicability of desistance theories to this age group. Matza's (1964) influential theory of drift is pertinent in this regard. He posited that the majority of adolescents who offend do so 'casually, intermittently and transiently' and are 'uncommitted', simultaneously participating in a range of conventional activity:

The delinquent transiently exists in a limbo between convention and crime, responding in turn to the demands of each, flirting now with one, now the other, but postponing commitment, evading decision. Thus, he drifts between criminal and conventional action (1964: 28).

Their misbehaviour is mostly 'mundane and commonplace childhood activity' and its 'tenure is short' (1964: 27-9) (similar to Moffitt's (1993) adolescence-limited offender)⁵⁹. Matza contends that most children will drift out of delinquency as they approach adulthood, and 'conventional adult statuses' become available, such as completion of school, employment and marriage (1964: 55). I later review the role of such (adult) social bonds to desistance in children.

Central to Matza's conception of drift is that it 'stands midway between freedom and control'. He (1964) notes the 'accidental or unpredictable' offending of the drifter who is 'neither compelled nor committed to deeds nor freely choosing them' (1964: 28). As Farrall et al. (2014: 65) reflect, 'the overriding feeling one gets from Matza's work is of the almost unintentional character of much offending'. Yet, he ascribes to the drifter a degree of freewill, albeit constrained by adolescence: 'the potentiality for freedom through the loosening of social controls but who lack the position, capacity, or inclination to become agents in their own behalf' (2014: 29). While 'drift makes him available for delinquent acts. Whether the drift culminates in delinquency is up to him' (2014: 89).

When reading Matza (1964: 29), one questions the relevance of desistance thinking to the uncommitted, short-term adolescent 'delinquent as drifter' he portrays. Would there be a sufficient pattern or severity of offending to enable the study of desistance? Would they

⁵⁹ For example, Moffitt (1993: 686) describes adolescent-limited offenders as those who 'lack consistency in their antisocial behaviour across situations... [and are] able to abandon antisocial behavior when prosocial styles are more rewarding'.

regard themselves as offenders? However, as a number of scholars have noted, drift is a common feature of offending throughout the life-course (and indeed, the desistance process) (Maruna, 2001; Burnett, 2004b). In this regard, Farrall et al. (2014: 66) view Matza's work as an important reminder that:

the majority of offenders are not steadfastly committed to their offending and, therefore, provided that the conditions for drift are not met, will have no particular yearning to commit crime. Rather, a commitment to offending waxes and wanes.

Moreover, drifting does not preclude frequent offending. As Barry (2006: 89) notes of her sample of 40 'young offenders',⁶⁰ the notion of drift was only applicable insofar as they move between crime and non-crime on a daily or weekly basis, rather than monthly or yearly. To be a drifting adolescent offender then does not, necessarily, render desistance thinking irrelevant.

However, questions about the short-term or minor nature of offending that often characterises adolescent misbehaviour remain salient to the applicability of desistance perspectives to this age group. On this basis, several scholars have questioned the relevance to theory and policy of studying desistance amongst adolescent-limited offenders, particularly if they are 'low-rate' offenders (Kazemian, 2007; Kazemian et al., 2009; Laub and Sampson, 2001). As Laub and Sampson argue (2001: 10):

Because low-rate offending is normative, especially during adolescence, criminologists should not spend much time or energy theorising why everyone seems to commit crime during their teen years. Following this logic, criminologists should also not spend too much time or energy studying termination and desistance for low-rate offenders (defined as involvement in a single event or a series of relatively isolated events over a long period of time).

From a slightly different perspective, Case and Haines (2020: 12) recently challenged the employment of desistance thinking with children given the short-term nature of their behaviour and evolving identity:

⁶⁰ Barry's interviewees comprised 20 young men and 20 young women aged between 18 and 33. All of the sample, except two women, had begun offending in childhood, with an average number of 17-38 previous offences (17 for woman contacted via social work departments and 38 for men on intensive probation supervision) (2006: 188).

One can only desist after having developed an adult identity (in this instance, as a so-called ‘offender’) and having evidenced a long-term trajectory of offending behaviour. Children are still growing, physically, mentally, emotionally for the first time so they cannot desist, they can only ‘become’.

Yet a ‘long-term trajectory of offending behaviour’ is not a prerequisite for desistance. I agree with Mulvey et al. (2004: 222) that from a practical perspective ‘desistance can be studied only among individuals who have demonstrated a frequency or rate of offending great enough to allow for a significant decline in the activity’ and thus ‘an individual who has committed a serious crime once, and only once, is not an appropriate subject for a study of the process of desistance’. This may mean that desistance thinking is only relevant to adolescents who have repeatedly offended (which has been operationalised in previous desistance studies as at least two convictions for ‘standard list’ offences⁶¹ [see for example, Bottoms and Shapland, 2016: 100]). But it does not follow that it is extraneous to those whose offending careers have been relatively short to date. As discussed earlier, there is evidence that some children have a long history of troublesome behaviour prior to entry into the justice system, suggesting that desistance will be a relevant concept even if, on paper, their (official) offending careers are short. In addition, it is conceivable that children may have a criminal identity, even on the basis of relatively short-term and/or low-rate offending.

In this regard, Maruna (2001: 48) suggests that identity is a key criteria in studying desistance: ‘If they never thought of themselves as offenders (i.e. if they were “square johns” who committed a few crimes) then desisting from crime is hardly interesting (or possible)’. However, we know relatively little about how children who offend think about themselves. While Case and Haines’s (2020) above objection to the applicability of desistance to children on the basis of adult identity is tautological,⁶² it implies an important issue. Do children have offending identities? Is identity or cognitive change relevant to stopping offending in adolescence? Does the formational stage of identity during childhood mean that they have greater susceptibility to thinking of themselves as offenders? Or does this suggest that such labels are likely to be more transient during this life-stage? The limited number of studies of

⁶¹ The ‘Standard list’ encompasses all indictable and triable either way offences, as well as some serious summary offences, such as common assault and criminal damage.

[<https://hub.unlock.org.uk/knowledgebase/criminal-record-databases-2/>]

⁶² insofar as their notion of desistance relates only to adult identity and thus can only apply to adults.

desistance during adolescence mean that we are currently ill-equipped to answer these questions. Below I critically review the literature on labelling to shed some light on this issue.

Labelling and desistance?

Within the youth justice arena, it is conventional wisdom that contact with the criminal justice can have a ‘tainting effect on some children and can increase the likelihood of reoffending’ (Bramley et al., 2019; Taylor, 2016: 4). Such thinking is associated with traditional labelling theory, which developed from the symbolic interactionist perspective that through common language or symbols, society constructs shared meanings and understandings with importance consequences. A key concept was “the looking glass self” in which one’s identity is informed by how others see one. Thus ‘when adults label a youth a “troublemaker”, the youth may come to see himself as a troublemaker, eventually adopting an identity as a troublemaker’ (Matsueda, 2014: 15). Furthermore, a child may not only internalise and act out such a label, but through the associated stigma, may become detached from conventional sources of support, further compounding the deviant label and behaviour (Matsueda, 2014: 16).

As a formal societal response, the criminal justice system is seen as an influential labelling force, such that contact can perpetuate offending. For Lemert (1951, 1967), a key forefather of the theory, this was central to his distinction between *primary deviance* – trivial, transient misbehaviour, with minor consequences for the individual’s social status and identity - and *secondary deviance* – which he saw as the consequence of negative societal responses to misbehaviour, particularly criminal justice intervention, that have a deleterious consequence for the person’s identity, future behaviour and social position. Becker (1963) contended that the law is enforced selectively, and more likely to be applied to disadvantaged groups, even when engaging in the same behaviour as their non-disadvantaged peers. This became a key tenet of labelling theory (Matsueda, 2014: 23).

Since a period of disenchantment in the 1980s, the theory has had something of a resurgence. Moving beyond the traditional labelling emphasis on identity, some life-course theories propose that a deviant label can indirectly increase future offending through blocking access to social opportunities, acting as ‘snares’ (Moffit, 1993: 691; McGee et al., 2015⁶³), trapping

⁶³ McGee et al (2015)’s longitudinal research on 3173 young adults followed from birth to the age of 21 showed

the individual in a ‘cycle of exclusion’ (McAra and McVie, 2012: 369) and producing ‘cumulative disadvantage’ (Laub and Sampson, 2003: 291). Other work has expanded upon labelling ideas, arguing that the nature of system contact is an important determinant of its effects on future behaviour. For example, in his theory of reintegrative shaming, Braithwaite (1989) argues that societal responses to crime that ostracise the ‘offender’ from conventional society, and thus potentially reinforce criminal associations and lifestyles, are likely to result in secondary deviance. In contrast, responses in which community disapproval (public shaming) is followed by reacceptance into conventional society are more likely to have a positive effect, through minimising stigma and developing internal conventional morality. Sherman (1993; 2014) developing this in his defiance theory, contends that one’s sense of shame is dependent on the perceived fairness of the sanction. Thus, those who experience the sanction as unfair, are less likely to acknowledge shame, increasing the likelihood of further offending through ‘defiant pride’, and vice versa. By these accounts, labelling perspectives have important implications for youth justice supervisory practice. They suggest that supervision has the potential to do more harm than good, further entrapping children in offending, particularly if it is experienced as stigmatising and illegitimate. From a desistance perspective, labelling theories might suggest the importance (perhaps especially so) of attending to self-identity in supervisory work with children.

However, the empirical evidence for labelling theory is relatively weak, with studies providing mixed support and typically finding only small effects when favourable. As summed up by Huizinga and Henry (2008: 245): ‘The weight of evidence suggests that arrests and sanctions either do not have much effect or increase subsequent delinquent behaviour’. I concentrate here on the labelling research concerning under-18s given the present study’s focus; it is also important to note that the evidence is regarded as stronger for this age group than adults, albeit still limited (Sherman, 2014). Research in the field has historically been neglected, with few experimental studies seeking to test labelling theory (Barrick, 2014) and little recent work. For example, Petrosino et al.’s (2010) meta-analysis is one of the most often-cited studies of the negative effects of system contact on juvenile delinquency, finding that it increased prevalence, frequency, severity and self-reported

that court attendance was significantly associated with the persistence of adolescent limited antisocial behaviour (measured as by the Young Adult Self Report version of the Child Behaviour Checklist, which contains 114 problem behaviour items) into young adulthood, substantiating Moffitt’s ‘snare. However, the sample were more disadvantaged than the general population, did not follow group beyond 21 and those categorised as ‘life

offending.⁶⁴ However, the effects are small and most of the 29 experimental studies included are dated (published before 1990), with the authors finding no or small positive effects of system contact for the 6 studies reported after 1990.⁶⁵ In addition, the studies were not intended to test labelling theory, thus key conditions are often poorly described (i.e. what was entailed in ‘criminal justice processing’) and there is also some question about selection effects, as well as a lack of information on participants’ prior records.

Longitudinal research has facilitated specific examination of labelling effects, but is typically beset by small sample sizes since only a fragment of the overall sample experience formal system contact. The first test of this kind was undertaken by Farrington (1977) in the Cambridge Study of Delinquent Development, a longitudinal survey of 411 boys from the age of 8 in London. He matched a sample of 53 boys convicted between the ages of 14 and 18, with 53 others who were not convicted up to age 18, on the basis of self-reported delinquency scores at 14 and other risk factors.⁶⁶ He found that those who were publicly labelled were significantly more likely to reoffend. However, additional analysis found that the age, quantity and nature of conviction appeared to moderate the labelling effects: for those who were convicted at 14 (45 boys) or between 14 and 16 (14 boys), but not afterwards, while there was evidence of a labelling effect immediately after conviction, there was no significant difference at age 18 with the matched non-labelled groups. Yet, interestingly, although not significant, there was some difference for the group convicted before the age of 14, suggesting that labelling at a young age may have a longer effect than later such experiences. Analysis of delinquency scores of those who were convicted only once between ages 14 and 18 (28 boys) and those who were convicted on two or more occasions (25 boys), found that there was a significant effect from repeated labelling only.⁶⁷ Finally, comparison of 21 boys who had unrecordable motoring convictions or cautions

course persistent’ were a relatively small sample (92).

⁶⁴ This was based on analysis of 29 experimental studies.

⁶⁵ Of the 27 studies reporting prevalence data, 21 were conducted between 1973 and 1989, and 6 were conducted after January 1st 1990. Analysis of the 6 studies showed a positive effect of system processing (effect size of .09). However when the two studies with strong, positive effects were removed due to methodological problems, the effect of system processing becomes slightly negative (effect size of -.01).

⁶⁶ This included troublesomeness at age 10 and five ‘important’ factors: criminality of parents, family income, family size, I.Q and a global index of parental behaviour (1977: 116). Although only 48 of the group could be matched on these factors (38 of the original 53 could be matched exactly with an additional 10 boys whose scores did not differ by more than 10 points with the non-labelled group), the publicly labelled boys had significantly higher delinquency scores at age 18 than the matched non-labelled group.

⁶⁷ Results for the single conviction group showed some labelling effects, did not reach the level of statistical significance ($p < 0.06$).

between age 14 and 17 with a grouped matched on self-reported delinquency at 14 found no labelling effect, suggesting that the nature of the label is important (1977: 116-9). However, the study has several weaknesses which limit the conclusions that can be drawn, including the small size of the samples, the absence of girls in the study and the dated time period in which it was conducted (e.g. Hirschfield [2008] argues that labelling effects may be less significant in today's inner-city communities [Murray et al., 2014: 230]).

More recent, and widely-cited, findings come from the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime, a longitudinal study of 4,300 school children who started secondary school in the city in 1998. McAra and McVie (2007: 330) found that children with previous police and system contact, were significantly more likely to be formally processed than those without such history, even after controlling for involvement in serious offending and other factors,⁶⁸ suggesting an adverse effect of public labelling. In further analysis using propensity score matching (PSM), McAra and McVie (2007) compared the impact of three progressively intensive forms of system contact (police charge, referral to a Reporter, and hearing⁶⁹ resulting in supervision) on the prevalence and frequency of serious offending on an intervention group and their matched comparison group, at the point of intervention and one-year later. Although there was a reduction in self-reported serious offending across all groups, the analysis showed that children who had being taken to a hearing, resulting in supervision, were significantly more likely to self-report involvement in serious offending one-year later than the matched comparison group (2007: 333).⁷⁰ The authors argue that this suggests that the harmful effects of the system are amplified the further one is drawn in, inhibiting desistance. Of particular relevance, while the authors reported potential weaknesses in supervision (e.g. only 25 per cent of cases received regular one-to-one support), they questioned whether improvements would reduce the apparent harmful effects of such intervention:

We would argue that it is not the welfarist paradigm per se that is damaging to young people (or indeed the nature of social work services on offer), but rather the

⁶⁸ These factors included social deprivation, family structure and those affecting the child's availability for policing, such as truancy and hanging around the streets in the evenings.

⁶⁹ A children's hearing comprises a panel of three specially trained volunteers who decide whether compulsory measures of care, such as a supervision order, are required. Referrals to a hearing are made by the Children's Reporter on either care and/or offence grounds and.

⁷⁰ There were no significant differences in the offending of the two groups at either the police charge or reporter referral stages.

cumulative effect of systemic contact over many years, which our findings suggest, has the potential to stigmatise and criminalise (2007: 338).

Yet one should be cautious in drawing definitive conclusions given both the small sample size in the hearing group (59 adolescents) and the difficulty matching PSM groups (the comparison group included those with charges).

However, in a later paper (2010: 190) the authors present evidence that there are ‘critical moments’ in the early to mid-teenage years, which influence desistance. Analysis centred on comparison of two groups with early onset offending (first conviction at age 9/10), categorised as a chronic group (34 children) whose offending reduced in their early 20s and a desister group (24 children) whose offending declined from age 15/16 and had stopped by the age of 20. Importantly, the groups virtually mirrored each other on a range of factors at age 12, including volume of serious offending, previous system contact and socio-economic status.⁷¹ However, amongst the chronic group there were significant increases in prevalence of truancy, school exclusion, adversarial police contact, as well as police warning and charge at ages 13-15, which were not experienced by the desister group.⁷² These could not be accounted for changes in self-reported serious offending as the groups were indistinguishable in this regard from ages 12-17, and as such suggests that desistance may be hindered by increases in adverse school experience and police contact, especially in early-mid adolescence (2010: 191-4). Interestingly, amongst both groups there was a significant increase in experience of statutory supervision at age 15, which was higher in the desister group (63 per cent versus 53 per cent amongst chronics), perhaps indicating that this type of system contact has little or no adverse effect on desistance; although this was not explored and the findings are limited by the small sample sizes involved (2010: 193).

More generally, many significant research gaps remain. There has been poor conceptualisation and study of the key mechanisms associated with the theory. Notably, despite deviant self-concept being a lynchpin of labelling theory, it is one of the least researched areas (Farrington and Murray, 2014; Barrick, 2014). If system contact does adversely shape self-concept, what is the process by which this occurs? Why would the individual accept, rather than reject, the deviant label? Gadd’s application of the

⁷¹ The only significant differences were that the desister group were more likely to live in one of the 25% deprived areas and a greater proportion were male (2010: 192).

psychoanalytic notions of identification and recognition to desistance sheds some light on these issues, suggesting a ‘more dynamic process than labelling theory – however refashioned – is able to capture’ (Gadd, 2006: 197). Yet they remain little understood. There are uncertain findings about the differential effects of official processing too. Barrick (2014) in her synthesis of 66 empirical studies on the official sanction-reconviction relationship found evidence for stronger labelling effects for juveniles.⁷³ She suggests that this may indicate the increased malleability of juvenile identity and susceptibility to stigmatisation, although it is unclear whether this is reflective of the age-crime curve (2014: 101-2). Petrosino et al. (2010: 131) report stronger labelling effects for juveniles with moderate to high levels of prior offending, compared to those with low levels; while system processing seemed to have a crime *reduction* effect on first-time offenders. However, the effect sizes are small. Barrick (2014: 105-8) also highlights the inconsistency of findings of differential labelling effects by race, gender, and socio-economic class.

Although the empirical evidence for labelling theory is beset by weaknesses, holes and inconsistencies, taken together it points to a slightly harmful effect of system contact, which may increase with repeated contact. Even if the effects are small, they are a significant matter of concern given the potential to inhibit desistance. Moreover, this message tallies with service users’ narratives about the stigma associated with criminal justice processes (Bramley et al., 2019; Maruna and LeBel, 2009). However, further research on labelling theory is clearly needed to better understand the effects of criminal justice processing, as well as any mediating and moderating factors. As Farrington and Murray (2014: 6) note:

More research is needed to specify the types of sanctions that are most effective with different types of people. It is to be expected that, depending on the types of sanctions, types of people, and other boundary conditions or moderating factors, official processing might increase, decrease, or have no effect on offending.

In particular, there are important questions and uncertainties about the effects of community supervision. The available evidence on system contact would suggest that supervision has the potential to do more harm than good, although this may vary by circumstance. The labelling effects appear to be greater for those who have had repeated contact with the system and potentially also longer lasting for those with contact at an early age. However, we know little

⁷² However, the desister group experienced non-significant increases in truancy and adversarial police contact.

about the particular labelling effects of supervision as most of the research has encompassed generic system processing or conviction, and only considered supervision within the context of multiple previous system contacts. As a result there remain questions about the effects of supervision on children who are first time offenders, which is increasingly the case in England and Wales (see Bateman and Wigzell, 2019). We know little too about whether the nature of supervision can ameliorate labelling effects. McAra and McVie (2007: 338-9) question whether improvements in the nature of supervision would help reduce offending rates, arguing that it is the cumulative effect of system contact that has particularly deleterious consequences. However, they later advocate for such intervention to minimise the potential for stigma and criminalisation through a desistance paradigm, entailing work on constructing a non-offender identity and an emphasis on positive, stable child – worker relationships (2007: 201).

In this regard, while labelling theorists contend that official criminal justice intervention can confer negative identity, by the same token it may also harbour the potential to ascribe positive labels. Maruna and LeBel (2010: 76) argue that such a ‘de-labelling process’ is often a component of desistance: ‘...personal transformation...also contains a looking-glass element. People start to believe that they can successfully change their lives when those around them start to believe they can’. While there is significant evidence for such ‘pygmalion effects’ across a range of fields, there remains scattered support in the criminological literature. Yet there is evident potential for supervision to work in such a way through the professional relationship, and the removal of barriers to participation in conventional society. Gadd’s psychosocial theory of desistance offers transferable insights into how supervisors may be able to inspire positive self-identity development through the processes of identification and recognition from a position as an ‘external, sovereign other’(2006: 182). This may be particularly relevant to the supervision of under-18s given scholarly suggestion that the formational stage of identity may render adolescence a period of especial malleability to external influences, as discussed later. As such, although there is some evidence for an adverse labelling effect of system contact amongst under-18s, their stage of development may mean that such labels are more likely to be transient and open to change.

⁷³ with 58 per cent reoffending after criminal justice contact compared with 23 per cent of adults.

Factors in adolescent desistance

Late adolescence is clearly a time when some individuals ‘start to stop’ offending. However, as Mulvey et al. (2004: 223) contend, we have relatively little understanding of desistance in adolescence, including whether the same factors are involved as in adulthood:

It would be even more useful, however, to know what factors prompt positive change among these [serious offender] adolescents during this period.

Unfortunately, current research on this topic is also sparse. A limited number of studies have identified a few factors, such as a positive marriage or steady employment, as likely candidates for promoting positive change (Laub et al., 1998). These studies, however, have focused on adults, and it is not known whether the same, or even comparable, factors affect juveniles similarly.

As Mulvey et al. (2004: 223) posit, the developmental changes afoot during adolescence may have distinct implications for the factors associated with desistance, including ‘one’s sense of personal agency, psychological capacities, attitudes and beliefs, or social context’.

Socio-structural factors

The little empirical research that has considered desistance theories with respect to under-18s, suggests that they are pertinent to this age group, but with divergences and many remaining questions. The two largest studies of desistance including under-18s suggest that desistance factors differ by age and gender. Graham and Bowling’s (1995) mixed methods study⁷⁴ of offending and desistance amongst 14-25 year olds found that life-course events were only associated with desistance amongst girls and young women, with some variation by age. Thus, survey data showed that desistance was correlated with school completion for girls aged 14-17, and family formation/ marriage for those in their 20s (1995: 59). In contrast, many of the men had not experienced such ‘developmental landmarks’ by their early 20s, and those who had seemed no more likely to desist (1995: 65). *Understanding Offending Among Young People*, a study of resistance, desistance and persistence amongst 276 young people in Scotland across three age groups (aged 14-15 years, 18-19 years and 22-25 years) found that desistance was related to consequences and increased maturity in the youngest group;

⁷⁴ This comprised a survey with a random sample of 1,721 young people about their background, family life, school experiences and lifestyles, including involvement in offending, with desistance analysis focused on a sub-section of 166 ‘desisters’ and 226 ‘persisters’ (1995: 52); and life history interviews with 21 ‘desisters’ (defined as those who had not reported offending within the past year), comprising 10 young men and 11 young women aged 16-27 (1995: 68).

maturity and transitions, such as getting a job or finding a partner, in the middle group; and family responsibilities in the older group, especially amongst young women (Jamieson et al., 1999; McIvor et al., 2004).⁷⁵ In addition, both Graham and Bowling's (1995) and McIvor et al.'s (2004) studies identified disengagement from offending peers as an important factor in desistance, in common with more recent research (see also Barry, 2006, McMahon and Jump, 2018).

Although the cross-sectional design of both studies means that it is difficult to know whether the samples had really desisted, their findings that desistance factors vary by age are entirely plausible. It seems likely that some 'traditional' correlates of desistance, such as marriage/family formation and employment, will be less important for under-18s (and indeed this may be the case more generally for marriage⁷⁶). Instead, it may be that other positive socio-structural developments more relevant to the age group are related to desistance. For example, McMahon and Jump's (2018: 11-12) desistance study with 21 'persistent and serious' young offenders aged 13 – 17 reported that positive structural changes, such as education, training, employment and reparation of family relationships, appeared to 'play a particularly dominant role in young offenders' desistance'. Notably, findings from the Sheffield Desistance Study also point to the importance of rapprochements with family members in the desistance pathways of young adults (Bottoms and Shapland, 2016: 114).

Maturation

Redolent of Glueck and Glueck's (1974) maturation theory, young people in both Graham and Bowling's (1995) and McIvor et al.'s (2004) studies, emphasised the role of maturation in desistance, manifest in being less impulsive and understanding the moral and personal consequences of offending (see also McMahon and Jump, 2018; Beyond Youth Custody, 2017b). While understanding of the role of maturation in desistance remains limited – a legacy of employing it in a tautological way⁷⁷ – in recent years there has been renewed interest in the concept that suggests its significance in explaining adolescent and young adult

⁷⁵ The sample was categorised as resisters if they had never offended (92); desisters if they had offended before but not in the previous 12 months (75); and persisters if they had committed one serious offence or several less serious offences in the last 12 months (109) (McIvor et al, 2004: 183).

⁷⁶ There is evidence that marriage may no longer be as significant to desistance given changes in modern society since the Gluecks' 1940 study on which Sampson and Laub conducted their research (McAra and McVie, 2017: 62).

⁷⁷ That is, that maturation results in desistance while desistance is evidence of maturity (Bottoms and Shapland, 2016: 197).

withdrawal from offending (Mulvey and Schubert, 2016; Bottoms and Shapland, 2016; Rocque, 2015). For example, Bottoms and Shapland (2016: 107-11) identified maturation as a prominent feature in the narratives of their young adult ‘would-be desisters’, characterised by increased responsibility and improved self-control. However, they argue that it should be conceptualised as ‘active maturation’ to reflect that it is ‘animated by the *impetus* of offenders themselves’ and ‘not simply an internal psychological matter [but]... continually shaped, prompted and/or inhibited by relationships with significant others’ (2016: 108; own emphasis). This finding is likely to be relevant to under-18s given that psychosocial maturation steadily increases from early adolescence (Mulvey and Schubert, 2016). That said, Bottoms and Shapland note that many of their sample exercised self-control *synchronously* (Kennett, 2001), deliberately avoiding potentially criminogenic situations ‘by restructuring their lives so as to avoid meeting former criminal associates, or deliberately not going to certain pubs’ (2016: 111). Such tactics are likely to be less available to under-18s, who by dint of their young age and associated childhood status are less able to control where, how and with whom they spend their time (such as in school).

Agency

Related to this, in line with some of the desistance research with adults, agency has been identified as important to young people’s ability to desist, with some potential differences. In their child-focused study of desistance, McMahon and Jump (2018) found evidence of ‘condemnation’ scripts amongst those who persisted, as first identified in Maruna’s (2001) work with adults. Although such scripts were ‘perhaps less developed’ with the children in their sample, there was a sense of ‘inevitability’ of their continued offending, suggesting a lack of personal agency (2018: 12). Meanwhile, those who desisted had more hopeful narratives and underlined the role of agency in change, although McMahon and Jump (2018) suggested that the constraints of their life stage may render them less able to exercise it, in line with sociological theories of children’s agency (see for example, Bordonaro and Payne, 2012). Findings from Fitzpatrick et al.’s (2015) study of personal goal aspirations amongst 14 boys under YOS supervision in the UK suggests that aspects of ‘condemnation’ thinking may be common in vulnerable children’s narratives. All expressed uncertainty – ‘a hopefulness and hopelessness’ - about the likelihood of realising their idealised future plans, shaped by previous experiences of powerlessness, victimisation and instability. Moreover, they often employed protective mechanisms for dealing with the potential threat of disappointment, including the portrayal of oneself as ambivalent about the future (2015: 175-7). The authors

argue that this demonstrates the ‘crucial’ importance of professionals supporting the self-determination and hope of this group (2015: 179).

There is some evidence that children’s sense of agency increases with age. Haigh’s (2009) study of desistance amongst 25 young people in Australia (split into those aged 14-17 [15 interviews] and 18-24 years [10 interviews]) reported that agentic change was critical to desistance amongst the older group. However, younger interviewees highlighted the role of external influences, such as changing schools and parental pressure. Nevertheless, as with Giordano et al.’s (2002) cognitive theory of desistance, she asserts that a significant change in the interpretation of their lives underlay all participants’ attempts to desist such that external challenges to ‘doing crime’ and opportunities to change became ‘relevant’ (2009: no page).

Identity

Research with this age group suggests too that, as with adults, identity plays some role, with negative self-concept associated with engagement in offending and positive identity development often linked to desistance (McMahon and Jump, 2018; Johns et al., 2017; Beyond Youth Custody 2017b; Nugent and Barnes, 2013). For example, the desisters in McMahon and Jump’s (2018: 9) study ‘explicitly discussed shedding “offending identities” and developing new, prosocial non-criminal identities’, although the sample was very small (6 people). However, research with young custody-leavers aged between 14 and 25 found mixed evidence for the role of identity change in their desistance journeys: while a minority described a clear shift in their sense of self; many provided contradictory accounts of a changed identity and were ‘resistant’ to such interpretations, instead emphasising the role of agency; and it was absent from others’ responses (Beyond Youth Custody, 2017b: 18-23). Yet participants often referenced a crystallisation of discontent and imagined future selves (Paternoster and Bushway, 2009) in stopping offending, suggesting that cognitive change played some role (Beyond Youth Custody, 2017b: 18-23). Although it would be inappropriate to draw firm conclusions from the research owing to the vague description of methods,⁷⁸ it nevertheless raises questions about the role and nature of identity shifts for

⁷⁸ The research was conducted as part of Beyond Youth Custody, a five-year project designed to improve knowledge and practice of resettlement for young people after release from custody through a multi-dimensional programme of research, dissemination and policy-influencing activities. This included involvement with 15 voluntary sector projects who were supporting young custody leavers to collect data on resettlement implementation and effectiveness. Although a general overview of methods is provided (e.g. ‘more than 200 site

desisting adolescents. Given that ‘research has long indicated that crystallisation of identity (e.g. discovering “one’s true self”) is part of the maturation process and transition to adulthood’ (Rocque, 2015: 350) it may be that some adolescents experience any cognitive shifts associated with desistance as part of the process of becoming who they are, rather than a significant departure from their old self (in line with Case and Haines argument [2020]). In this regard, Rocque (2015) proposes that cognitive transformation and identity maturation should be understood as parallel concepts, insofar as the latter comprises prosocial attitudes of deviance, prosocial views of self and openness to change (Rocque, 2015: 350).

Given the formational stage of identity during adolescence, it has been suggested that this period may carry greater potential for narrative change as ‘a period of malleability’ (McNeill, 2006b: 133; see also Hampson, 2018). For example, in their case study research of 14 serious juvenile offenders aged 14-19, Panuccio et al. (2012: 150) identified the importance of external support in motivating and sustaining desistance, concluding that ‘they are still young and may be less committed to criminal lifestyles and more amenable to prosocial influences than older offenders’. Likewise, McIvor et al.’s (2004: 185) findings indicated that openness to change was strongest amongst the children in their sample: the youngest respondents were most confident about their capacity to desist, whereas for the older group ‘who may have become more entrenched in patterns of offending...desistance was rarely considered to be an immediate or achievable goal’. This broadly fits with labelling research findings that criminal justice contact has a cumulative adverse effect on children’s identity (McAra and McVie, 2007).

Relationships

Related to this, there is some evidence that relationships with prosocial adults may have particular resonance for young people. In her study of probation, Rex found that advice and encouragement provided by probation officers ‘appeared to have particular resonance for young recidivists’ (those aged 20 years and under) (Rex, 1999: 375). Similarly, Trotter (1999) found that the pro-social modelling approach was most effective with *young*, high-risk offenders (as cited in McNeill, 2003: 154). Rex also, notably, found that younger men’s needs differed from older probationers in that they required practical help, rather than advice

visits and... a similar number of staff and stakeholder interviews’), there is a lack of detail e.g. regarding the number of young interviewees, and how desistance was defined (2017b: 15-16).

to solve difficulties themselves (Rex, 1999: 374). McNeill (2003:159) asserts that the supervisory relationship may be particularly important for young men involved with their peers in offending, given the shifting nature of their commitment to desistance. The centrality of worker – child relationships to change is a consistent theme in the wider youth justice research, as explored later in the chapter.

Summary

To summarise, research on desistance during adolescence remains limited, although it is an emerging area of interest. There are weaknesses to the majority of studies of desistance during this life-stage insofar as they typically comprise very small samples and/or lack follow-up to determine whether ‘desisters’ really stopped offending. Nevertheless, taken together this literature suggests that there are commonalities in the desistance pathways of adults and adolescents, including the role of positive structural changes, agency, cognitive change and of supportive relationships. However, the research also indicates that there are important areas of difference in relation to desistance and children that as yet are insufficiently understood. These include the distinct constraints experienced by children in exercising their agency, and the subsequent need for increased support in this regard; the role of maturation processes; and the potential greater importance of prosocial relationships. There are inconsistencies in the existing evidence base too concerning the role and nature of identity shifts and positive structural changes in desistance amongst under-18s.

Perspectives on supervision: children and professionals

What it means to be on supervision

A number of recent studies have provided insights into children’s perceptions on the meaning of youth justice supervision. A common theme is that children view it as having limited meaning to their lives. France et al. (2012) noted that most children had little understanding of the reason they had received the disposal, or its purpose. Phoenix and Kelly (2013) report that, with one exception, the 29 youth-justice-involved children they interviewed were unable to talk about their specific intervention or order. France et al. (2012: 69) found that those who did have a greater understanding ‘saw little value in how it helped them in their everyday lives’. For the majority, the youth justice system was ‘seen as just another way of controlling them’ (2012: 68). Similarly, writing about her interviews with 52 youth-justice-involved

girls, Sharpe noted that they ‘often felt that YOT supervision had not effected change in their everyday circumstances’ (2012: 133).

However, a more optimistic picture is painted by retrospective interviews of people’s supervisory experiences. It may be that the passage of time since supervision allows participants to reflect more positively (Farrall et al., 2014). One such example is Johns et al.’s (2017) case study of the lives of 12 formerly prolific offending young people, now aged 21-24, and their YOT workers in one Welsh community.⁷⁹ They found that, within a context of marginalisation at home and in the local community, for some, the YOT was the only place where they felt supported and listened to. They credited the YOT with saving them from getting into more trouble and playing a crucial role in their movement away from it. The meaningfulness of supervision to the group seemed to be linked to the long-term, intensive nature of their YOT contact and the corresponding depth of their supervisory relationships. Similarly, Barry’s (2007) interviews with 40 previously persistent offending young people (aged between 18-33) revealed that supervision was viewed as the most helpful of all disposals, largely because of the quality of relationship with their key worker.

Supervision content

There is a paucity of research on children’s perspectives of what helps - or not - in one-to-one youth justice supervision, and almost nothing on practitioner views. Beginning with the literature on supervisory meetings, Sharpe noted that the girls in her study were critical of those that involved ‘just talking’ or completing worksheets (2012: 135). Some said that they didn’t come to such appointments because they viewed them as pointless. Phoenix and Kelly (2013) similarly reported that young people questioned the usefulness of supervision activities, such as talking and completing questionnaires. This is because they did not perceive them to be addressing what they saw as their needs, such as finding somewhere stable to live. This resonates with Shapland, Bottoms and Muir’s finding that their young adult males under probation supervision considered meetings unhelpful that comprised superficial discussion of ‘general stuff’ and ‘how am I managing’ (2012: 139).

⁷⁹ Johns et al.’s (2017) case study is drawn from their larger study of the prolific offending of 117 young people in Wales. The case study itself comprised narrative analysis of the 12 young people’s case files (11 men and one young woman, now aged 21-24), as well as interviews with four of the young men and two of their YOT workers.

However, there is evidence that people do attach significant value to being listened to and talking with their supervisor when they perceive such interactions as genuinely attending to their emotional and practical needs (Barry, 2007; McCulloch, 2005). For Barry's young adults this was viewed as the most important means of supporting change, which she suggests is because it offered the opportunity for 'personal development, learning and meaningful interaction' within a context of few trusted individuals to which to turn in childhood (2007: 416). Whereas for those in McCulloch's (2005) study, it was the activity of 'talking through' and receiving advice about how to resolve their problems that was most helpful, as they did not expect probation to do this for them (see also, Rex, 1999). The practitioners correspondingly viewed such work as helpful due to the opportunities it offered to develop supervisees' thinking skills and problem solving abilities (McCulloch, 2005). Such support may have significance beyond meeting supervisees' needs: Rex's research (1999: 375) with 60 young and adult probationers found that they interpreted provision of practical advice as evidence of concern for them as people, which 'appeared to have particular resonance for young recidivists'. Notably, the opportunity for practical assistance and having someone to talk with were the two aspects of supervision most wanted by the young adults in Shapland, Bottoms and Muir's (2012) longitudinal study.

The value attached to practical advice by those in McCulloch's (2005) work may reflect their older age, since younger participants are more likely to want direct help (Rex, 1999). Sharpe's (2012) work seems to corroborate this: the girls' positive evaluations of YOT supervision were typically related to receipt of practical support, such as help with finding accommodation. Yet many girls reported that YOT interventions did not address their social and welfare needs, such as help with experiences of victimisation. This accords with research findings that YOTs are less likely to attend to needs relating to family and personal relationships, living arrangements and their neighbourhood, with workers finding these difficult to address due to their lack of influence in such areas (Wilson, 2013). The girls also reported having received 'little or no support prior to their involvement in the youth justice system', leading to complaints that they had been provided with 'too little help, too late' (Sharpe, 2012: 132).

In term of specific supervisory activities, studies have tended to find that children are critical of reparation, perceiving it as either irrelevant to their offending and victims, or as a

punishment (Sharpe, 2012; France et al., 2012).⁸⁰ However the young people in Barry's (2007) study considered it constructive because it provided something to do, giving them a sense of self-worth. A unifying theme across the literature is the value placed on creative leisure activities by both children and practitioners alike. For the girls in Sharpe's (2012) study, boxing and fitness sessions seemed to increase their self-esteem. The seven YOT workers in Drake et al.'s pilot study (2014) similarly felt that the unstructured nature of activities, such as mucking out horses and walking together to new places, provided a basis for children to envision different lives and develop positive self-narratives. While Johns et al (2017: 15) note that kayaking and working with animals not only provided the children with 'alternative forms of risk taking', but helped to foster supervisory relationships and enhance the legitimacy of the YOT. It is noteworthy that despite their worth, such opportunities were only available to a handful of Sharpe's (2012) interviewees, which may well be a wider experience, given the recent decreases in YOT funding outlined in the previous chapter.

Relationships and personal support

It is a consistent finding of studies in the field that children's relationships with their YOT workers are the main arena in which their experiences of supervision are shaped.⁸¹ Sharpe (2012: 135) notes that for the girls in her study, the quality of relationship with their YOT worker was the 'principal determinant' of their appraisal of YOT interventions. On the basis of their interviews with 29 YOT-involved young people, Phoenix and Kelly (2013) argue that children's relationships with their YOT workers provided 'the context in which they made sense of the "offending work"' undertaken with practitioners. Whereas 'their experiences and the meaning they derived from them had little to do with any specific intervention or policy' (2013: 431). Gray similarly noted in her seven-year follow-up study of nine recipients of Intensive Supervision and Surveillance (ISSP) that the relationship aspect of supervision was felt by many of those interviewed to be 'one of the most influential aspects of ISSP' (2013a: 35).

In terms of outcomes, Johns et al. (2017: 18) report that the YOT's support, provided through a trusting supervisory relationship, was perceived by the young people as the central factor in

⁸⁰ Reparation commonly takes the form of general community work rather than direct reparation to victims.

⁸¹ Evidence of the centrality of young person – worker relationships can also be found in the literature concerning alternatives to custody (Biehal et al, 2010: 11), youth custody (Rose, 2014; Ofsted, 2010), resettlement work (Nugent, 2015; Bateman et al, 2013; Ipsos Mori, 2010; Cooper et al, 2007) and voluntary sector schemes (Knight, 2010).

their movement away from crime, although intimate relationships and having a family were the ‘biggest motivator’. Likewise, some of the young people in Gray’s (2013a: 34) study reported that the bond with their worker was ‘the important factor’ in their compliance and subsequent desistance. In this respect, engagement emerges as another key benefit of such relationships. Phoenix and Kelly (2013) found that children’s perception of whether or not their YOT worker cared was the key determinant of their engagement with supervision. While a YJB-commissioned study of techniques for effective engagement found that many of the 78 young people interviewed ‘highlighted the importance of their relationship with their worker, making a direct link between feeling positive about their worker and the likelihood of them attending the YOT when required’ (Ipsos MORI, 2010: 25). These findings broadly accord with those of probation research studies, which have shown that the supervisory relationship is perceived by supervisees to be the ‘pivotal factor’ in determining whether or not probation helps them to desist (Leibrich 1994; see also Rex, 1999; Healy, 2012).

The importance of relationships is acknowledged by children and practitioners alike. A study of ISSP reported that ‘managers often emphasised the quality of the relationships developed between the young people and individual ISSP staff [as most important in outcomes], rather than any particular component of ISSP’ (Moore et al., 2004: 33). As France and Homel (2006: 305) argue, what young people value but are often not getting ‘is not so much programmes and content but a good supportive relationship with an adult who is not judgemental and is able to offer guidance and advocacy when needed’. This resonates with the psychotherapy evidence that the quality of the therapeutic relationship is the most important factor in client outcomes, irrespective of the intervention (Hovarth and Symonds, 1991). The practitioners in Johns et al.’s (2017) and Drake et al.’s (2014) research similarly attest to the centrality of good quality supervisory relationships in supporting desistance (for comparable findings from the probation literature see Phillips, 2014; Shapland et al., 2012). While Ipsos MORI’s (2010) survey of 421 YOT practitioners found that 94 per cent believed that developing a positive worker - young person relationship was necessary for effective engagement (see also Marshall, 2012; Mason and Prior, 2008).

A slightly different view was taken by Sharpe’s professional interviewees, who felt that supervisory relationships were important ‘but...are not everything’ (2012: 114). This chimes with lessons from the social work and probation literature that the supervisory relationship is not a panacea for change. Although it can support and motivate efforts to desist, individuals emphasise that they need to make their own decision to desist and that their social networks

play just as, if not more of, an important role (McNeill, 2006a; McNeill, 2009; Farrall, 2002; Hill, 1999). Thus, the message from the youth justice and probation literature is that the worker - client relationship cannot act 'as a substitute for addressing structural inequalities in society' (Burnett and McNeill, 2005: 234), but instead underpins the supervisory process (McNeill et al., 2005).

The operation and effect of relationships

While the centrality of worker – service user relationships to effective practice has been increasingly highlighted by empirical youth justice research in recent years (Johns et al., 2017; Drake et al., 2014; Gray, 2013a; Phoenix and Kelly, 2013; Ipsos MORI, 2010), much of the evidence is drawn from small-scale studies and the effective practice literature. As Prior and Mason (2010: 219) note, 'the quality of the relationship between practitioner and the young person and the associated knowledge and skills – has rarely been the topic of rigorous research investigation'. They contend that this stems from an 'ineligibility' of such questions for experimental research (Prior and Mason, 2010). But perhaps more significant is the 'airbrushing out' of the supervisory relationship as a stimulus for change in the national policy discourse, until relatively recently (Burnett, 2007; see also Burnett and McNeill, 2005).

Such neglect of the topic reveals many unanswered questions and uncertainties regarding *helping* supervisory relationships in youth justice. The 'operation and effects of these relationships in youth justice are little understood' (Drake et al., 2014: 27), and there is a distinct gap in our knowledge regarding 'whether, how and why' the supervisory relationship can facilitate change (McNeill and Batchelor, 2004: 72). Furthermore, we know relatively little about the qualities of *helping* supervisory relationships in youth justice or the necessary conditions for their development. Thus, in order to theorise and define helping relationships, I turn to the literature from a range of helping fields, including psychotherapy, social work, youth work, health, and education, in addition to youth justice and criminal justice supervision.

Theoretical frameworks for helping relationships

The theories outlined here are psychosocial in character, entailing a conceptualisation of individuals as 'psychosocial subjects' who are 'simultaneously, the products of their own

unique psychic worlds *and* a shared social world' (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007: 4). Thus, 'the social is 'always psychically invested and the psychological is socially formed, neither has an essence apart from the other' (Frosch, 2003: 1555). Human beings can only be understood through the prisms of social context and their inner worlds. Gadd and Jefferson (2007) advocate a psychosocial approach that seeks to take both the social world and the inner world seriously. Thus:

taking the social world seriously means thinking about the questions to do with structure, power and discourse in such a way that 'the socially constructed subject can be theorised as more than just a "dupe" of ideology; that is... [as] more than the social conditions that give rise to them' (Frosch, 2003: 1552). Taking the inner world seriously involves an engagement with contemporary psychoanalytic theorizing because only there, in our view, are unconscious as well as conscious processes, and the resulting conflicts and contractions among reason, anxiety and desire, subject to any sustained, critical attention (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007: 4)

While the psychosocial perspective is usually identified with modern psychoanalytic theory, attachment theory can be seen as a type of psychosocial theory, as Gadd and Jefferson (2007: 19) explain:

...our view is that Bowlby's work was a significant step in the direction of genuinely psychosocial criminology, his research identifying some of the most important connections between the psychic and the social: the significance of childhood attachments to adult forms of relating; the intersubjective and contingent character of these attachments; and the relationships between these attachments and the symbolic, often defensive quality of much juvenile delinquency.

I draw on both contemporary psychoanalytic and attachment theories here. Both emphasise the importance of childhood relational experiences in shaping development, behaviour and future relationships, despite understanding their foundations somewhat differently, as detailed below. Although the disciplines, historically, have had an uneasy coexistence, the interconnections between them are increasingly acknowledged and utilised (Fonagy et al., 2018; Holmes and Slade, 2018; Holmes, 2014; Ruch, 2010).

A note on history

In taking a psychosocial perspective, one must acknowledge the unfavourable heritage of psycho-analytically informed relationship-based practice models in social work and probation. Such approaches were discredited in the 1970s and 1980s for ideological and empirical reasons. From an ideological perspective, they were criticised for the tendency to pathologise the individual – seeing their problems as a manifestation of internal psychological problems, rather than related to environmental factors – and positioning the practitioner as the expert ‘that assumes superiority over the other’s ability to perceive their own reality’ (Seal and Harris, 2016: 31) (see also, Ruch, 2010; Burnett and McNeill, 2005; Trevithick, 2003). At the empirical level, several public inquiries into the deaths of children known to social services (Trevithick, 2003) and research evidence apparently demonstrating the ineffectiveness of one-to-one and counselling work in probation were significant contributors to the discreditation of relational approaches (Burnett and McNeill, 2005).

Trevithick (2003: 166) agrees that such criticisms were warranted but contends that ‘these may not reflect the shortcomings of the approach itself, but the unrigorous use of a psychosocial relationship-based approach in practice’, which treated the relationship as an ‘end in itself’ – as a substitute for practical help – rather than a foundation for work. However, taking a different view, Burnett and McNeill (2005: 227) critique the pathologizing and patronising psychodynamic⁸² casework model, yet argue that ‘it would be a mistake to assume that all probation officers practised...in the manner that was being criticized’. In this regard, research and practice observations from the time indicate that probation intervention was often more pragmatically based, focused on solving practical problems (Davies, 1969, cited in Burnett and McNeill, 2005: 227; Vanstone, 2004: 107). Burnett and McNeill (2005) further suggest that the humanitarian values of probation officers mean that they were likely collaborative and respectful in their approaches.

⁸² It should be noted that the terms ‘psychoanalytic’ and ‘psychodynamic’ are often used interchangeably in the literature. Although, some texts differentiate between the two theories, there appears to be no consistent definition. For example, some literature defines psychoanalytic theory as based only on the body of work developed by Freud and understands psychodynamic theory as encompassing Freud’s and other’s contributions, such as object relations theory (Jones-Smith, 2020: 36). Others define psychoanalytic theory as encompassing the wide range of work in this field (e.g. Freud’s work and object relations theory), while psychodynamic theory is understood as informed by psychoanalytic theory, attachment theory and systems theory (Ruch, 2010). Throughout this thesis I use the term ‘psychoanalytic theory’, understood in this latter broad sense, and only reference ‘psychodynamics’ where the term is used in the literature.

Moreover, Burnett and McNeill (2005: 230) highlight that the two studies that are most often cited as providing evidence of the ineffectiveness of counselling/one-to-one work ‘are far from being straightforward investigations of what they are alleged to discredit’. Both the *Cambridge-Somerville Study* and *IMPACT* study produced mixed results, with the former examining counselling alongside a range of other interventions for the treatment group and the latter finding no difference in one-year reconviction rates between the intervention and control group (Jain and Cohen, 2014; Folkard et al., 1974, 1976, cited in Burnett and McNeill, 2005: 230-231). As Burnett and McNeill (2005: 231) note ‘overall, the research evidence against the effectiveness of traditional relationship-based supervision is minimal and not very convincing’.

While acknowledging the historical criticisms and according risks of taking a psychoanalytic perspective, in my view, when applied alongside an appreciation of the severe socio-structural difficulties faced by children (see Chapter 4) and the systemic practice context (Chapters 6 and 7), it provides rich insights into aspects of the relationship and the practice surrounding it that would not otherwise be possible.

Psychoanalytic theory

Object Relations Theory is regarded as the ‘predominant psychoanalytic paradigm’ (Holmes, 2014: 49). It is influential in historical and contemporary accounts of relationship-based practice (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1970; Ferard and Hunnybun, 1962; Ruch, 2010; Seal and Harris, 2016). Melanie Klein, often seen as the founder of this school of thought, understood the foundations of emotional development as developed in *relation* to the child’s significant other (termed the ‘*object*’; the mother, by Klein’s account) in the early months of life. She hypothesised, on the basis of inference from clinical work with adult patients and some play therapy with children,⁸³ that from birth children experience significant anxiety, arising primarily from fear of annihilation (the Death Instinct), as well as the trauma of birth (separation anxiety) and fear that their bodily needs will not be met (including through loss of the caregiver) (Klein, 1946: 166). To defend against the anxiety felt, the child projects their fears onto their mother as the primary external object. However, the mother is also experienced as gratifying and loved. Unable to assimilate the conflicting feelings, the infant occupies a ‘paranoid-schizoid position’, in which the mother is split into the ‘good’ and ‘bad’

⁸³ This is according to Holmes (2014: 116) as Klein’s 1946 paper does not detail the basis for her theory.

mother. In parallel the child experiences a fractured sense of self, simultaneously internalising ('introjecting') these good and bad feelings since 'she [the mother] is not felt to be a separate individual but is felt to be the bad self' (1946: 69). As further defence mechanisms, Klein proposes that there is a tendency to idealise the good mother as a protection against anxiety, as well as deny the existence of the bad object and the negative associated feelings (1946: 168).

Klein contended that in healthy development, in which there is 'gratification again and again by the external good object', this stage of paranoia is transitional (1946: 170). By her account, from the age of three months the child begins to recognise that 'the loved and hated aspects of the mother are no longer felt to be so widely separated', and experiences guilt about their aggressive feelings towards their loved mother. This is accompanied by development in understanding of the realities and synthesis between the external and inner world as well as the wish to repair and protect relations with the loved object (1946: 172). Such changes enable the child to experience a more integrated sense of self. This was termed by Klein as the 'depressive position', but perhaps more 'aptly named' by Winnicott (1955) as the 'stage of concern', denoting that 'out of concern for the mother and her family may later grow the concern for the wider family of one's immediate group, one's community and eventually, the plight of mankind' (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1970: 85)

While Klein's work placed emphasis on the child's internal world to the neglect of the external environment, the focus shifted in later variations of object relations theory. Donald Winnicott and Wilfred Bion emphasised the importance of maternal sensitivity and responsiveness to infants' needs to healthy development (this was also a key concern and basis for Bowlby's development of attachment theory, of which more later). For Bion (1962), the mother's ability to 'contain' her infant's emotions was critical in this regard. Building on Klein's work on projective identification (1946), Bion proposed that the infant's projection of intolerable feelings onto their mother (e.g. by crying in distress) provides a means of communication, by alerting and evoking distress in the mother. However, if the carer is able to physically and psychologically respond to the needs (for example, through feeding, comforting and changing), this *contains* and modifies the emotion into something more manageable, which is re-internalised by the infant. Through consistent containing experiences, a child develops the ability to both understand and cope with their emotions (Ruch, 2010: 42).

Klein's object relations theory has a number of significant shortcomings. These include assuming cognitive capacities of newborn infants that contemporary research indicates are not developed until 16-18 months of age, and her emphasis on primal drives, bodily functions, and body parts,⁸⁴ which are now more typically viewed as metaphoric (Gabbard, 1996: 162). However, the concepts of depressive and paranoid anxieties, splitting, projective identification, idealisation and containment remain fundamental to modern psychoanalytic thinking. Furthermore, rather than belonging exclusively to a period of infant development, they can be viewed 'as modes of psychological experience that persist throughout life' (Gabbard, 1996: 162; see also Megele, 2015; Ruch, 2010).

Applying psychoanalytic approaches

A central premise of psychoanalytic approaches is that one's past experiences may be unconsciously 'transferred' to present relationships and interactions. This may be especially so in the context of interactions with 'helping' professionals as s/he is likely to represent significant others, such as parents, that the service user turned to in times of need during childhood (Ferard and Hunnybun, 1962: 30). At its most potent, transference may mean that a helping professional is experienced 'as if they were our own parent' (Ruch, 2010: 34). However, more broadly, transference 'affect(s) the way we (a) perceive; (b) interpret the new situations and (c) influence(s) it; for our behaviour, in terms of our assumptions, tends to elicit a response in the partner(s) which fits our expectations' (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1970: 15).

As implied above, such interactions will also arouse unconscious feelings in the professional, known as *counter-transference*. This may be *personal* counter-transference (that is, the worker's own transference) or *diagnostic* counter-transference (that is, the worker's reaction to the user's transference; for example, a child acting in expectation that their YOS worker will behave as the punitive parent, may elicit such a reaction in the worker). Developing understanding of such processes is a critical tool for the practitioner as they provide insight into the child, the dynamics of the relationship and their own responses. Yet as Ruch (2010: 35) notes 'what makes it complicated is that because these patterns develop unconsciously,

⁸⁴ For example, in Klein's words the mother is split into the 'good breast' and the 'bad breast', with 'oral sadistic impulses' towards the breast (both phantatised and real) described as expressions of defensive anxiety (1946: 166-7).

we are not likely to be aware of what is happening’, rendering practitioner supervision essential to make them more ‘visible’. From a social work perspective, Ruch argues that an essential component of helping relationships is to consider such dynamics collaboratively ‘the ways in which both parties seem to be experiencing the relationship’ (2010: 35). This explicitly seeks to address previous criticism of psychosocial approaches as positioning the professional as ‘expert’.

As with early childhood relationships, the defence mechanisms of projection, splitting and idealisation are highly relevant to dynamics in the professional relationship. During periods of anxiety and distress, which typify involvement with ‘helping’ professions, such defence mechanisms are likely to be triggered, but this may be especially so for those who have past traumatic and adverse experiences. Thus, a practitioner may unconsciously take on the unwanted emotions of the service user (for example, through feeling unusually despondent after a meeting with a depressed child). Ruch notes of the social work context that there is a tendency for service users to manage their emotions through ‘splitting’, denoting some practitioners as unconditionally good (such as the YOS worker) and others as wholly bad (e.g. the social worker) (2010: 40). It is essential that practitioners have insight in such patterns. This is both to enable effective work with service users (to avoid collusion or punitiveness); for example the idealised worker may feel flattered and even special, making it difficult to challenge the service user for fear of jeopardising the relationship (Turney, 2010: 144-6). But, as Ruch explains, it is important too for the management of the professional relationship with other services: ‘in interprofessional working contexts, such behaviours by service users can have a powerful impact on professional dynamics (2010: 40).

While the psychoanalytic stance views an appreciation and connection with the unconscious dynamics imbued in their relationships as essential for helping, it also understands the relationship as actively helping through containment and introjection. Writing from a social work perspective, Trevithick (2012: 251) provides a detailed account of how a practitioner might act as a container:

This is often achieved through the process of talking to someone who has the ability to listen, to empathize, to take in and to bear the worries being expressed, and the ability to come alongside the individual in ways that communicate an understanding and provide a sense that the person is not alone. The final stage of

this process involves offering back the concerns to the anxious person but in a modified form, where the major anguish is acknowledged but also altered so that it no longer carries the same 'sting' or sense of agitation.

Casting further light on this last stage, Ruch (2010) explains that this may involve practitioners sensitively exploring the client's defensive mechanisms so that they are better able to understand and manage their emotions. Ruch highlights that non-verbal communication is an 'equally important...form[s] of containment that can speak more powerfully than words' (2010: 44). She relates an example of how a practitioner, Joe, provides a containing response through consistently expressing concern, providing support and turning up to meet 17-year-old Hussein, a care leaver who is hostile and often does not attend meetings. Gradually, Hussein is able to accept Joe's support and begin to open up about his anxieties (2010: 32-43). Yet it is unclear how such an approach might translate to youth justice supervision, where practitioners are expected to breach children for persistent non-attendance.

As well as helping clients to better understand and manage their emotions, some of the earlier literature suggests that containment 'makes it possible for the client to introject a kind of container/ mother holding aspect of himself' (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1970: 143-4). As Salzberger-Wittenberg (1970: 28) posits, drawing on Abraham: 'Incorporation is the basis of all learning. It is therefore possible, for instance, for the client to introject a tolerant and understanding caseworker'. Similarly, Ferard and Hunnybun (1962: 64) note that:

...through a client's relationship with a worker whom he respects and in whom he has confidence... allows for the gradual introjection by the client of another parent in the person of the worker, who is more sympathetic to human weaknesses and failures than the real or imagined parent of childhood.

Implicit here is that the developmental and reciprocal notion of human identity; a theme of the contemporary relational literature, which is discussed later.

Attachment Theory

The key premise of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973) is that humans have a primal need for security, which is principally sought from relationships (Holmes and Slade, 2018: 32). Secure early relationships provide the foundations for healthy development, through developing

positive expectations of others, the self, and relationships; a sense of security to enable exploration; the capacity to draw on external support; and the basis for emotional regulation (Sroufe, 2018: 1002-3; Holmes and Slade, 2018). Without this, people adapt in dysfunctional or ‘defensive’ ways (Holmes and Slade, 2018: 32). Thus, disrupted attachment experiences, which are prevalent amongst children who offend, can have adverse implications.

In this regard, attachment theory has demonstrated that one’s early experiences of the availability and responsiveness of key caregivers are internalised as ‘working models’ for subsequent patterns of relationship formation and behaviour (Bowlby, 1973: 207; see also Kobak et al., 2018). Through experimental research with infants, Ainsworth et al. (1978) identified three main categories of attachment, which were found to reflect the accessibility and responsiveness of the primary caregiver.⁸⁵ These are: secure; insecure ‘avoidant’ (in response to dismissive and disengaged parenting); and insecure ‘ambivalent’ (in response to inconsistently responsive parenting). As adults, avoidant children may present with a ‘dismissing’ style, shunning close relationships; while ambivalent children may develop a ‘preoccupied’ style of attachment, oscillating between a desire for closeness and withdrawal from relationships (Hesse, 2018; Ansbrosio, 2008). There is a wealth of evidence that insecure attachment is associated with later adverse development and well-being, including difficulty understanding one’s own and others’ emotions, as well as negative self-image (i.e. problems with ‘mentalisation’) (Thompson, 2018). However, prospective studies have found although those with insecure attachment patterns are more likely to experience behaviour problems than those with secure patterns, *most do not* (Sroufe, 2005).

In this regard, there are important mediators of the effects of early attachment experiences, including genetics (Bakermans-Kranenburg and van Ijzendoorn, 2018). Recent longitudinal research has suggested that one’s internal working model is open to revision between early childhood and late adolescence, dependent on changes in the caregiving environment, and may even be adaptable in adulthood on the basis of intimate relational experiences (Kobak et al., 2018). Furthermore, attachment research points to the need for secure relationships

⁸⁵ The experiment, termed the Strange Situation, involved infants aged 12-20 months entering a room with their parent and spending several minutes together there before a stranger joins them. What follows are several episodes of the parent leaving the child in the room both with the stranger and alone for a few minutes at a time. Attachment categorisation is based on how the child responds to their parent when they return. Main and Solomon (1990) added the fourth category of ‘disorganised/ disorientated’, to account for children (about 15 per cent) who do not coherently adhere to any of the main attachment categories, although demonstrate an

throughout the life-course to ‘help co-regulate extremes of emotion, positive and negative’ (Holmes and Slade, 2018: 26).

For attachment theorists, therapeutic relationships harbour a potential to help through providing a sense of psychological security and safety – *a secure base*. Secure relationships are understood as ‘form[ing] the springboard from development and change’ (Holmes and Slade, 2018: 21). More specifically, Holmes and Slade (2018: 19) view transformative patient-therapist relationships as ‘depend[ent] on the therapist’s capacity to maintain a stance that is: regulating, non-threatening, sensitive⁸⁶, synchronous, mentalising and radically accepting’. Such competencies are modelled on the characteristics of a ‘good enough’ parent, and seen as the foundations of attachment security. Some of these factors require further explanation, so below I briefly explain affect regulation and mentalisation, together with the related concept of epistemic trust.

Affect Regulation and Mentalisation

Attachment theory explains that it is through a child’s early attachment relationship(s) that they learn how to understand and regulate their emotions: the child needs the help of their caregiver to ‘co-regulate’ their emotion, with the latter ‘collaboratively first “holding” a feeling – then understanding, naming and acting upon it’ (Holmes and Slade, 2018: 25). Over time, the child gradually begins to internalise this capacity to cope with their emotions, developing ‘self-regulation’ (2018: 26). Implicit here is the care-giver’s sensitivity to the emotion displayed by the child and their acceptance of that emotion.

Closely related to affect-regulation is the concept of mentalising, a relatively modern addition to the theory developed by Fonagy and colleagues in the 80s and 90s (Sharp et al., 2020: 1). This refers to one’s capacity to envision and understand our own and others’ mental states (thoughts, feelings and intentions). Holmes (2010) defines it as ‘the ability to see oneself from the outside and others from the inside (Holmes, 2014: 99). As Holmes and Slade (2018:

underlying pattern of attachment consistent with the main three categories (Solomon and George, 2018).

⁸⁶ Sensitivity encompasses the therapist’s ability to: perceive, interpret and respond to feelings accurately (these are aspects of empathy, which is examined later); accept the client, through acknowledging and tolerating negative feelings (e.g. countertransference, as discussed above); work collaboratively, rather than seeking control; and be psychologically and physically available through supporting their own emotional and physical well-being. Since these factors are discussed elsewhere in this chapter, I will not explain them further here.

71) note ‘affect regulation is intimately connected to mentalising – only when feelings are held within manageable limits can one begin to think about them’. Secure relationships with early attachment figures provide something of a ‘training ground’ for mentalisation (Fonagy and Campbell, 2017: 283):⁸⁷

...where attachment figures are interested in the child’s mind and the child is safe to explore the mind of the attachment figure, allow the infant to explore other subjectivities, including that of his/her care giver. Finding him/herself accurately represented in the mind of the caregiver as a thinking and feeling intentional being ensures that the infant’s own capacities for mentalizing will develop well (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist and Target, 2002).

As such, the capacity to mentalise is critical to the ability to make sense of and control one’s emotions and, ultimately self-agency (Holmes, 2014: 100).

Epistemic trust

In a related recent development, Fonagy and colleagues have introduced the construct of ‘epistemic trust’, which arises from secure attachments and mentalisation (Sharp et al., 2020: 4). This is ‘trust in the authenticity and personal relevance of interpersonal knowledge...[it] allows us to accept that *what we are being told matters to us*’ (Fonagy and Campbell, 2017: 284; authors’ emphasis). This is essential for humans to flourish since children are not born into the world with an innate knowledge of it and its components, but instead are reliant on learning from others. In addition, it contributes to resilience as ‘epistemic trust enables social learning in an ever-changing social and cultural context and allows individuals to benefit from their (social) environment’ (Fonagy and Campbell, 2017: 284; Sharp et al., 2020: 5).

When the development of epistemic trust has been disrupted, individuals may struggle or be unable to trust others. As Fonagy and Campbell (2017: 284) note, such individuals are typically termed ‘‘hard to reach’’, yet they are simply showing an adaption to a social environment where information from attachment figures was likely to be misleading (Fonagy et al., 2015)’. Fonagy and Campbell (2017: 285) posit that those with epistemic trust are likely to be more responsive to psychotherapy because they have greater openness to social

⁸⁷ Mentalising takes place through a process known as ‘affect mirroring’, whereby the sensitive caregiver detects the child’s emotions and demonstrates understanding of these through *marked* (e.g. exaggerating, slowing down and almost caricaturing the emotion) and *ostensive* communicative cues (e.g. eye contact,

learning, whereas the opposite is likely to be so for those with epistemic *mistrust*, who may need long-term therapy to first foster trust and openness to provide a foundation for learning. In other words, for psychotherapy ‘to be meaningful there needs to be a workable level of epistemic trust’ (2017: 286). They propose that ‘(the relearning of) epistemic trust may be at the heart of all effective psychotherapeutic interventions’ (2017: 285). Crucially, they suggest that the ability of therapists to foster and work through epistemic trust is the distinguishing factor in the effectiveness of psychotherapy; providing a new perspective on the so-called ‘Dodo bird verdict’⁸⁸ (2017: 283)

They propose that there are three distinct communication processes that make psychotherapy effective: first, the therapist helps the patient to feel understood, which may lower ‘epistemic vigilance’; second, as openness grows ‘he/she shows increased interest in the therapist’s mind and the therapist’s use of thoughts and feelings, which stimulates and strengthens the patient’s capacity for mentalising’; thirdly, as epistemic vigilance reduces, the patient becomes open to learning and also more likely to relax their epistemic mistrust of the wider social world, fostering resilience (2017: 285-6). These factors may be relevant to understanding how relationships in involuntary youth justice supervision can help.

Bringing together psycho-analytic and attachment-informed approaches

Reflecting on the application of attachment theory to social work relationships, Howe (1995: 213-4) argues that although such an ‘undiluted’ therapeutic approach cannot and should not be transplanted, attachment-informed relationships are both possible and deeply helpful in this setting:

...They can never provide the attachment experiences the clients need and probably never had. Social workers should simply be ‘good enough’...Nevertheless, a good relationship is capable of providing a “corrective emotional experience” (Alexander and French, 1946 cited in Nesworkski et al., 1988).

He conceptualises a ‘good enough’ relationship as follows:

‘motherese’ intonation) that signal to the child the didactic importance of her response (Sharp et al, 2020: 4).

⁸⁸ This refers to the claim made of psychotherapy, that regardless of the methods used, all psychotherapies are equally effective.

If the social worker can be consistent, caring and reliable, this allows the client to improve her level of social functioning within a reasonably predictable relationship. It might also boost feelings of trust and self-worth' (1995: 213-4).

For both Howe (1995) and Ruch (2010), if practitioners are to work in this way – as ‘a relational resource’ – they need to be able to make sense of their client’s behaviour and manage their own responses effectively (Ruch, 2010: 17). This entails an understanding of unconscious and conscious emotional processes, defences and representational models, which are a feature of all relationships (Howe, 1995: 222). Thus, while relational working may outwardly seem simple and perhaps even be regarded as a matter of instinct, if practitioners are to work meaningfully and effectively through the relationship they must be ‘appropriately equipped to understand the complex dimensions of such relationships’, including understanding their own thoughts and feelings (Ruch, 2010: 17-21). This work provides important insights into how psychosocially-informed model of relationships might be applied in youth justice.

Conceptualising helping relationships

While the above theories have slightly different perspectives on *how* the relationship helps, both share a broadly similar view of the foundations of good relationships. These are best described as: *genuineness, warmth* and *empathy*. Indeed, these components are consistently identified across a range helping professions, including social work, youth work and criminal justice (Seal and Harris, 2016; Turney, 2010; Ross et al., 2008; Burnett and McNeill, 2005; Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1970; Ferard and Hunnybun, 1962). Other variations of this list have included: friendliness (Turney, 2010; Ward, 2010); (mutual) respect (Lewis, 2016; Ipsos MORI, 2010; Dowden and Andrews, 2004); (mutual) liking (Dowden and Andrews, 2004; De Boer and Coady, 2007); trust (Seal and Harris, 2016; O’Leary et al., 2013; De Boer and Coady, 2007) and attentive listening (O’Leary et al., 2013; Ferard and Hunnybun, 1962). However, in my view, these are all essentially facets or products of genuineness, warmth and empathy and thus I focus principally on these.

Such qualities are derived from Rodgers’ (1957) humanistic, person-centred conceptualisation of the essential therapist qualities for constructive change in counselling. However, their presence in a helping relationship should be distinguished from a person-centred approach, which is crucially characterised by non-directivity, alongside the above

qualities. This includes privileging the client's self-determination and, thus, *not* subjecting him/her 'to advice, interpretation, criticism, confrontation or challenge beyond encouraging people to clarify what they see happening' (Trevithick, 2012: 337). As could be said of youth justice, scholars have argued persuasively that a truly person-centred approach is fundamentally incompatible with the risk management and instrumentalism of contemporary social work (Murphy et al., 2013; Trevithick, 2012). Accordingly, while I draw on Rodgers' understanding of these components throughout, it is only in their general helping sense that they are discussed here.

To provide the basis for helping, such qualities must not only be demonstrated by the worker, but perceived and felt by the service user (Rodgers, 1957). As Howe (2008: 176) notes 'if these elements are present in good measure, then the client also feels that the relationship is *collaborative* in which a *positive emotional bond* between client and therapist is established'. Furthermore, 'in their most powerful form', they are *reciprocal*, mutually experienced by the worker and service user (Seal, 2014: 73). Mutuality could also be understood as the essence of Bordin's (1979) notion of the therapeutic or working alliance, commonly regarded as the archetypal helping relationship, as characterised by the triad of mutually agreed Goal and Tasks, and a shared Bond. Here I focus on the core qualities of genuineness, empathy and warmth as well as reciprocity since this was particularly relevant to my findings. I examine these aspects in the context of helping relationships, paying particular attention to social work and psychotherapy due the significant body of work in these fields, as well as education, health and, of course, youth and criminal justice.

I draw significantly on the children's social work literature, since it is an overlapping and parallel setting with youth justice. Many of the children under youth justice supervision will also be involved with children's social care; children's social workers are often based in youth justice teams too. Both are contexts in which intervention is often involuntary (for parents, but it also may be for children too), there is an intrinsic power differential in relationships, and non-compliance carries the threat of sanctions. There are similarities between the configuration and nature of the two systems too. As Chard and Radley (2012: 191-2) write:

Both are complex and multi-disciplinary systems which provide services to highly vulnerable children and young people, their families and victims. Both manage high

levels of risk, including those to children and young people and particularly in the youth justice system, the risks that young people may pose to others. They are also systems with the power to remove children and young people from their families, although the reasons are very different; one acts in the name of child protection, the other in the name of public protection and punishment.

Both systems share a common aim to safeguard children, although this is a primary objective for children's social care and a statutory responsibility for youth justice⁸⁹ of which it has 'arguably lost sight of' alongside its principal aim of preventing offending, as discussed earlier in the chapter (Chard and Radley, 2012: 192).

Genuineness and Professional Authenticity

Within helping professions, *genuineness* is typically understood in Rodger's (1957) terms of the practitioner being 'freely and deeply himself'. In other words, this refers to 'authenticity, acting in a human way as a real person and not hiding behind a mask or professional role' (Trevithick, 2012: 338). However, a prominent feature of contemporary research on helping relationships is the critical importance of a different, although related, quality of *being true to one's professional self*. This is not about rigid adherence to professional prescriptions, but rather refers to the practitioner being honest with themselves, with the client when appropriate, and generally within their work about their professional concerns and purpose (Turney, 2010: 140). Such a stance may entail gentle challenge and confrontation. For Turney (2010), this represents another dimension of genuineness. However, to avoid confusion with Rodgers' non-directive conceptualisation, it is better understood as what Ruch terms 'authenticity to professional purpose' (2014: 2159). I examine both qualities further below.

Genuineness

Genuineness is 'someone who doesn't regard you as a client, but treats you as an ordinary human being' (de Winter and Noom; 2003: 336). But how does a practitioner embody this in their practice and what effect does it have? For the 190 homeless adolescents interviewed in De Winter and Noom's (2003: 335-6) peer-research study of the quality of professional care in the Netherlands, they valued workers who demonstrated genuine 'personal interest' and

⁸⁹ The Children and Young Persons Act 1933, section 44.

listening, as well as ‘taking them seriously’ as ‘ordinary human beings’ through facilitating meaningful dialogue, involvement in decisions and mutual trust. In this sense, genuineness seemed to be embodied by an approach that was both caring, but respected and fostered young people’s independence through collaboration. Although the research did not investigate the impact of such components on outcomes, similar themes were identified in Ribner and Knei-Paz’s study (2002) of successful social work intervention amongst ‘multi-problem families’ in Israel. For the 11 adult female clients interviewed, a professional relationship characterised by a ‘human dynamic’ was identified as the lynchpin of success. This was characterised by a ‘quality of closeness’ and associated ‘sense of equality’, as well as the components of ‘flexibility and going the extra distance’ (2002: 382-5). The women described their social worker as akin to a ‘friend’,⁹⁰ ‘mother’, or ‘sister’, which denoted ‘...the directness and equality of the relationship; they did not experience the distance of speaking with a professional who knew better’ (2002: 382). The sense of equality – communicated through feeling accepted in spite of their ‘failures’, and being helped without ‘degradation’, such as through collaboration – ‘allowed these women to feel somewhat freed from the label, if not the status, of “needy”’ (2002: 385). However, since the research only included ‘successes’, it is unknown whether clients who did not experience such improvements also had these sorts of genuine relationships.

While the above studies suggest that genuineness manifests in practitioner approaches, there is also a sense from the literature that it can be understood as a *way of being*. In his case study of a helping youth work relationship, Harris observed that how the practitioner ‘looks’ at the client is regarded as important in communicating authenticity: ‘Jim looks at you like you’re a human. He doesn’t look at you like you’re a youth; he looks at you like you’re just a normal human being that needs help’ (Harris, 2017: 525; author’s emphasis). This is also the message from Seal and Harris’s (2016: 59-60) two-year cross-national study on youth work responses to youth violence, which involved interviews and creative research methods (e.g. film making) with 50 youth workers and 170 young people aged 16-25 years. By their account, ‘human-ness’ means that ‘young people would see this in the “face” (Levinas, 1985) of youth workers, and experience it within a relationship’ (2016: 132). They posit that

⁹⁰ The notion of helping relationships as a ‘friendship’ is controversial and generally seen as inappropriate (Turney, 2010, Ward, 2010; although for a contrary view see Beresford et al, 2008).

experiencing such human-ness in connection better enables young people to recognise their own and others humanity (2016: 132):

Enabling young people to connect with the notion of personhood may be part of enabling them to recognise more empathically the subjective reality experienced by the victims of their violence.

The research here thus suggests that genuineness is not only an important factor in fostering relationships, but may also contribute to positive change through conveying the client's normality and capabilities; a theme in the desistance literature (Farrall et al., 2014; Lofland, 1969).

In this regard, the role of genuineness in building professional relationships is also apparent in the probation and youth justice research. Probationers value being treated as a 'human being' (Leibrich, 1994), and workers who will get to know them as an individual (Barry, 2000: 586). Nearly two-thirds (39 out of 60) of the probationers in Rex's (1999: 371) study said that officers who actively listened and demonstrated interest, 'enabled them to talk'; and 58 per cent reported that they appreciated 'not being judged or patronised'. Likewise, a 'down-to-earth, non-judgemental style' was viewed by probationers as an important basis for the establishment of a reciprocal relationship in Healy's research (2012: 388). As noted earlier, in all of these studies, the professional relationship was regarded by interviewees as the most influential aspect of supervision. Genuineness is rarely mentioned in the youth justice literature, but seems to be intimately connected with notions of care on the occasions that it is. Thus, workers who are perceived as motivated only by instrumental factors – 'just there to get paid' (Phoenix and Kelly, 2013: 429) and 'just ...there to get money' (Bateman et al., 2013: 83) – are judged as uncaring. Whereas workers who are understood to genuinely care, are observed to increase perceptions of legitimacy, engagement and 'to spark hope' (Nugent, 2015: 281) through 'fostering a sense of empowerment and militating against a fatalistic outlook' (Bateman et al., 2013: 77).

Professional authenticity

Writing from a youth work perspective, Seal and Harris (2016) argue that although the centrality of genuineness, warmth and empathy to helping relationships 'needs restating', this should be augmented with the notion of *challenge*. By their account, this is 'genuine challenge of the sort that requires the young person to think "If what you say is true about me

– I must be very wrong about me” (2016: 77). This includes ‘constructive confrontation’ where, through a good relationship rooted in empathy, mutual respect and trust, workers create or find opportunities to gently confront young people about problematic behaviours and views. Their research suggested that youth workers were often reluctant to use such an approach for fear of jeopardising the relationship, but examples of its presence ‘seemed to coincide with ‘genuinely transformative moments’ (2016: 77-9). In a social work context, Turney (2010) emphasises the powerful nature of such fear, highlighting too that practitioners may unconsciously contrive to avoid addressing difficult issues or minimise any concerns. She accordingly notes that ‘it is easy to see how it would be possible to fall into a collusive response’ (2010: 139). Thus, Seal and Harris contend that ‘avoiding them [constructive confrontations] in the name of empathy could seriously undermine their ability to have a meaningful impact on violence’ (2016: 80).

Ruch (2014) highlights the need for social workers to practise what she terms ‘confrontational empathy’ in response to less visible tensions, such as where an uninvited parent is always present for meetings, inhibiting honest interactions with the child. This entails the practitioner sensitively asserting their authority from a position of emotional engagement and understanding with the service user’s anxiety (2014: 2159). From an attachment perspective, once a secure therapeutic relationship is established, *gentle* challenge to the patient’s attachment organisation (e.g. pushing for an avoidant individual to open up), is critical to softening such defences and creating the basis for change. Indeed ‘ironically, therapists “fail” the test when they respond in ways consistent with the patients expectations’ (Holmes and Slade, 2018: 33). Lewis’s (2014) collaborative research with seven white male probationers in England found that they respected and valued effective challenge with a “direct”, “straight” and “honest” approach’ as it ‘highlighted...what aspects needed to be addressed in order to lead a “good” life’; what she terms ‘pro-social push’. However, crucially, for challenge to be felt as such, it had to be advanced in the context of a positive relationship, premised on empathy, respect, acceptance and optimism, which created a ‘climate for change’; without this, challenge was interpreted as an ‘abuse of power’ (2014: 169). Furthermore, Lewis’s research suggested that challenge within the context of a supportive relationship is not only valued for *what* is said, but also the ability to ‘learn from the relational processes that are at play, using similar processes within their own lives to create social bonds and secure attachments’ (2014: 169; author’s emphasis).

The message from this literature then is that relationships characterised by only warmth, genuineness and empathy alone, risk not reaching their potential to help, and in the worst examples, are counterproductive, inferring collusion (albeit often unintentional) with and reinforcement of negative perspectives and behaviours. Yet, as implied above, if honesty and challenge is to be effective it must be premised on a good relationship, grounded in warmth and empathy. In this context, challenge is more likely to be interpreted as evidence of genuine care and concern, and accordingly accepted (Turney, 2010; Lewis, 2014, 2016; Seal and Harris, 2016). Yet, challenge may feel particularly difficult with highly vulnerable service users where the practitioner is the idealised ‘good’ worker, and fears any challenge will disrupt this. Turney (2010: 146-7) accordingly urges that practitioners occupy a stance of being ‘respectfully curious’, which entails ‘be[ing] able to hold on to the positives, while at the same time maintaining “a therapeutic position of safe uncertainty and authoritative doubt” (Flaskas, Mason and Perlesz, 2005: pxxv’. Thus, a helping relationship necessitates holding intimacy and distance in ‘healthy tension’; the capacity to be *human* and *professional* (Hem and Heggen, 2003: 106).

Empathy

Rodgers (1957) described empathy as ‘to sense the client’s private world as if it were your own, but without ever losing the “as if” quality’. In its most accurate form, the therapist is ‘well able’ to understand the client’s feelings, ‘is never in any doubt’ about what they mean, and can accordingly appropriately judge the content and tone of their responses (Rodgers, 1957; no page). Trevithick (2003: 168-9), drawing on Winnicott (1986) and Shulman (1999), outlines a detailed conceptualisation of empathy as entailing deep understanding of another’s thoughts and feelings, and allowing them to do the same to us, which requires significant self-knowledge and awareness. In this regard, Salzberger-Wittenberg (1970: 137-9) advocates a ‘receptive attitude’, which crucially involves not only attending to what the client is feeling, but what feelings this provokes in the worker, which may be an indication of projective identification. By Jordan’s account, writing from a psychotherapy perspective, it is this ‘*joining* aspect of empathy, the mutuality involved’ that leads to an ‘increased sense of relatedness’ (1997: 144; author’s emphasis). As she explains (1997: 145):

...in addition to increasing their understanding [of the other], both people draw nearer each other in the empathic moment in a way which expands their sense of human community. Kohut talks about the “recognition of the self in the other” as

the central dynamic in empathy (1978). But there occurs an equally important experience of recognising the other in the self.

There are conflicting views as to whether empathy should be understood as a skill that can be taught or as a natural ability grounded in one's own experiences of empathy and secure attachment (Durnescu, 2012; Trevithick, 2012).

As Durnescu (2012: 208) puts it, in his historical analysis of 'what matters most in probation supervision', of all staff characteristics 'empathy seems to have had the longest "career"'. Yet, experimental research has produced mixed findings as to the importance of empathy in criminal justice practice. Trotter's (1996: 43) experimental study in corrections supervision in Australia found that officers who used pro-social modelling and reinforcement, including challenge of negative behaviours and views, (as shown by their file notes), had clients with lower reconviction rates, regardless of their use of empathy, suggesting that empathy alone was unimportant to outcomes. However, Trotter (2009: 146) highlights the contradictory findings of Andrews et al. (1979) that probation officers who combined a pro-social approach with high levels of empathy had clients with lower reconviction rates than those with low empathy levels. This aligns with the message from the social work and youth work literature, as discussed above, that empathy is an important foundation for engagement and effective challenge. Thus, for the probationers in Rex's (1999: 371) study, 87 per cent said that officers needed to demonstrate empathy if they were to feel committed and positively engaged in the professional relationship. Related to this, such understanding of probationers' lives seemed to provide the basis for their acceptance of directive 'critical advice' from officers about their problems and behaviour, and was interpreted as concern (1999: 376). This in turn was perceived to foster and support decisions to desist from crime, although as noted earlier it is not known whether probationers were able to translate their intentions into desistance.

Little attention has been paid to empathy in professional relationships in youth justice, with some exceptions. In their review of engagement techniques, Prior and Mason (2010) suggest that the crucially important aspect of empathy for the purposes of relationship building is the ability of workers to communicate to the young person that they understand the 'reality of their lived experiences' (Eadie and Canton, 2002: 22). The centrality of this is implicit in Phoenix and Kelly's (2013) analysis of children's subjective experiences of youth justice supervision in England. For many of the 29 interviewees, the perception that YOT officers

could not comprehend the reality of their lives – ‘They just don’t understand what my life is like’ – contributed to their assessment that the YOS could not help them (2013: 429-431). From a social work perspective, O’Leary et al. (2013) posit that such understanding will be particularly important in relationships between workers from the ‘dominant cultural group’ and service users from ethnic minorities, to gain in-depth appreciation of the influence of factors on their lives, such as ‘white privilege’ (2013: 148). This notion could be extended further to include gender, sexuality and class. Nugent (2015) highlights the value of non-verbal empathy in her longitudinal evaluation of a support service for young men leaving custody in Scotland. Repeated interviews with 52 young men aged 16 -21 years identified the importance in building helping relationships of ‘quietly empathetic’ action by practitioners, such as leaving fruit and food out as a ‘discrete helping hand’ (2015: 280). This sort of activity may be particularly important with involuntary clients.

Warmth

Here I discuss warmth, as well as care and acceptance. These terms are often used together or interchangeably in the literature, in line with Rodgers’ (1957) definition of unconditional positive regard as representing these three qualities. A growing number of small-scale studies and effective practice literature across social work have identified the value of emotional closeness in statutory helping relationships. These variously highlight the importance of ‘emotional depth and closeness’ (De Boer and Coady, 2007), altruistic love (Turney, 2010) and ‘professional closeness (Kendrick and Smith, 2002). Kroll (2010: 70) depicts the nature and benefits of such bonds as the:

...crucial coming together of two individuals, leading to a genuine connection that enables a real conversation to take place that goes beyond and beneath the mundane. If successful, it provides the basis for trust, engagement, disclosure, progress and change.

Through interviews with six social worker – client dyads, aged 17-45 years, from child welfare agencies in Canada, De Boer and Coady (2007: 39) found that helping relationships ‘were marked not only by collaboration and mutual liking, respect and honesty, but also by emotional depth and closeness’ and were felt ‘to be healing and life-changing’. Importantly, there had been difficulties in all of the relationships examined, including ‘hostility, distrust and avoidance’; as such their quality and effectiveness could not be attributed to uncomplicatedness (2007: 34). Such relationships were developed through a dual

combination of judicious use of power (which is revisited later) and ‘a deeply humanistic style of working’(2007: 38). This involved workers making the effort to get to know clients as *people* beyond the confines of the presenting issue, developing an in-depth understanding of their lives and, in turn, facilitating work that was strengths-focused and grounded in realistic goals. Workers also fostered a personal connection through thoughtful self-disclosure, which helped to humanise the worker and demonstrate their ability to relate (2007: 38). Such approaches can be understood as overlapping with the earlier qualities of genuineness and empathy.

Furthermore, a desire to ‘go the extra mile’ for clients with whom there was a personal bond, further reinforced feelings of trust and respect. This included activities that ‘stretched professional mandates and boundaries beyond the narrow focus of child safety’, such as writing personal letters in times of distress, holding meetings over lunch or coffee and allowing clients to keep in touch after their case was closed (De Boer and Coady, 2007: 39). The significance of ‘boundary pushing’ in the development and maintenance of helping relationships is a thread throughout the literature (Seal and Harris, 2016: 146; O’Leary et al., 2013; Ribner and Knei-Paz, 2002). Seal and Harris (2016: 146) noted that in cases where young people felt that workers had ‘got through to them’, the worker had blurred professional boundaries (for example, by giving them their mobile number or visiting them on their own time), which seemed to generate trust and be interpreted as evidence of genuine care. They reflect that ‘the implication of this is that workers may need to make themselves vulnerable to young people, just as young people make themselves vulnerable too’ (2016: 147). Related to this, Seal and Harris (2016) identified the value of ‘therapeutic trust’ (Horsburgh, 1960; Pettit, 1995) – which referred to workers placing trust in young people knowing that they might be let down, but believing that such trust will eventually be honoured – which seemed to foster young people’s self-belief (Seal and Harris, 2016: 145-6). Flexibility of contact and boundaries, such as being available when the client needed and visiting out of hours, was also regarded a key facet of helping relationships by the female social work clients in Ribner and Knei-Paz’s (2002) study. As they note:

The women understood and valued the extra effort needed to function on this level and experienced these efforts as showing a sincere desire to help rather than just fulfilling a prescribed responsibility. Such activities also served to differentiate a particular worker from the faceless establishment (2002: 384)

The need to feel a worker personally cares may serve a deeper psychosocial purpose. Jordan (1997: 146) suggests that ‘the need for connection and emotional joining is our primary need. The need to feel *special* becomes paramount when the need for relatedness is not met’. Harris (2017: 520) similarly notes that ‘young people may need to feel that they have reached the worker in some way and that the worker is different with him/her from how they are with other young people’.

The importance of care in professional relationships is apparent in the probation literature too. A consistent finding is that probationers value workers who care or demonstrate concern for them (Lewis, 2014; Healy, 2012; Barry, 2000; Rex, 1999). Similarly, a number of youth justice studies have found that whether or not a YOT worker is perceived to care is the *primary* criteria on which they are judged to be ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (Phoenix and Kelly, 2013; Bateman et al., 2013). With some exceptions, there has been little in-depth discussion about what it means to demonstrate care in this context or the potential effect on engagement and desistance. As noted earlier, Rex’s probation study found that probationers’ interpreted officers’ practical advice as concern, which strengthened their commitment to desist (Rex, 1999). In Lewis’s (2014) research, probationer’s linked notions of care with the characteristics of listening, interest and empathy. Crucially, they described positive relationships as *mutually caring*, which increased their investment in the relationship (2014: 170). This is discussed in further depth below.

Youth justice research indicates that the reliability and consistency of worker’s actions, such as turning up regularly, on time and delivering on promises are key means by which young people determine whether or not they care (as well as their perceptions of workers’ motivations, as noted above) (Phoenix and Kelly, 2013: 429; Bateman et al., 2013). The notion of boundary stretching in helping relationships is notably absent from the supervision research. Indeed, in his ethnography of probation practice in England, Phillips (2014: 126) found that the importance of clear and firm boundaries was so prominent in discussions with probation officers ‘that they might be considered a defining characteristic of the relationship’. Similarly, Lewis (2016: 67) describes examples of loosened boundaries in supervisory relationships as ‘collusive’, although she states that further research is needed to better understand this aspect of practice. Questions therefore remain about the nature and role of boundaries in helping supervisory relationships.

Reciprocity and mutuality

The professional relationship is typically understood as one-way, insofar as the worker is supporting the service user. However, at a fundamental level, it is reciprocal insofar as ‘it is a two-way process in which both parties affect each other’ (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1970: 37). Within this context, some literature has drawn attention to the role of *mutual caring* in the professional relationship. This aspect of relationships, perhaps unsurprisingly, has received scarce attention in the youth and criminal justice supervision literature. Moreover, studies that have highlighted reciprocity (Barry, 2000; 2007) or mutuality (Lewis, 2014, 2016) as a feature of supervisory relationships have not examined these concepts in depth. Thus, I focus on the fields of social work, youth work and psychotherapy here.

Saunders (1999) examined 268 psychotherapy clients’ experiences of the affective environment (their feelings and perceptions of the therapist’s feelings), and its connection to the quality of sessions and treatment effectiveness. He found that *reciprocal intimacy* was significantly related to treatment effectiveness, particularly for those in brief therapy (of eight sessions or less). Alexander and Charles (2009) studied mutual care in professional relationships through interviews with nine social workers from a range of fields in Canada. Practitioners described sensing the client’s care for them both through overt (such as letters, small gifts) as well as subtle gestures (such as asking about the worker, and teasing). The existence of such mutual care in relationships varied between clients (dependent on both the worker and client) and changed over time within each relationship (2009: 15-6). They found that such experiences were common, although the small, varied and purposive nature of the sample mean that it is difficult to determine the wider prevalence of such relationships and whether they are more typical of certain social work fields. A further weakness of the study is the lack of exploration of the effects of such relationships on outcomes.

Nevertheless, Alexander and Charles (2009) provide a helpful theorisation of the centrality of such reciprocal dynamics in the development of self-identity.:

Through actions (witnessing ourselves) in roles and the responses of others, individuals may come to realise who they are...Interpersonal relationships involve this process of reflexivity as individuals imagine themselves in the mind of the other (2009: 10).

Benjamin (1990, 2004) refers to this as ‘intersubjectivity’, defined as ‘a relationship of mutual recognition – a relation in which each person experiences the other as a “like subject”, another mind who can be “felt with”, yet has a distinct, separate center of feeling’ (Benjamin, 2004: 5).⁹¹ Harris’s (2017) case study of Jim (a worker) and Daniel (a young client) provides insights into how such interactions ‘trigger introspection and reflective self-awareness’ that initiate positive change in a youth work context (2017: 519). This includes Jim’s positive appraisal of Daniel, which he begins to internalise, and Jim’s self-disclosure of his own difficult past, which causes Daniel to redefine his understanding of Jim (as someone who is fallible too) and his own identity in relation to this (2017: 529). There are clear parallels here with Gadd’s (2006) work, drawing on Benjamin (1990), on the role of identification and recognition in relations between ‘offenders’ and those they have harmed, in prompting subjective change and desistance.

However, it is notable that even amongst staunch advocates of relational working, concern has been expressed about the complexities of negotiating mutuality in the professional relationship. Reflecting on mutual disclosure, Turney (2010: 138) contends that although this may humanise the worker, it can be potentially abusive or oppressive, serving the worker’s needs. In this vein she argues that ‘one significant feature of the professional relationship is that it is not for the practitioner’s benefit. So it is crucial to keep in mind whose needs are being met by disclosure’. Similarly, psychotherapeutic perspectives caution against ‘role-reversal’ in the professional relationship warning that ‘Danger threatens when...the child or patient assumes responsibility for regulating and containing others’ feelings, often...with disastrous consequences’ (Holmes and Slade, 2018; 29).

Miller and Stiver (1997) and Jordan’s (1997) work challenges this unitary view of helping relationships, developed from psychotherapy practice with women at the Stone Center. They are critical of traditional psychoanalytic methods that focus on self-development, conceptualising helping relationships instead as premised on shared development and responsibility, mutual care and respect:

⁹¹ Intersubjectivity overlaps and interlinks with the concept of mentalisation. For example, Liljenfors and Lundh (2015) argue that mentalisation develops within the context of intersubjectivity. However, there is ongoing debate about the compatibility of the two concepts.

Our perspective emphasises that in growth-enhancing relationships people take mutual responsibility for relationships and provide the means for each other's development...When both people share a respect for and desire to nurture the relationship, mutuality is created (Jordan, 1997: 139).

Miller (1986) further describes the importance of the mutual growth-enhancing dimension:

...in order for a relationship to be enhancing for one person, it must encourage growth in both participants...together we create connection and understanding. The therapeutic dialogue is between two real people, each experiencing more aliveness in connection, with a shared primary goal to enhance the client's wholeness, well-being and capacity for relationship (Jordan, 1997: 155).

More specifically, Miller and Stiver (1997: 26-34) conceptualise such relationships as those that lead to increased zest and vitality, increased empowerment to act, an enlarged picture of ourselves and others, an increase in self-worth and a growing desire for more rather than less connection and contact with others. Benjamin's (1990:16) work provides further insights into why mutuality in relationships is significant. She focuses on the nature and role of *mutual recognition* in the parent – child relationship in developing the foundations for identification with, recognition of, and connection to others, and one's self identity. She describes it thus:

*To recognise is to affirm, validate, acknowledge, know, accept, understand, empathise, take in, tolerate, appreciate, see, identify with, find familiar... What I call **mutual recognition** includes a number of experiences commonly described in the research on mother-infant interaction: emotional attunement, mutual influence, affective mutuality, sharing states of mind (author's emphasis).*

As she observes, reminiscent of attachment theory, the purpose of the infant's separation from the primary care giver is not 'to grow out of relationships...to a state of singular oneness' but rather to become 'more active and sovereign within them' (1990: 18). If and when the infant is able to recognise the care giver as a separate sovereign 'like subject' who is able to withstand their negative projections, mutual recognition becomes possible, despite the inequality of the relationship (1990). When present, it can lead to a 'powerful mix of otherness and togetherness', where there is connection, yet appreciation of difference and independent existence (1990: 25). It is through such relationships of recognition that one's self-identity is formed and continually reshaped: 'recognition is...reflexive; it includes not

only the other's confirming response, but also how we find ourselves in that response. We recognise ourselves in the other...' (1990: 21). The difference of the other is crucial to the influence of such connected relationships as 'the externality of the other makes one feel one is truly being "fed", getting nourishment from the outside, rather than supplying everything for oneself' (1990: 47). Relationships with other significant adults who confer recognition, providing 'otherness and togetherness', are an important aspect of child development (Gadd, 2006: 183). This links with notions of childhood as a period of heightened openness to external influences and, accordingly, the potential of supervisory relationships to support children's development of positive self-identities. However it remains to be seen whether such mutual relationships are appropriate or possible within a youth justice context.

Donati's theory of relational sociology complements these ideas and has been employed by Weaver (2016) and Weaver and McNeill (2015) to make sense of the relational aspects of desistance, focusing on social networks and community. Donati (2011: 73) conceptualises reciprocity as the fundamental essence of relationships, it is 'the generating mechanism or motor of social relations'. Furthermore, these reciprocal interactions create an effect which goes beyond what each party brings: it 'has its own reality (life) because it exists even when the exchange or the communication falls silent and thus has a reality that goes beyond the contents of the exchange and the communication' (2016: 360-1). Thus, being in relation produces what he calls 'relational goods' (such as mutual concern and trust), but also has the potential to effect 'relational bads' (fear and mistrust) (Weaver and McNeill, 2015). He theorises that being in relation as a *relational subject* shapes identity and conditions one's action through *social reflexivity*, which refers to 'when the inner conversation takes into account the feedbacks originating from the reflexivity of the network of social relations in which the person is involved' (2016: 358). The nature of the relation and the resulting relational subject will depend on the structural context in which they exist, and associated constraints and enablers that operate on and between them (2016: 368).

This provides insight into *how* supervisory relationships might harbour transformative potential. I consider the applicability of this conceptualisation of helping relationships to the involuntary youth justice supervision context, later in the chapter,

Supervision for the Supervisor

A striking theme throughout the literature is that the potential of a *good* relationship to be a *helping* relationship will be severely circumscribed without reflective case supervision for the practitioner. At a basic level, supervision is necessary to support professionals in ethically grappling with the tension between intimacy and distance implicit in relationship-based practice, protecting against punitiveness, indulgence and collusion (Turney, 2010; Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1970). It plays a critical role too in enabling practitioners to recognise and manage the unconscious and conscious feelings that are inevitably raised in the context of helping relationships. This includes the emotional burden that practitioners may absorb through the containing aspects of their work (Trevithick, 2003). This is essential for effective practice, both directly to best ensure an ethical and constructive relationship with the service user, but also indirectly through supporting the emotional well-being of the practitioner, safeguarding them from emotional fatigue, and the associated withdrawal from meaningful interactions, potential oversights and burnout (Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1970). Ruch (2010: 41) highlights the dangers of such ‘inhibiting aspects of anxiety on individuals’ ability to think about what is going on and what is being seen’ evident in child protection failures, such as with Baby Peter and Victoria Climbié. As Howe (1998: 53) argues ‘If social workers are not to feel fearful or angry, lost or overwhelmed with cases that are emotionally taxing, there is a great need to reflect on matters with others’. In short, it seems that at the heart of a helping relationship is not just the qualities of the relationship itself, but also a genuinely supportive organisational context.

Organisational, ideological and political context

In recent years, both children’s social work and youth justice (as well as the probation field) in England and Wales have received academic critique for allowing a managerial focus on record keeping and prescription to ‘become too dominant’, obscuring the central importance of the professional relationship (Munro, 2011: 8; see also Ruch, 2010; Chard and Radley, 2012; Burnett and McNeill, 2005). In addition, internationally, practice cultures in social work, youth work and youth justice are perceived to valorise dispassionate relationships. However, this issue has received rather more academic attention – in terms of the quantity and depth of discussion – in children’s social care. This focus renders the social work literature particularly helpful for the purposes of discussion here, but also raises the question as to why there has not been similar interest and thoughtfulness on this issue in the youth

justice field. Are children in trouble seen as less deserving of helping relationships? Are qualities of care and connection regarded as incompatible with a context of control?

A central observation of literature across these different fields is that practice cultures typically view such emotional closeness and boundary stretching as unprofessional (Jordan, 1991; Ruch, 2014; Ribner and Knei-Paz, 2002; Hem and Heggen, 200X, Alexander and Charles, 2009). As Batmanghelidjh (2006: 157), the founder of high profile former charity Kids Company, argues: ‘The committed individual is perceived as too involved, as if feeling is somehow an indicator of incompetence, inferiority or weakness. Our structures are failing children because we’re scared of love’. Much of the anxiety about close relationships has arisen from cultures and safeguards that have sought to protect children from abuse, in recognition of the implicit power imbalance in such interactions (Turney, 2010; Kendrick and Smith, 2002; Ruch, 2014; Alexander and Charles, 2009). Fear of promoting dependence through close helping attachments is another factor, which is particularly relevant to time-limited youth justice supervision (Johns et al., 2017; O’Leary et al., 2013; Ferard and Hunnybun, 1962; Salzberger-Wittenberg, 1970). However, as Kendrick and Smith (2002: 50) observe of residential child care ‘[t]here is a danger that, in interpreting “safe caring”, there is a presumption that close adult-child relationships are intrinsically suspect and should be discouraged’. Such defensive cultures risk causing further emotional damage to children through frustrating the secure relationships that are essential for healthy development (Kendrick and Smith, 2002). Furthermore, Alexander and Charles’ (2009: 17) findings that practitioners regarded ‘mutuality as a subversive act’, suggests that there may be greater risks in a culture that leads to practitioners obscuring elements of their relational practice.

Rigid boundaries may reinforce power imbalances too by denying the service user’s role in shaping a professional relationship that reflects their wants and needs (O’Leary et al., 2013). For example, Alexander and Charles (2009: 19) contend that:

While the professionalization of social work practice and relationships is meant to provide standards for ethical behaviour, the findings of this study indicate that a professionalised approach to human relationships may be unethical for both social workers and their clients. A rigid, standardized and non-personal approach to engaging with people while attempting to support their development belies a message of inequality and is ultimately patronizing and disrespectful. This

standard, or one-way approach, implies that people who are clients (in this moment) are incapable of determining or creating the kind of relationships they want or making a significant contribution to our life experience.

Other scholars note that stifling the emotional dimensions of practice is more likely to result in disengagement and burnout amongst professionals. As Trevithick (2003: 171) explains:

Defences operate to protect people or organisations from aspects of themselves that are felt to be threatening, or that provoke anxiety...They can also lead to exhaustion because 'keeping a lid on things', or 'pushing feelings down', takes emotional energy.

In social work, this has provoked some debate about what it means to be professional. A number of scholars accordingly suggest that an ethical approach to relationships is one that values closeness and recognises the importance of flexibility in (some) boundaries if it is in the interests of the service user (Turney, 2010, Alexander and Charles, 2009). O'Leary et al. (2013) accordingly argue for the reconceptualization of boundaries in social work as dynamic, premised on connecting rather than separating the social worker and client, and taking into account the client's perspective in their development. In their model, at the core are expectations common to all professional relationships, such as a shared understanding of its basis and goals; a second layer is separated by a permeable boundary, featuring components that are less pivotal to the relationship but may be beneficial, such as worker self-disclosure and the sharing of food or drink; a final outer layer, outside the relationship boundary, indicates activities that are unethical, such as sexual relations (2013: 144-5).

In this regard, an organisational culture that valorises genuine relationship-based practice is essential. Simmonds (2010) argues that the organisational context tends to be reflected in the qualities of relationships between supervisors and practitioners, and in turn in their relationships with service users. Drawing on Heard and Lake's two categories of human relating, he contends that audit cultures encourage 'dominant/ submissive', rather than 'supportive/ companionable' relationships. This is, in part, because practice often follows the maxim of: 'work needs to be more compliant and then everything will be OK...faced with complexity and uncertainty, as much of social work is, turn to the rules, follow them and all will be well'. But also because it manifests in the service user a view of the practitioner as someone whose role is to 'collect your information and leave me alone' (Simmonds, 2010:

217). As an illustration, Ruch's reflective case discussions with six social workers found that administrative priorities and practice cultures mitigated against in-depth and prolonged, compassionate interactions with children. This resulted in practitioners resorting to defensive responses, such as retreating to the safety of bureaucracy, creating a vicious cycle of retreat from relational practice (2014: 2156).

However, the neglect of relationship-based practice is not only a symptom of external and administrative pressures. Ruch's (2014) research suggested that practitioners feel hindered in developing warm, empathetic, humanistic relationships by the everyday conundrums inherent in practice, with which they feel ill-equipped to deal. Sudbury (2002: 155) depicts this complexity well:

This [neglect of the relationship] is not caused solely by external and organisational pressures. The ability to do what is right in the social work role requires the ability to enter into troubled and disturbing subjective experiences whilst thinking, making judgements and behaving appropriately in the more objective world of outside reality and organisational procedures.

Supervision is vital to assisting practitioners with negotiating such issues and in so doing helps to sustain relationships with children (Ruch, 2014; Sudbury, 2002).

Structural and operational factors

The nature and length of contact may be important to the development of positive relationships. There is ample evidence that informal spaces and places, such as chatting in the car or playing pool, can help to foster therapeutic relationships. For the young people in Gray's (2013a) study, it was the one-to-one interaction provided by such activities that fostered the relationship, whereas other research has indicated that the value lies in the ability of such settings to put children at ease (Drake et al., 2014; Gray, 2013a; Ipsos MORI, 2010; Rodd and Stewart, 2009). Practitioners and children report that relationships with a beneficial effect are gradually built over time (Johns et al., 2017; Drake et al., 2014; Ipsos MORI, 2010; Ilan, 2010; Cooper et al., 2007), suggesting that the length and/ or intensity of involvement may be an important factor in the quality of relationships. This links to the findings of the juvenile cohort study that more frequent face-to-face YOT contact was correlated with

reduced reoffending (Wilson, 2013).⁹² Despite the apparent value of one-to-one work, a number of recent studies have found that workers spend relatively little face to face time with children (Armitage et al., 2016; Marshall, 2012; Crossley, 2012; Ipsos MORI, 2010).

Related to the importance of time is the issue of *continuity*. The evidence from the adult and youth justice fields is that seeing the same supervisor throughout ones order is conducive to relational development and successful outcomes (Shapland et al., 2012; Ipsos MORI, 2010). Similarly, there is some research attesting to the value of having one key worker or coordinator across interventions (Cooper et al., 2007; McNeill et al., 2005) as involvement with several individuals may present difficulties to ensuring the integrity of the intervention (Trotter, 1999; McNeill et al., 2005). A ‘pass-the-parcel’ style of supervision may also serve to reinforce experiences of inconsistent relationships with adults (McNeill et al., 2005: 37; see also Ansbro, 2008), which are common amongst children in the justice system. This raises questions of the efficacy of the trend away from generic models of practice - whereby the case worker delivers all aspects of the intervention - towards specialist practice models (whereby the case management and intervention aspects of supervision are split, and the offender is likely to be working with a variety of staff) (McNeill et al., 2005).

Young person factors

The role of the child in the development of positive supervisory relationships has been somewhat neglected, with attention having centred on practitioner skills. But children’s prior experiences of authority and the presence of other sources of support in their lives appear to be important factors in this respect. Some youth justice studies have noted that children with few, if any, figures of support in their life present ‘as incredibly dependent on their probation officers or other professionals...and that substantial and intensive practical and emotional assistance was required’ (Gray, 2013a: 37; see also Ipsos MORI, 2010). This suggests that supervisory relationships may be more likely to develop and be particularly important in such cases. Related to this, Trevithick (2003: 168) notes of social work that ‘not all service users need or desire a relationship, often because other important relationships already exist’. There is also some evidence from interviews with young and adult offender probationers that they

⁹² The study comprised two elements: case file analysis of a broadly representative sample of 13,975 children involved with 30 YOTs from February 1st 2008 to January 31st 2009, which were cross-referenced with police national computer records regarding past and future offending; and interviews with 102 YOT practitioners.

had to want help before an effective relationship with their supervisor could be established (Lewis, 2016; Barry, 2000).

Another theme present in the literature is that some children are unable to form relationships with staff because their ‘trust issues remained insurmountable’ (Gray, 2013a: 35; see also, Sharpe, 2012; and Hoghughi, 1978 [regarding secure care settings]). Children’s distrust appears to be informed by their previous negative experiences with authority figures, by whom they have been let down or mistreated. This work links with Lewis’s (2016: 57) findings, building on Ross et al. (2008), that ‘interpersonal schemata are at play within therapeutic correctional relationships’. She observed that probationer’s appeared to have ‘relational scripts’ based on previous interactions with authority figures, which acted as important point of reference for understanding and informing the relationship with their current officer. Furthermore, their schemas appeared to evolve over time in response to different authority figures. This is further supported by educational attachment research, which has found that children with secure patterns of attachment can develop insecure patterns of attachment with particular teachers, adversely affecting their socio-emotional adjustment (defined as sense of coherence and feelings of loneliness) (Al-Yagon-Mikulincer, 2006: 12).

Meta-analyses in psychotherapy have found that the client’s attachment style predicts the quality of the working alliance: insecure individuals are more likely to have weaker alliances, and vice-versa (Diener and Monroe, 2011; Diener et al., 2009). Limited evidence on the particular effects of preoccupied and dismissive styles in relation to the alliance (Eames and Roth, 2000; Kanninen et al., 2000), indicates that the former tend to ‘engage with their therapists in more intense and volatile ways, and that dismissing patients would be more affectively constrained and perhaps less engaged’ (Slade, 2018: 765).⁹³ However, the findings from a number of small-scale studies provide some evidence that psychotherapy can shift the attachment status of clients from insecure to secure (Levy et al., 2006; Stovall-McClough and Cloitre, 2003; Travis et al., 2001), leading to improved outcomes (Muller and Rosenkranz, 2009). This attests to the potential of helping relationship development in spite of client factors that may mitigate against such bonds. In this regard, De Boer and Coady (2007: 41)

⁹³ A meta-analysis on the impact of attachment status on therapeutic outcomes echoes this work, showing that generally secure clients do better than insecure, those with dismissive styles are less affected by therapy and preoccupied clients have more volatile therapeutic experiences, with the worst outcomes (Levy et al, 2011).

remind us that whilst client characteristics and ways of being impact on the development and nature of the relationship, one must be cognisant of the dangers of ‘blaming relationship failures on “resistant” and “damaged” clients’. Regardless of the ability to realise such transformative relationships, they argue that it is the worker’s responsibility to persevere in developing them (De Boer and Coady, 2007: 41).

Helping relationships in the involuntary supervision setting

There are clear questions about the applicability of such relationships to youth justice settings. Can helping relationships of care, connection and challenge be established in an involuntary setting in which there are stark power differentials and practitioners must attempt to both care and control? Are therapeutic relationships, grounded in psychosocial perspectives, possible and ethical in this context?

Power differentials and the involuntary context

There is some argument in the literature that an involuntarily setting is a significant ‘handicap’ in the development of helping relationships (Ferard and Hunnybun, 1962; 115; see also Seal and Harris, 2016). Not only can it be difficult to foster such a relationship with someone who is there by obligation and has not willingly asked for help, but this further reinforces the power differential. Thus, for Salzberger-Wittenberg (1970: 10) ‘It is both a limitation and an essential condition of the work that it is a joint enterprise and can be hindered, virtually stopped, or broken off by the client at any time’. However this is not so in youth justice; breaking off the relationship carries the potential of severe consequences for the child.

There is some evidence to suggest that the statutory nature of YOT work may undermine the development of positive supervisory relationships. Phoenix and Kelly (2013: 429) posit that the statutory nature of YOT work may discourage the formation of good relationships: ‘markers that young people used to determine whether a YOT worker cared could be seen as the result of the contrived, artificial (or even professional) nature of the relationship’.

Likewise, several studies in the youth justice and children’s work sphere have reported that children are more positive about non-statutory workers, with whom the development of a trusting relationship is premised on their role as a ‘safe outsider’ (Evans et al., 2006: 40; see also, Sharpe, 2012; Cooper et al., 2007). However the fact that studies have emphasised children’s positivity about some YOT workers and the significance of their relationships with

them (Johns et al., 2017; Phoenix and Kelly, 2013; Sharpe, 2012), indicates that any such barriers can be overcome.

In this regard, a number of studies in the social work and probation fields have found that helping relationships are possible in involuntary settings, and intimately connected to the exercise and visibility of power. Returning to De Boer and Coady's (2007: 36) work, they found that social workers' 'soft, mindful and judicious use of power' was critical to the development of helping relationships in a social work context (alongside a humanistic style of working). The authors noted that 'the imbalance that is inevitably part of child welfare work need not be a barrier to the establishment of a positive helping relationship' (2007: 35). Such use of power manifested in the worker's empathy with the client's distress, in recognition that 'the fear associated with their power' might discourage engagement; honesty and directness about the reasons for child welfare involvement; a non-judgemental approach; and demonstration of respect by emphasising the client's strengths (2007: 36-7). Sharing power through collaboration was identified as another key component, which in turn fostered trust. This entailed both 'constantly clarifying information to ensure mutual understanding', as well as encouraging clients to take notes themselves or seek legal advice about their rights (2007: 37). These latter activities are likely to be more difficult for children, although this was not considered in the research since most of the clients were adults. Following through with their promises was the final important means of displaying 'soft' power, conveying respect and contributing to the development of trust (2007: 38). The sense one gets from reading De Boer and Coady's (2007) work is almost of voluntary relationships being built in an involuntary setting.

O'Leary et al. (2013) agree that an involuntary context and uneven power relations do not preclude the development of helping relationships – indeed they suggest that developing boundaries collaboratively with social work clients is perhaps more important in such circumstances as this 'enhances clients' sense of autonomy, level of participation and dignity and has the potential to make the whole process of intervention more humane' (2013: 150; for a similar argument, see Alexander and Charles, 2009). They contend that the most important criteria for the formation of a professional relationship, whether it is in a voluntary or involuntary context, is that it has a purpose and a function (2013: 142). In their view, the client has a crucial role to play in determining the 'scope of relationship and the type of exchange that would promote desired outcomes' (2013: 145). However, as noted earlier in

the chapter, the aims of the system may critically shape the nature and quality of relationships, raising questions of the relevance of such arguments to youth justice.

Lewis's (2016) research on the relational dimensions of probation work in England, argues that therapeutic correctional relationships are possible in this context. She defines such relationships as those 'that nurture[s] growth and positive change...[and] as a collaborative relationship that is founded upon therapeutic qualities, such as mutual respect, genuineness, empathy, acceptance and positive regard (Rodgers, 1967; Miller and Rollnick, 2002)' (2016: 2). Lewis also found that despite tension between 'change agent' and 'risk management' in the probation officer role 'offenders accepted the differing roles and when motivated, were still receptive to a therapeutic correctional relationship' (2016: 64). The development of such a bond was significantly linked to the practitioner's judicious use of power.

Lewis observed that while the power differential is an inescapable element of therapeutic correctional relationships, shaped by the systemic context, 'it can be *presented* separately within practice' (2016: 66). Her research indicated that the visibility of power and the nature of its use varies across practitioners (and over the course of relationships). Thus, a worker may exert power sensitively or overtly, and use it fairly, or for domination. Accordingly, the presence of a therapeutic correctional relationship is intimately connected to the practitioner's use of power, and thus their perceived legitimacy in the eyes of the probationer (2016: 64-66). Skeem et al. (2007: 407) came to a similar conclusion that *relational justice* – a blend of caring and fairness – was a core component of helping relationships in the correctional context, and suggested this could be understood as a 'relational variant' of procedural justice. Related to this, Ross et al. (2008: 469) posit that, within the context of involuntary relationships, it will be especially vital for service users to feel able to express their emotions about the practitioner and the process to avoid ruptures in the alliance.

Nevertheless, Lewis states that '*real*' or genuine therapeutic relationships cannot be *fully* achieved in a probation context because the practitioner always carries 'what Thorne (1992) described as, a protective cloak of professional authority' (2016: 66). Yet, this view reflects a very particular (person-centred) interpretation of genuineness and therapeutic relationships, as designed by Rodger's (1957) for counselling; the literature reviewed earlier would suggest that therapeutic genuineness is possible within involuntary, statutory settings. That said, several other scholars have concluded that traditional notions of the therapeutic relationship,

as represented by Bordin's working alliance of Goal, Task and Bond, cannot be applied in the criminal justice field. Skeem et al. (2007) developed and validated the 'Dual-Role Relationships Inventory' (DRI-I) in speciality mental health probation in the USA with over 400 probationers, to reflect the dual care and control function of relationships in such settings. They found that it was better able to capture the quality and effectiveness of relationships than the Working Alliance Inventory (WAI), the most widely used measure of the (traditional) working alliance. Relationship quality and effectiveness with involuntary clients in the study was related to *caring*, *fairness* and *trust* (relational justice) and an *authoritative* (not authoritarian) *approach*. Crucially, partnership, such as shared goals, was 'not central', which they attributed to the power imbalance potentially obviating the need for the client's agreement with supervision decisions (2007: 406-7). While the findings chime with the overall message of the literature reviewed earlier of the importance of a caring, but professional relational approach, there remain questions as to the generalisability of the measure/model to other involuntary settings, such as youth justice. Bourgon and Guterrez (2013: 263) proposed another reformulated model, bearing more resemblance to the original working alliance, premised on 'engagement, collaboration, and purpose'. This correspondingly refers to mutual efforts to participate in 'interpersonal processes', working together and the helper's responsibility to purposively work towards change. However, in my view, this conceptualisation lacks aspiration for the potential of supervisory relationships to involve emotional depth and mutuality, which the literature suggests are possible in involuntary contexts.

Both Ross et al. (2008) and Lewis (2016) contend that the working alliance qualities of goal, task and bond are present within therapeutic correctional relationships, although they posit that this construct does not capture the complex nature of such relationships.⁹⁴ Taking a more pragmatic view, based on their clinical experience, Ross et al. (2008: 463) conceptualise the therapeutic alliance as 'a collaborative relationship between therapist and client that can facilitate positive change for the client. Therefore it only has to be "good enough" for change to be possible. They also suggest, on the basis of factor analyses of the psychometric

⁹⁴ To address this, Ross et al (2008: 474) propose a preliminary Revised Theory of the Therapeutic Alliance, which theorises the interlinking factors that form the basis for the tripartite working alliance. This comprises: the treatment setting (the immediate environment and systematic factors e.g. policies & legislation), therapist and client characteristics (such as attachment style, interpersonal schemas), perceptions, emotions and cognitions, and therapist and client behaviour towards one other.

measures of the therapeutic alliance, that Bordin's triad can be rationalised into two factors – of *agreement* on goals and task, and *bond* – which, they argue may be particularly relevant to work with those who offend. This is because it may be necessary to focus on one dimension rather than, or before, the other (for example, forming a bond before agreeing goals and tasks) (2008: 476). Related to this, Lewis notes that 'agreement of task and bond is somewhat dependent upon the degree of bond and that bond can vary and move over time' (2016: 60). Notably, both Ross et al. (2008) and Lewis (2016) view the immediate relationship setting (such as the administrative burden) and systemic context (such as policies and legislation) as important influences in the development (or not) of the working alliance.

Psychosocial relationship-based practice: psychoanalytic and attachment

The above literature suggests the potential for therapeutic relationships, broadly conceived, in involuntary settings, including criminal justice and youth justice. However, there has been little contemporary research on the applicability of psychosocial relational perspectives to the fields of criminal or youth justice. Can psychoanalytic and attachment perspectives provide helpful insights into relational dynamics in youth justice?

Over the past 15 years or so, there has been a renewed interest in theorising those who offend as 'psychosocial subjects'. This is perhaps best reflected by the work of Gadd and Jefferson (2007), Gadd (2006) Gadd and Farrall (2004) and multiple authors in a special issue of *Theoretical Criminology* on the 'Jack Roller' (2007), the life story of a delinquent boy in the 1930s. However, with the exception of psychosocial theorisation of youth work responses (including the professional relationship) to youth violence (Harris, 2017; Harris and Seal, 2016) such perspectives are absent in contemporary 'youth justice' literature.⁹⁵ This work has illustrated the helpfulness of psychoanalytic concepts, such as mutual recognition and containment, in understanding the mechanisms by which youth work relationships can help. Yet, Harris's (2017) findings suggest that systemic failings together with a lack of relevant training or supervision, may be precluding workers from recognising and effectively managing such dynamics, and in turn undermining the desistance-promoting potential of their practice. But it is unknown whether such a perspective would be relevant to the involuntary youth justice setting.

⁹⁵ It should be noted here that Haines and Case's (2015: 135) work on 'Child First' youth justice is explicitly critical of psychosocial approaches to risk, as defined by a reductionist focus on psychological and immediate social (families and education) factors in children's offending, to the neglect of wider socio-structural factors,

Several researchers and practitioners have provided valuable insights into the applicability of attachment theory to relationships in the criminal justice field, although similarly there has been little work in youth justice. Ansbro (2019) examined the relevance of attachment concepts to probation practice. Her study comprised interviews with six probation officers about ‘three typical service users’ each over a 6-month period, involving monthly interviews about case progress. She found that probation officers found it helpful to view probationers’ early care experiences through the prism of attachment, as this ‘helped to humanise those whose offences might militate against empathy and tempered an impulse to be punitive or rule-bound’ (2019: 188). Crucially, probation officers did seem to act as a *secure base* in many cases, involving emotional depth and ‘a sort of psychological safety’, suggesting the translatability of attachment relationships (to some extent) to this field (2019: 187). However, officers had mixed views on the relevance and utility of mentalisation; and attachment style was not seen to be helpful in practice whatsoever, predominantly because service users did not fit into one particular style. Yet a limitation in this respect was that there was a lack of specificity about the details of probation officer’s knowledge of attachment theory. Furthermore, Ansbro (2019: 187) cannot tell us much about how providing a ‘secure base’ helped probationers aside from the ‘sense that it was used to regulate emotional extremes’ or how such relationships were managed in a probation context, given the time-limitation. While Ansbro’s research was focused on adults, there are some examples of the relevance of attachment to the young adult and youth justice fields, albeit in secure environments.

In his research on (male) young adults’ psychosocial experiences of imprisonment, Harvey (2007) argues that those who enter prison with a *secure base* are better able to adapt to life within it. This stems from an ability to trust those around them, ask for support, recognise when it is being offered, and regulate their emotions, as well as having secure relationships outside; whereas the opposite is typical for individuals with an *insecure base*. He also links secure attachment to a greater sense of self-determination, and *vice versa*. Notably, he asserts that staff can provide prisoners with a limited secure base, if they provide consistent, pro-social support. Going further, practitioner Rose (2014) sees relationships with staff as a medium through which the behaviour of children who offend can be changed by providing a ‘corrective emotional experience’. To do so, such relationships must offer a:

such as poverty. Their understanding of the term psychosocial is therefore different to the one used here.

.....significantly different kind of experience of adult care and authority that is both warm and has genuine emotional content...[and] a cognitive element...which allows experiences to be reflected upon and talked about so that new learning can take place to address problems and change previous patterns of behaviour (2014: 73) .

However, there remain questions as to whether attachment-informed working - and its potential benefits - is possible or desired by children in the time-limited, often transient setting of community supervision. Do YOT workers sometimes act as a 'secure base' or 'good enough parent' figure for their young supervisees? What factors shape whether such a relationship develops? If such a relationship is present, what do children and their YOT workers perceive the impact to be?

Summary

To summarise, the aims, purpose and philosophy of youth justice and the role of the supervisory relationship in practice remain a shifting and uncertain territory. Recent movement towards Child First and desistance-inspired approaches at a policy level, sit uneasily against the continued shadow of a risk-centred and deficit-focused orientation. There are thus questions as to whether increased prioritisation of children's best interests and the supervisory relationship can be realised within the contemporary youth justice context.

Although desistance thinking is grounded in research with adults, I argue that the concept is broadly transferable to children. However, the emerging body of desistance research with adolescents indicates that there are important divergences from adult pathways away from offending and uncertainties about the significance of some factors in children's desistance, potentially varying by age, gender and offending history. These must be better understood and reflected in the application of desistance thinking in youth justice.

Youth justice research suggests that relationships with workers and provision of practical support, rather than particular interventions or supervisory content, are the territories in which children draw meaning and benefit from their supervision experience. However, there is still much to learn about the minutiae of youth justice supervision, and children's and practitioner perspectives of it. While there is some evidence attesting to the centrality of practitioner – client relationships to the achievement of good outcomes, much less is known

about their position in youth justice practice, the factors in their development, and characteristics, as well as why and how they can facilitate positive change.

Most of what we do know is drawn from the social work, youth work and psychotherapy practice literatures (and some probation research) rather than youth justice. Across these fields, helping relationships are consistently characterised by several factors: genuineness, ‘professional authenticity’, empathy, warmth and, at their most powerful, reciprocity. In parallel, client factors (e.g. prior experiences of figures of authority), and external and operational factors (e.g. supervision for supervisors) are identified as critical in the development of helping relationships. Animated by psychoanalytic theory and attachment theory, this work⁹⁶ theorises *therapeutic* relationships as those that provide a *secure base*, are *containing*, confer *recognition* and are attentive to the conscious and unconscious emotional processes that inevitably enter into such interactions. This suggests that supervisory relationships will carry the potential for transformation if they encompass such features. Yet, it remains unknown whether such relationships are possible in the time-limited, involuntary youth justice supervision setting.

⁹⁶ It should be noted that I am referring here to the social work, youth work and psychotherapy literature. With the exception of Ansbro (2008, 2019), the probation literature does not consider the relevance of attachment or psychoanalytic concepts to probation practice.

Chapter 3: Researching youth justice supervision

This chapter explains the methods and approaches used to answer the research questions detailed in Chapter 1, as well as the difficulties encountered along the way. I begin by explaining the research design and the rationale behind it, including the theoretical framework. I then move on to outlining the process of gaining access to the research sites, their demographic details and the experience of establishing myself within the teams. Following this, I detail how I went about selecting the young and professional research participants. What follows is an exposition of the activity of accessing and undertaking observation of supervision sessions, interviews with the children and professionals, and children's case files. I conclude by detailing the processes employed to analyse and interpret the data collected.

Research rationale and design

The research questions demanded a methodology that would allow me to get 'under the skin' of youth justice supervision. To this end, I sought to use an ethnographic approach. In studying the everyday nature and context of behaviour (Brewer, 2000), ethnographic methods arguably provide the best possible opportunity of observing the 'true' nature of supervision and supervisory relationships. Second, the immersion in everyday practice that is part-and-parcel of ethnographic research aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the insider's view (Fetterman, 2010). I felt this was likely to be particularly valuable when trying to gather perspectives on what sorts of supervisory practices are *helpful*. Added to this, the flexible method of data collection in ethnographic approaches (Brewer, 2000) was particularly appropriate for studying the fluid nature of supervision and the supervisory relationship.

The nature of the questions reflected a concern with eliciting different perspectives of the same phenomenon, to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings (Fetterman, 1998). I decided early on in the research design process that it would be particularly important to engage in observation, and interview professionals as well as children, in order to 'create a picture of the social whole' of supervision (Fetterman, 2010: 19). This reflects calls within criminology for there to be a greater emphasis on engaging and utilising the client's perspective about what they need to change (McNeill et al., 2005; Prior and Mason, 2010).

As McNeill et al. (2005: 25) note, ‘the underlying premise is that clients themselves know what needs to be done to address their problem’.

Equally, it is important that children’s views about ‘what helps’ are triangulated with those of practitioners, yet few youth justice studies (Hazel et al., 2002) have done this. As Drake et al. (2014: 23) argue, the ‘perspectives of practitioners offer crucial reference points for interpreting young people’s accounts, *and vice versa*’. In addition, I collected data from the children’s case files about their life history, needs, sentence details and supervision content (before the interview where possible). The purpose of doing so was three-fold. First, to enhance understanding of the children’s circumstances and their implications for supervision, in light of lacking official information about children on community orders, as noted in the previous chapter. Second, to tailor discussions with children about their experiences of supervision and supervisory relationships.⁹⁷ And third, I anticipated that the case file data would be useful for contextualising the information gathered through observation and interview, thus aiding analysis and interpretation.⁹⁸

The multi-perspective study involved conducting in-depth fieldwork in two YOSs concurrently, spending two days each week alternately in the YOSs over a 17-month period. This comprised six elements:

1. Interviews with a sample of children under supervision (across the two YOSs) to explore their perspectives on supervision and the relationship with their workers;
2. Interviews with YOS practitioners to investigate their perspectives on supervision and supervisory relationships. All YOS officers were also invited to a post-analysis workshop to discuss the findings and analysis;
3. Observation of children’s youth justice supervision sessions throughout their orders to better understand the nature of supervision and to track their progress;
4. Observation of everyday supervision and YOS practice to gain insight into the context of supervisory interactions;

⁹⁷ For example, asking a child about their experience of changing worker three times in nine months.

⁹⁸ In addition, in line with desistance theory, I was anxious to avoid further stigmatising children by asking them to share details of the offences for which they had been sentenced, and thus relied on their case files for this information, unless it was volunteered.

5. Interviews with relevant managers about their perspectives on supervision and supervisory relationships. Managers were invited to a post-analysis workshop to discuss and validate the findings and analysis, and
6. Accessing the case file data of the children involved, subject to their consent, to collect details about their current order and case history to contextualise the information gathered through interviews.

Theoretical framework

Ontological and Epistemological Position

My interest in both exploring the everyday ‘realities’ of youth justice supervision and its subjective meaning to participants led me to a critical realist approach. Originating from the writings of Roy Bhaskar (1975,1979), critical realism is a ‘series of philosophical positions on a range of matters including ontology, causation, structure, persons, and forms of explanation’ (Archer et al., 2016: no page). At its simplest, it presupposes that the social world exists independently of our experience of it (objectivism), but that our knowledge of it is mediated by history, social context and interaction (subjectivism). Thus, knowledge is ‘always fallible...there can be no final theory, unsusceptible to revision and improvement’ (Collier, 1994: 23). While our knowledge of social reality will always be context dependent and transient, explanations of it can be more or less valid, dependent on the methodologies and theories one employs (Layder, 1998). Accordingly, critical realists hold that ‘we are only ever able to get at the reality of things in different ways’ (Archer et al., 2016; no page). This necessitates *methodological pluralism*, using a mix of data collection strategies (Archer et al., 2016; Oliver, 2012; Layder, 1998). In addition, critical realist research has an explicit *emancipatory* goal, through seeking to understand the social mechanisms that result in needs not being met, laying the ground for transformation (Collier, 1994).

In reflecting my subtle realist ontology and relativist epistemology, a critical realist perspective was infused throughout the study, from research design to data analysis. As Layder has argued, one’s ontological and epistemological position ‘has important implications for the manner in which we go about research, the sorts of research problems we pose and the questions we ask’ (1998: 23). Thus, the critical realist approach translated into a focus on both the subjective elements of supervision (e.g. what supervisory relationships

meant to children and practitioners), the social-structural setting in which it takes place (e.g. local and national governance, financial considerations) and the interconnections between them (e.g. how time-limited supervision impacts upon supervisory relationships). This fitted with the adaptive theory research methodology due to the similar philosophical outlook, as detailed below.

Methodological Approach

With its roots in the development of ethnography and emphasis on ‘gaining intimate familiarity’ with participants, grounded theory (GT) might be seen as a natural companion to ethnographic research (Gobo and Marciniak, 2016; Charmaz et al., 2018: 418-9). However, I chose not to use the method for the principal reason that, in my view, none of its strains fitted with my ontological and epistemological views or, accordingly, the research questions.

Classic grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) insists that researchers approach the field without preconceptions, on the (in my view, mistaken) premise that there are ‘theory-neutral facts’ awaiting discovery (Bottoms, 2008: 98). Furthermore, such objectivist versions of the method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) neglect the importance of researcher reflexivity, which was a key consideration in this study. Constructivist grounded theory (CGT) addresses such issues, advocating ‘informed grounded theory’, ‘theoretical agnosticism’⁹⁹ and ‘acknowledges the researcher’s active role in shaping data and analysis’ (Charmaz et al., 2018: 412-9). However, although acknowledging that data are to some extent constructed by researchers through interactions with participants, I do not subscribe to the constructivist view that *all* data is a construction and that there exists no reality independent of our knowledge of it. As Layder (1998: 8) contends:

By simply rejecting objectivism and/or the attempt to adopt what approximates to an objective standpoint, one is foregoing the possibility of understanding the systematic (Habermas, 1987; Layder, 1997) aspects of society and social life and how they are intertwined with the everyday lifeworld.

The difficulty reconciling my subtle realist ontology and relativist epistemology with the variations of grounded theory led me to adopt *adaptive theory*. Arising, in part, out of critique of the above approaches, Layder’s adaptive theory (1998) is concerned with inquiry into the

⁹⁹ This is the idea of approaching ones research with an open and critical mind to the theoretical perspectives that may be relevant (Charmaz et al, 2018).

multi- dimensional nature (both objective and subjective elements) of social reality and the nexus between its layers:

It centralises the interconnections between, on the one hand, actors' meanings, activities and intentions (lifeworld) and, on the other, culture, institutions, power, reproduced practices and social relations (system elements). In this respect, adaptive theory focuses on the ties between agency and structure in social life and the connections between macro and micro levels of analysis. Thus adaptive theory represents a methodological approach which takes into account the layered and textured nature of social reality (its ontological depth). It also acknowledges the need for an epistemological basis which reflects the interweaving of objective and subjective elements of social life (1998: 27).

Such an outlooks aligns with the study's interest in investigating both the minutiae and meaning of supervisory interactions, as well as the contexts that shape the supervision setting and relations within it. An additional appeal of adaptive theory was that it 'simultaneously privileges' prior theory and the role of new data in theory development (Layder, 1998: 27), whereas even in contemporary versions of grounded theory (i.e. CGT), empirical data is arguably predominant. This approach was particularly suited to the study as I discuss later in the chapter.

Accessing the YOSs

I negotiated access to the two YOSs five – six months, respectively, before starting fieldwork. Shire YOS was recruited by chance after I met the manager at a sector conference and was subsequently invited to conduct my research at the YOS. City YOS was recruited by the YJB on my behalf. The Board had expressed interest in the research early on in my first year and offered to help with access. This involved the YJB contacting YOSs in a region specified by me (because it contrasted to that of Shire YOS, which I had recruited first) to inform them of my research and invite expressions of interest. City YOS did so, and following a phone call with the service manager to discuss the research, they confirmed their participation.¹⁰⁰ The selection of YOSs was informed by my interest in studying two similarly performing YOTs:¹⁰¹ from contrasting geographic regions, encompassing an urban and rural area (as this

¹⁰⁰ No other YOSs expressed interest in involvement with the research.

¹⁰¹ Prior to the research, both YOSs had consistently been judged by HMI Probation as well-performing.

may have a bearing on the nature of supervision); and that were supervising a sufficient number of children to make the research viable, comprising an age, gender and ethnic mix. It was also a priority that the managers should be committed to the research given its length and intensity.

I conducted the fieldwork from late November 2014 to early May 2016 on a part-time basis.¹⁰² However, the time and intensity of involvement in each site differed slightly. I started fieldwork in Shire YOS in late November 2014 and in City YOS in early April 2015. The original plan was to spend eight months in Shire YOS, followed by eight months in City YOS; but it was agreed at my PhD review (March 2015) that I should research the YOSs simultaneously (spending alternate weeks in each) to aid comparison and questioning. This led to me starting in City YOS five months earlier than planned and spending over a year in both YOSs (13-months in City YOS and 17-months in Shire YOS). Splitting my times between the two YOSs had several practical implications for the research, as discussed below.

Demographic information about the YOSs

Both services were of a broadly equivalent staff size, recognised as well performing YOSs and were 'traditional' multi-agency teams. That is, they were made up of 'generic' YOS workers as well a small number of specialist YOS staff (e.g. education officers, and probation officers) some of whom were secondees.¹⁰³ As can be seen, the two YOSs shared some important similarities, but differed sharply too.

Shire YOS

Shire YOS consisted of two teams and encompassed a large rural and urban geographical area, spanning three English unitary authorities. At the 2011 Census, the combined population of the three areas was 657, 582, of whom, 63, 221 were aged 10-17. The proportion of the population from Black, Asian, Minority and Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds was significantly below the England and Wales average of 19.5 per cent in all three counties (5.3%, 7.1% and 3.6%). The locality included pockets of affluence as well as of significant deprivation, with one of the authorities ranked as one of the 30 most deprived in England (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011).

Although City YOS was later assessed to be unsatisfactory.

¹⁰² As I was working part-time alongside my PhD.

¹⁰³ Although City YOS commissioned-in mental health and substance misuse services, which were co-located

The YOS was located in children's and families services. The staff team was relatively stable and mostly permanent. Children on court orders were supervised by case managers (qualified staff, with case responsibility) and support workers (typically unqualified, without case responsibility). All appointments with children were held in the community (e.g. in youth centres, at home or school).

City YOS

In contrast, City YOS was made up of one team and was located in a deprived urban area on the periphery of a large city. At the 2011 Census, the local population stood at 275, 900, which included 24,838 10-17 year olds. Residents from BAME backgrounds made up 58.5 per cent of the population, higher than the national average. The area encompassed by City YOS was ranked as one of 35 most deprived local authorities in England in the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010 (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011).

The YOS was located within the community safety team. City YOS had a large proportion of agency workers and a high turnover of staff during the research period. The majority of staff involved in supervision were qualified case managers. The YOS office was the principal location for children's supervision appointments.

Getting to know the teams

My research began in both YOSs with a presentation at the staff meeting about the aims of the study and broad research plan. In Shire YOS, I presented first at the managers' meeting and then several weeks later at the practitioners' meeting. At this point, I spent several hours with one of the operational managers looking through the list of children who had recently been sentenced, with the aim of identifying potential participants and approaching their supervisors before I formally started fieldwork two weeks later. In City YOS, due to the way meeting dates fell, I presented at the staff meeting and began fieldwork the same day.

The real business of negotiating access began with fieldwork. As Buchanan et al. (1988) have noted, senior management permission does not guarantee organisational member cooperation. It thus 'becomes necessary constantly to renegotiate access to the lives and experiences of the

with the YOS. Whereas Shire YOS had specialist YOS workers in these fields, some of whom were seconded.

individual members of that organisation' (1988: 59). It was thus important that I began to build the trust of the practitioners, both as potential research participants themselves and as the gatekeepers of the children. In Shire YOS, this was a difficult process at first. My first week had coincided with the team's transition to a new case management system, which required the copying and pasting of all their case files onto the new system, as well as a recent team restructure. To compound the issue further, it was two weeks before Christmas, which meant that there was an additional pressure to also complete their day-to-day tasks before the break. The office was a place of frenzied activity and palpable tension during this period. I felt uncomfortable asking practitioners for their time, given their busyness. Yet, in a perhaps naïve desire to begin 'recruiting' children to the study as soon as possible, I spent these early days following-up with practitioners about potential cases. While many were open to helping, unsurprisingly this approach produced some curt responses.

I had learnt my lesson when I started in City YOS five months later. Here I spent the first days 'hanging out' and introducing myself to the practitioners, to which they were generally welcoming and friendly (Adler and Adler, 1987: 12). As well as emphasising the confidential and anonymous nature of the research in these interactions, I circulated the two information sheets for practitioners and children to the whole team. Several of the case managers keenly told me that they were 'warm' to the research, variously remarking that: 'it is good having a researcher here as it makes us think about what we're doing' and 'I'm interested in the idea of having someone sit in on my session'. These practitioners were proactive in identifying and approaching potential young participants for the research, as well as in inviting me to observe supervision sessions. Others appeared more reticent.

Returning to Shire YOS, as practice pressures abated and the weeks unfolded, I increasingly felt like I was considered a 'fellow team member' (Adler and Adler, 1987: 34). The service manager deliberately 'made a fuss of me' in front of staff, with the implication being that this enhanced my credibility.¹⁰⁴ Two of the support workers subsequently 'took me under their

¹⁰⁴ I was concerned that this could lead staff to think that I was the manager's 'spy', passing information back to him about practice. Yet, although practitioners did appear to see me as someone who had the manager's 'ear', this seemed to have a positive effect. Several practitioners quickly became champions of the research, which was perhaps influenced by the value attached to the study by the manager. Related to this, some practitioners appeared to see me as a potential advocate for their work with management (in one example to maintain funding 'will you say to [the service manager] what you said to me about the [value] of the music group?'). However, early on, on occasion I was jokingly told 'right, don't tell the [service manager] that bit' (typically in relation to personal information), which I understood as testing my loyalties.

wing', inviting me to shadow them, going out of their way to give me lifts and, in one case, having me over for dinner at their family home; these were my key 'sponsors' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 64). Others gradually followed suit. This acceptance manifested itself in friendly references to me as 'chicken', 'cherub' and 'our Ali', as well as inclusion in the office 'brew' round and day-to-day office banter and gossip, which were a central part of the team experience. As with Souhami's (2007) YOT research, the banter I was subject to from male practitioners was often laced with innuendo and flirtation, indicating the gendered nature of my membership role (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). One implication of this was that some of the male professionals were particularly protective towards me. They referred to me as 'innocent', entreated me to be careful' when conducting fieldwork alone and, in one case, prevented me from shadowing an appointment with a 'dangerous' boy 'who would enjoy seeing you [for the wrong reasons] and that's not a nice thing for you to deal with'. The close relationships with practitioners here generated rich data.

Despite the initial warmth to the research in City YOS, this proved difficult to foster and translate into research progress. Soon after I joined, the YOS descended into chaos, characterised by high staff turnover, a manic rush to catch-up with paperwork for an impending inspection and the murder of a YOS-involved child. In the midst of such turmoil, I found it difficult to integrate into the team, which was perhaps compounded by only spending two days in the YOS every fortnight (in comparison to Shire YOS where I was there week-in week-out for the initial four months). My assignment to a backward facing desk at the end of the office in an empty pod of workstations, disconnected me from the team further. As such, sometimes there was the same office banter and gossip here as in Shire YOS, but this was rarely something in which I was naturally included or was able to penetrate. At times, I felt little more than an observer.

Opportunities to build rapport with practitioners primarily lay in the lunchroom, a space wherein they vented their frustrations, shared concerns, and took time out. But it often felt like an impermeable place to an outsider, as I was. My sense was that the beleaguered state of the YOS intensified the importance of having a place of sanctuary reserved only for those with full membership. Sometimes the team were huddled around the tables, with no space remaining to join. Early occasions of access often felt like an intrusion; some practitioners seemed reluctant to cede a space and their conversations were impervious to my presence (although such invisibility had benefits). Others indicated misgivings about the research,

warning of the need for complete confidentiality and the unlikelihood of me being permitted access to one-to-one supervision sessions. I had to force myself to go the lunchroom, and did not always succeed in doing so. But over time, I found my presence behind the scenes was increasingly accepted, which in return afforded rich insights into YOS life. With this came opportunities to demonstrate my interest in practitioners' experiences, gain their trust, raise awareness of the research and negotiate access to young interviewees. Thus, in both YOSs, my role came to resemble that of a 'peripheral-member-researcher' whereby I was recognised by members as an insider but did not occupy the same role as central members (Adler and Adler, 1987: 37).

Sample selection

Children

I interviewed 26 children subject to court orders.¹⁰⁵ My initial sampling frame was a list of all children sentenced to community orders in the two months prior to me starting fieldwork (Shire YOS = 29 , City YOS = 26). This reflected the initial research plan to 'follow' a group of children in both YOSs from the outset to conclusion of their community sentences, involving observation of their supervision sessions and interviews. I made attempts to invite all children on the list to participate in the research by approaching their case managers in the first instance.

The majority of the potential cases were automatically ruled out by their case managers. This was typically due to the child being accommodated out of area, imminently moved to probation, or their fragile state, which included poor compliance, and vulnerability linked to their volatile life circumstances. Out of the initial sampling frame of 55 children, only 21 (City YOS = 14, Shire YOS = 7) were initially invited to take part in the research and of these 10 agreed to participate (City YOS = 2; Shire YOS = 8). I subsequently adopted a method of convenience sampling, asking practitioners to recommend children who had recently started a community order and would be amenable to 'tracking' (session observation and interview). Another four children subsequently joined the study (two in each of the YOSs), increasing the research sample to 14. However, within several months, the sample had reduced to 11 as

¹⁰⁵ Referral Orders, Youth Rehabilitation Orders, and on Detention and Training Order licence

three of the early participants from Shire YOS had to withdraw due to their life circumstances.¹⁰⁶

Due to difficulties in recruiting a sufficient research sample of children¹⁰⁷ that were willing to be tracked, I revised the research plan to focus on interviewing only.¹⁰⁸ Using convenience sampling, I asked practitioners to recommend children for interview who had at least three months' experience of serving a community order, as well as proactively suggesting children whom I encountered during shadowing. This resulted in the recruitment of a further 15 children and, taken together, produced a relatively diverse sample, representing an age, ethnic, offence and order mix. However, girls were under-represented, totalling just 4 per cent of the sample (1 out of 26) compared to 12 per cent of those sentenced nationally in 2016/17 (YJB/MoJ, 2018b, table 5.2).¹⁰⁹ I was also cognisant of the fact that the sample was likely biased towards the more 'compliant' children and had been mostly recruited through their supervisors, with whom a good relationship may have been instrumental in their decision to participate.

The children ranged in age from 13 to 18, while the mean age was 16 years. Of the sample, the majority were white (16 out of 26), just over a third were black¹¹⁰ (8 out of 26) and eight per cent were of mixed heritage (2 out of 26). At 39 per cent, the proportion of BAME children in the research sample was significantly higher than the 25 per cent of children in the youth justice cohort nationally (i.e. those who received a caution or court conviction) (YJB/

¹⁰⁶ This included moving out of the area; disengaging from the YOS; and taking up a full-time job with long hours, which meant supervision contact was fleeting (usually a five minute meeting in the car before work).

¹⁰⁷ The aim was to gather a research sample of 25 – 30 children.

¹⁰⁸ With the 11 children recruited at the outset of the research, I persisted in my attempts to 'follow' their supervisory journey from its outset to conclusion. This involved attending their supervision sessions, collecting case file data on their supervision content and progress, as well as interviewing them and their workers. I had initially planned to interview this group of children (and their workers) at both the outset and conclusion of their orders, as a means of capturing their developing reflections about their supervisor and the supervisory experience. However, in practice this proved unfeasible to implement, since most interviews with children did not take place until halfway through their order (and some were only six months or less).

¹⁰⁹ In the year ending March 2017, a total of 25,751 children (10-17 year-olds) were found guilty at court, of which 3,137 (12 per cent) were female (YJB/ MoJ, 2018b, table 5.2). National demographic characteristics of the youth justice population, which are based on all children given a caution or conviction, show that a slightly higher proportion (17 per cent) are female (YJB/ MoJ, 2018: 14). This compares to Shire YOS and City YOS, where girls represented 19 per cent and 13 per cent of all children cautioned and convicted, respectively (local level data does not allow for disaggregation by disposal and gender) (YJB/ MoJ 2018c; Table 1). This indicates that the low proportion of girls in the research sample was also unrepresentative of the local demographics of youth-justice-involved children in the two sites, although this may less so if comparison was possible with only the children who had been sentenced (as opposed to all those cautioned and convicted).

¹¹⁰ I did not ask children to specify their ethnicity, however two of the children's case files detailed that they were of Black African (1) or Black Caribbean (1) descent.

MoJ 2018a: 13). This reflects the fact that 81 per cent (9 out of 11) of the City YOS sample were from a BAME background, which is broadly representative of the predominantly BAME (76 per cent) youth justice population of City YOS (YJB/ MoJ 2018c).¹¹¹

Equal numbers of the children were serving Referral Orders (12 out of 26) and Youth Rehabilitation Orders (12 out of 26) (which included four children on YROs with ISS). The remainder of the sample (2 out of 26; 8 per cent) were on Detention and Training order (DTO) licence at the time of interview. Most commonly children were serving orders of 12-months (14 out of 26).¹¹² The children's offence profile is explored in the following chapter and detailed demographics are available in Appendix 1.

Staff

In both sites, all YOS staff involved in court-ordered community supervision - ranging from Heads of Service, operational managers to YOS workers - were interviewed, where possible. This produced a total of 46 professional interviews (Shire YOS = 26, City YOS = 20), including nine managers (Shire YOS = 5; City YOS = 4). This represented 84 per cent of eligible professionals in Shire YOS (26 out of 31) and 87 per cent in City YOS (20 of 23). Focus groups were also held in both sites at the end of the research with the main staff team and separately with the managers, to present and discuss the provisional findings.

I had originally planned only to interview the supervisors of the children in the sample. However this proved impractical. In Shire YOS, the children originally involved in the research (n = 8) were concentrated amongst the same handful of supervisors. In City YOS, it was a similar story, as only five children agreed to the research in the first five months. It thus seemed a wasted opportunity not to interview a wider group of practitioners involved in supervision, which included specialist workers, such as substance misuse workers and education workers who often worked very closely with children. I ruled out interviewing professionals who had little or no involvement in one-to-one community supervision, such as

¹¹¹ Evidence also shows that BAME children overrepresentation increases with system progression, such that BAME children comprise 24 per cent of first time entrants (compared to 18 per cent of the 10-17 year-old general population in England and Wales) but 45 per cent of the youth custody population (YJB/ MoJ, 2018a). Thus, one would expect the proportion of BAME children to be higher in the research sample (since it encompasses children at the later stages of the system), compared to the national youth justice cohort (which includes children who received a caution).

¹¹² Of the remainder, 15 per cent of the children were serving orders of six months or less (4 out of 26, which included one DTO); 23 per cent were on orders of seven – 11 months (6 out of 26, including one DTO); two child were serving a community order of more than 12 months.

remand social workers (who worked with children in custody), and those who joined fleetingly.¹¹³ However, I decided to interview a small number of diversion practitioners in both YOSs, to better understand their role, the nature of out-of-court work and its implications for court-ordered community supervision.¹¹⁴ A handful of eligible professionals were not interviewed since they did not respond to invitations, preferred only to be shadowed or left the YOS at very short notice. Demographic information on the professional interviewees is available in Appendix 2.

Observation

I completed over 700 hours' observation across 114 days, which were broadly divided between the sites (59 days in Shire YOS and 55 days in City YOS).¹¹⁵ This included 48 one-to-one supervision sessions (42 in Shire YOS and 6 in City YOS), as well as a range of other contextual activities, including groupwork, internal meetings, and court hearings, which are detailed in Appendix 3. In both YOSs I was allocated a desk, computer/ laptop, YOS email address, unrestricted access to the case management system, and all YOS documents, as well as an ID badge.¹¹⁶ This legitimised my presence in the offices.

Here I focus predominantly on my experiences of accessing and observing youth justice supervision meetings, since this was the primary research interest. This activity afforded valuable insights into the underbelly of youth justice supervision, yet it proved difficult to do. In City YOS, and occasionally in Shire YOS, practitioners were reluctant to grant me access to supervision meetings. Often this appeared to be motivated by a sense of protectiveness over the supervisory space and the children involved. Sometimes practitioners had only recently or not yet met with children (due to change of workers and delays to beginning

¹¹³ Both YOSs, particularly City YOS, made use of agency workers, some of whom only spent a matter of weeks at the YOS before moving on.

¹¹⁴ The national out-of-court framework comprises the community resolution (non- statutory), youth caution and youth conditional caution (both of which are statutory disposals). The latter comprises mandatory interventions, supervised by the YOS, with non-compliance risking prosecution. For more information, see: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/438139/out-court-disposal-guide.pdf, accessed 18th July 2018)

¹¹⁵ This is reflective of spending approximately two days in each YOS every fortnight. I visited Shire YOS weekly for the first three months, but this was not possible in City YOS since I had decided to research the YOSs simultaneously by this point.

¹¹⁶ The ID badge was an important signifier of member status when I was amongst staff in the YOS offices, but I almost always removed the ID badge before I encountered children out of concern that it would mark me as a YOS professional, deterring them from speaking freely in interview. On the two occasions that I neglected to do so, I made an act of removing it in front of the children, indicating that it had a 'researcher' label to show I was a student rather than part of the staff and only had it on me to access the building. Their relaxed and open demeanour suggested that they understood this.

supervision)¹¹⁷ and thus, perhaps understandably, were anxious that my presence would disrupt their efforts to build rapport. In Shire YOS, children were typically not invited to the research because of their fragile compliance ('she's not engaging with me, let alone anyone else'). Early on, there was an especial reticence here about involving girls, who were described as 'not liking new people' and 'having so many professionals in their lives, [that] we don't want to introduce one more'.¹¹⁸

In City YOS, non-compliance prevented involvement too, but more commonly I was denied access to children because of their high levels of vulnerability. By way of example, a potential participant's brother had very recently been seriously wounded in a stabbing and the family were also facing eviction. The case manager feared that my presence in supervision sessions risked deterring him from sharing important information about his situation, so it was decided that he could not be approached for the research. While I understood practitioners' protectiveness, as Heath et al. (2009: 30-31) argue, a more participatory and, perhaps ethical approach would be to allow children themselves to decide whether or not to take part. However, there was some evidence that the children here shared practitioners' concerns, with reports that they had declined because they felt 'awkward' 'uncomfortable' and 'would feel like a guinea pig, like he couldn't be himself'.¹¹⁹

Where practitioners granted permission or suggested children for invitation to the research it was typically because 'he's very chatty', 'from a middle class family' and 'she's easy going, she would be a good one for you'.¹²⁰ One City YOS practitioner was frank that 'difficult cases' were off limits, describing them as 'like pulling teeth, there is just silence'. While I was told that attending such sessions would be 'bad for the work', and 'uncomfortable for the

¹¹⁷ The Shire YOS teams were concluding a restructure when I joined, resulting in some children having to change worker. Delays to the commencement of supervision were usually due to initial difficulties engaging with children.

¹¹⁸ I sensed that this was primarily driven by concerns that my introduction would upset their own fragile relationships with the girls and thus their compliance with supervision, and less by a need to protect them. I questioned too whether practitioners wanted to shield me from the difficulties they reported experiencing in working with girls, which were sometimes said to be more difficult to engage and more complex, in line with previous studies (Sharpe, 2012). However through shadowing workers in group activities (such as music group) I had the opportunity to spend time with some of the girls on supervision, after which several practitioners remarked that the girls felt comfortable in my presence and 'had accepted' me. They subsequently agreed to raise the research with several girls, one of whom consented and then subsequently withdrew as I detail later.

¹¹⁹ I questioned whether such responses reflected practitioners' own discomfort at the prospect of their supervision meetings being observed.

¹²⁰ I questioned too whether such cases were put forward because practitioners' (mis)perceived that as a young, white, middle class woman, these were the types of children I was interested in and, related to this, that I would

young people’, I suspected that practitioners themselves felt particularly uneasy about having such interactions observed, perceiving it as external judgement. In other cases, this reluctance manifested itself in staff repeatedly ‘forgetting’ to raise the research with children and, on occasion in Shire YOS, discouraging my shadowing on the basis that the child was ‘chaotic’ and ‘probably wouldn’t turn up, which would be a waste of your time’ or ‘there won’t be much to see’. Two practitioners said that they would need to devise a sanitised session that would be appropriate for observation (‘something contained and safe’; ‘I’ll need to plan something to do with her then, because we usually just talk about what’s going on for her’), which seemed to be borne out of a desire to protect children’s privacy and best ensure the manageability of the session.

To counter this, I continually emphasised to practitioners that I wanted to see supervision in its unvarnished, ‘true’ form, including uncommunicativeness and non-compliance. As I gained the trust of practitioners in Shire YOS, opportunities opened up to observe a broader spectrum of supervisory meetings (it helped matters that these were seen in the context of shadowing workers rather than inviting children to participate fully in the research).¹²¹ This never materialised in City YOS, although in time these efforts afforded access to a diverse sample of children for interview.

The fluidity of supervision was a further constraint on observation of meetings. Overall 30 per cent of the scheduled supervision meeting observations (21 out of 69) were unsuccessful, usually because children, and sometimes practitioners, did not or could not attend.¹²² In Shire YOS, a small number of practitioners undertook the body of supervision work with children,

be unable to engage with more ‘challenging’ children.

¹²¹ I asked all children whom I encountered during shadowing for their consent to my presence in their supervision meeting, introducing myself, explaining my independence from the YOS and emphasising that they should feel no pressure to agree to my presence. Without exception, children agreed. Generally, they appeared impervious to my presence, remarking that ‘I have to be here, so I don’t mind you sitting in too’. But in several cases, having given their permission, children seemed overtly aware of my presence and anxious, suggesting that they felt uncomfortable. I questioned whether my arrival with the worker to the session, and the limited time available to provide a detailed oversight of the research, increased the likelihood of children passively assenting to my presence, rather than genuinely giving ‘true’ consent (Heath et al, 2009: 32).

¹²² It was rare for children simply not to turn up without any explanation. More often, appointments were cancelled immediately beforehand or children gave an explanation for their non-attendance when the worker called to find out where they were. Reasons included that the child: had forgotten, was ill; was not aware of their appointment due to an administrative error; was unable to find or afford transport to their appointment; had travelled to a different part of the area and could not get back in time; had gone missing from home; or was working unexpectedly. On several occasions appointments were cancelled as the child had been re-arrested. Sometimes appointments did not go ahead because the practitioner: was unable to attend due to illness; delayed in traffic (Shire YOS); had forgotten they were on court duty or to schedule the appointment (City YOS).

often on the same days and times, which prevented observation of large numbers of appointments.¹²³ In addition, sessions were unavoidably scheduled for days that I was absent given that fieldwork was only two days per week.¹²⁴ The below field note extract represents a typical day:

I had scheduled to shadow [worker] today for four appointments... We spoke yesterday and agreed to meet in the office at 9.30 to accompany him to the second appointment at 11am as his first appointment was now at 8.30, for which I would not arrive in time (as it was a four-hour journey to Shire YOS)... He rung me when I was on the train to say that two of the appointments had been cancelled... Later in the car he explained that they had been cancelled because one child had 'attacked three care staff, putting one member in hospital with a spleen injury'. The second child 'had made threats to care home staff' and was due in court for this tomorrow, having 'a reputation for following through with the threats he makes'... We travel to the 11am appointment with Josh. He is waiting when we arrive. The appointment is short, lasting no more than 20 minutes... Afterwards we return to the office.

The most accessible supervision sessions were those of the children I was tracking. However I had to be careful not to attend too often for risk of becoming too much part of the supervisory dynamic I was trying to research and potentially being seen by children as synonymous with the YOS. I endeavoured to assume an invisible presence in sessions, sitting out of the way where possible (although it was often not) and not taking notes until afterwards.¹²⁵ That said, I did not want to seem aloof, and thus responded to children's eye contact and occasional smiles, chatting to them beforehand and afterwards, where possible, in an attempt to build rapport.

Occasionally, observations did not go ahead because practitioners believed my presence would be inappropriate.

¹²³ Such difficulties meant that, ironically, it would not have been feasible to track the 'target' number of children (25 – 30) even had there been a sufficient pool of potential participants.

¹²⁴ This moved to fortnightly in each YOS when I began fieldwork in both in parallel in April 2015.

¹²⁵ I felt strongly that it would be uncomfortable for children if I sat writing notes during the sessions, given that they often included sensitive content. I therefore wrote-up the notes immediately afterwards or wrote brief notes of the key points and then typed them up later that day. This was not an ideal method as I found that, particularly on full observation days, it was difficult to recall the detail of the interactions when writing them up at the end of the visit. In future, I would ask for children's permission to take notes during observation, endeavouring to keep writing to a minimum so as not to be off-putting. If permission wasn't given and I did not have time to make written notes immediately afterwards (e.g. due to driving to another observation), I would plan to make notes via a dictaphone and write them up as soon as possible afterwards.

Nonetheless, sometimes practitioners attempted to directly involve me in sessions, asking for my opinions or using me as a point of conversation.¹²⁶ In one example, the child was speaking to his worker about his girlfriend whom he had ‘demanded’ to take a pregnancy test, in response to which I was asked for my view ‘as a female’ on the situation. I declined to answer. On another occasion, as the worker had been delayed in traffic, I was asked to request that the child waited and eventually tell her that she could go after 30 minutes when the appointment was cancelled. This blurred the boundaries of my research role and, I suspected, in some cases caused children to question the authenticity of my claim as a student, which may have affected their openness in interview. However, refusing such a request risking burning my bridges with the practitioner (Adler and Adler, 1987: 15). This accords with Souhami’s (2007) contention that there is an implicit tension between the dual roles of researcher and team member in a peripheral-member-researcher role.

Interviewing the children

I was able to invite most children to participate in the research in person. In the majority of cases, practitioners gained children’s permission in principle, and I subsequently attended their next supervision meeting (or, in several cases, joined it immediately)¹²⁷ to explain the research and confirm their consent. Where this was not possible, I called children to introduce myself, explain the research and arrange a time for the interview.

Relying on practitioners to raise the issue of research participation with their young supervisees was often problematic. It was common for practitioners to forget to do so. Some appeared to have given the matter minimal attention, only providing children with the information sheet to read through. I suspect that for some this was due to a lack of time,

¹²⁶ It was noteworthy that practitioners sometimes elicited my feedback and advice following session observations, despite my emphasis that I was purely there to learn rather than to assess. I was most commonly asked whether I: had any positive or negative comments on their running of the session; thought the child was telling the truth or not; or had responded to non-compliance or a challenging issue appropriately (‘do you think that he called me is a sign that he respects me, or just thinks that he can get away with it?’; ‘you didn’t think I was too soft did you?’). I understood this to be a symptom of both the natural human instinct for reassurance, as well as some practitioners’ lack of confidence in their practice and sensitivity to the unusual experience of being observed. Related to this, on one occasion a senior practitioner attempted to discuss in the open management office the practice of a worker whom I had spent much time observing, which although comprised only praise of the worker, risked implicating me as someone who was assessing practitioners and feeding back to management.

¹²⁷ In City YOS, the meeting rooms were immediately below the main office, so if a child agreed to participate in the research, I was called down to be introduced to them.

whereas for others it was a lack of enthusiasm about the research.¹²⁸ It was notable that others had evidently thought about *how* to raise the research with their individual supervisees in order to maximise the likelihood of their participation. This included telling children that they had been ‘specially selected’ for the research ‘because it makes them feel special’ and, conversely, not doing so with others ‘because he feels that he has always been singled out because of his parents’ addiction’. In several cases, practitioners reported that they had emphasised to potential participants that the research was a chance to have their voices heard.

While many practitioners seemed genuinely supportive of the research, as time went on it was evident that the potential benefits for them were an important motivation. One practitioner noted of 16-year-old Miles who had agreed to be ‘tracked’, that ‘he is even more keen to comply because he knows you’re tracking him and that’s an incentive for me to facilitate your contact with my young people’. Another practitioner, who was soon to leave City YOS, was keen that I follow one of her supervisees whom she was particularly close to ‘because it will be good for him to have a consistent person during the transition’. More often, practitioners were keen to take advantage of the offer that I would use children’s statutory appointments for interview,¹²⁹ which was reflective of the time pressures on staff. Although it was not until I revised the research plan to focus only on interviewing children (rather than observe their supervision meetings too) did this incentive come into its own. Practitioners proactively suggested times that I could accompany them to meet with children to introduce myself or discussed participation with them on my behalf and subsequently booked in interview appointments. As one practitioner eagerly remarked ‘I’ll have a whole cohort of young people for you to interview’.

¹²⁸ To address this difficulty, I called or texted practitioners in advance of when I knew they were seeing children to remind them to discuss the research and, where possible, I gave them tailored, personally addressed letters to share and discuss with children rather than detailed information sheets. In addition, I provided staff with a brief list of bullet points about the research and consent issues to discuss with children, to discourage them from merely handing the information sheet to children. I found these to be effective methods for facilitating children’s participation in the research.

¹²⁹ In both YOSs it had been agreed with management at the outset of fieldwork that interviews with children could count as a statutory appointment or time off reparation hours (although non-attendance was not treated as non-compliance), as an incentive for both practitioners and children to help with the research. For some children, it seemed to be an incentive to have reparation hours taken off or have time away from the usual YOS faces, particularly if on ISS; but in several cases, this seemed to have no effect, with children saying that they would prefer to complete reparation or see their supervisor rather than a stranger.

While such enthusiasm was welcome, there was a risk that children might consequently feel impelled to participate in the research.¹³⁰ For example, another practitioner had said that ‘I’ll tell all of my young people they have to speak to you’. To guard against this, I repeatedly emphasised to both practitioners and children that the interview was voluntary, gaining their informed consent.¹³¹ For those under the age of 16,¹³² I also asked for parental or guardian consent too, by way of a signed consent form or, failing that, via telephone.¹³³

Suspicion of outsiders was a phenomenon that I encountered repeatedly as a researcher embedded in the YOSs, particularly in City YOS. Here, children were significantly less likely to agree to me observing their YOS appointments or to being interviewed. As an illustration, one child had verbally consented to interview, both to his YOS worker and to me, but when I asked him to sign the consent form, he asked whether I was ‘police’ and withdrew his agreement, stating that ‘I don’t want to sign no forms or say nothing about YOS’.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ As an example, a 17-year-old girl in City YOS, whose YOS worker had spoken to her about the research, withdrew her consent when she realised that she did not have to take part.

¹³¹ For children, I had designed an information sheet that used plain language, short sentences, colourful artwork and was ‘dyslexia-friendly’ (Arial font size 14, in blue text on yellow paper). (I had asked the education worker in Shire YOS to review the document, in response to which she recommended these amendments. [See also: https://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk/common/ckeditor/filemanager/userfiles/About_Us/policies/Dyslexia_Style_Guide.pdf].) At the outset of the interview, I asked children whether they preferred me to read it out or do so themselves, after which we discussed the content to ensure that they had understood. This included reinforcing the voluntary nature of the research, including the choice not to answer questions and withdraw at any time, without providing an explanation; their anonymity; and confidentiality, save for any information that concerned a serious offence not already known to the police, or to harm themselves or others (British Society of Criminology, 2015).

¹³² I gained ethics approval only to request the consent of a parent or guardian for children under the age of 16, since legally those aged 16 and above are deemed to be able to give their consent, unless they have particular incapacities, such as learning difficulties (Heath et al, 2009; Gillick versus West Norfolk, 1985). However on reflection, such a distinction between under-16s and over-16s is not compatible with my view that all those aged under 18 should be understood as children first and foremost, in line with the legal definition of children (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, Article 1) and afforded the associated protections. Thus, in future research with children, I would seek the consent of a parent or guardian for all participants under the age of 18.

¹³³ In one case, a 15-year-old boy had neither a parent or guardian to provide consent (he was living at home alone, but still did not meet the threshold for children’s social care support), but I decided to go ahead with the interview, since he wanted to take part and demonstrated ‘sufficient understanding’ of the research and of his rights relating to the interview. He thus could be deemed to have ‘Gillick competency’ (named after the legal case of Gillick vs West Norfolk, 1985 regarding contraceptive advice and treatment to under-16s), which refers to the ‘test’ used in medical law, and other areas, including social research, to determine whether a child aged under 16 has ‘sufficient maturity’ to make their own informed decisions (Heath et al, 2009: 27; NSPCC, 2018). As a further protection, I consulted with the child’s YOS worker about the decision and, although not ideal, obtained his consent as the gatekeeper in lieu of a parent or guardian (British Society of Criminology, 2015).

¹³⁴ This resonates with Heath et al’s (2009: 26) comment that in certain areas of research with children, such as with those involved in criminal behaviour, it may be ‘inadvisable’ to ask for signed consent, resulting in refusal to take part. Having previously understood signed consent as a vital element of ethical research, in future studies I would consider taking more of a situated approach to ethics (2009: 22), responding to ethical dilemmas in light of the individual research context rather than on the basis of absolutes. This might include asking a child’s worker whether they anticipate there being difficulty with the child providing signed consent, before asking

Practitioners were unsurprised by such reactions, citing some children's deep-seated mistrust of authority. As Jackson's supervisor told me, in relation to his unwillingness to being interviewed: 'he's always suspicious of meeting new people in the YOS as he thinks it is a ploy to get information out of him'. The frequency of such reactions in City YOS (as well as the slowness of practitioners to trust me here too), compared to the general openness in Shire YOS, led to me to question whether this was a cultural phenomenon; a cloistered community off-limits to outsiders. In this way, the area, although on the edge of a large City, shared aspects of the same close-knit culture and suspicion of outsiders and officials that has been associated with research in rural localities (Weisheit, 2016). My impression was that as a white, middle class young woman in a largely BAME, working class community, I was regarded with additional suspicion.¹³⁵

Amongst those who agreed to participate in the research, in a handful of cases the interview did not go ahead. Only two children withdrew their consent after I had met them.¹³⁶ After three unsuccessful attempts to interview a 17-year-old girl in Shire YOS, I decided to stop contacting her;¹³⁷ she had notably told her worker that she was worried about what she would say to me since we did not know one another. More commonly, children's changed circumstances, created, in effect, insurmountable barriers to the interview. Two children went missing from home. A third moved without notice to a different area of the country. A fourth disengaged from the YOS, and could not be contacted. A fifth child was enrolled in a full-time education course for three months, which was due to end after fieldwork concluded. I

them for it.

¹³⁵ Importantly, while I felt that this difference made it more difficult for children to trust me sufficiently to participate in the research, for those who did consent, I did not feel that this had a detrimental effect on the interview dynamic and content. Indeed, the differences between us may have encouraged the rich insights into their lives that they shared, because they were perhaps conscious of the need to explain their experiences more fully to someone outwith of their lived realities. As Carter (2004: 348) notes 'it is the gap in experience between interviewer and interviewee that creates a space for respondents to describe and tease out meanings and assumptions that may otherwise be unspoken'.

¹³⁶ With this exception, it was noticeable that children with whom an interview had been scheduled always attended the interview, either on the first occasion or in several cases on the second having asked in advance to reschedule. This suggested that the use of statutory appointments and reparation hours for interview may have conferred a pressure to attend. In addition, the use of statutory meetings was often a constraint on the timing of interviews, informed by when it fitted in the programme of supervision or practitioners felt that children would feel sufficiently comfortable with me. I understood there to be a range of motivations for the emphasis on my use of supervision meetings for interview, including easing time pressures on practitioners; protectiveness over children and their engagement; and, in some cases, to protect me from children not attending the interview. In hindsight it may have been better to attempt to interview children outside of supervision, although such a strategy may risk attracting only children who have particularly positive or negative appraisals of supervision (and thus are willing to be interviewed in their own time), rather than those to whom supervision means little.

¹³⁷ This comprised two occasions when she did not turn up at the time and place of the interview, and unsuccessful attempts to arrange the interview for the third time.

made the difficult decision not to pursue an interview with him, since this would have meant doing so at his home or in the local community, which was advised against by the YOS.¹³⁸

The location of interviews diverged significantly in the two YOSs. In City YOS, all interviews took place in private rooms at the YOS offices, due to the reported risks of meeting with children in the community. In contrast, in Shire YOS I interviewed children in their homes (including several residential care homes), community centres, youth clubs, education provision and, in one case, in custody. Where possible, I brought drinks, biscuits and sweets (asking in advance about favourite treats) as a means of informalising the interaction and as a small token of appreciation for their participation.¹³⁹ The space in which interviews take place, as Heath et al. (2009: 93) have noted, is 'rarely neutral'. Yet, contrary to my expectations, the informality or not of settings did not appear to be a key determinant of children's ease or openness in interview. One explanation for this is that in *both* YOSs, interviews were typically held in the *same* spaces in which supervision took place. Thus I suspect that the uncommunicativeness of some lay in the interview looking and perhaps feeling like another supervision meeting.¹⁴⁰

Interviews in homely environments more often had a relaxed air (in one example, we sat in the caravan drinking tea, shoes off, legs folded on the sofa) but this did not preclude difficulties in eliciting children's reflections about their supervisory experiences, for reasons I return to below. Informal settings sometimes involved interruptions or lack of privacy, such as interviewing a child at one end of the sitting room while the residential care worker watched television at the other end, which may have affected children's focus and openness (Heath et al., 2009).¹⁴¹ Another interview in a care home was interrupted by a resident 'trashing his room' upstairs, in response to which the police were called. This experience

¹³⁸ The YOS advised against meeting with children in the community, as practitioners were not currently doing so due to the perceived risks of being associated with children involved in serious violence. I was heavily pregnant at this point of fieldwork, which likely made me more inclined to heed this advice.

¹³⁹ I found that sharing biscuits helped to break the ice and was occasionally the cause of laughter as children attempted to answer my questions with a mouth full of biscuit. I invited them to take home whatever was left of the pack, for which several were particularly appreciative.

¹⁴⁰ Others were less obviously affected by the place of interview resembling supervision. Typically these children had a positive relationship with their YOS worker or long-term involvement with the YOS, which perhaps resulted in a more general feeling of ease in the supervision setting.

¹⁴¹ In this example, the only other options were to interview the child standing up in the kitchen or to drive with him to a local café, however I was informed by the YOS that I was not insured to drive children, an indication of the managerialist culture that remains in youth justice as will be discussed later. While I was anxious about how the lack of privacy might impact on the interview, in the few experiences of this, children seemed to

made me feel uneasy and underlined the potential hazards of conducting research in unknown, private environments.

I spoke to children alone, with one exception of an 18-year-old boy who insisted that his substance misuse worker remain for the interview.¹⁴² Amongst those who were interviewed, just under a quarter declined to be recorded (6 out of 26).¹⁴³ This tended to happen with children with whom I'd had little or no contact with prior to the interview.¹⁴⁴ In these cases, I took extensive notes during the interview and typed them up later that day. Where children had agreed to being recorded, I gave them the Dictaphone to play with beforehand and then asked them to take control of the recording, in an attempt to equalise the power imbalance. For each interview, I also made a brief note of key insights and questions elicited, as well as reflections on the dynamics of the exchange, what went well and did not.

In over half of the interviews (15 out of 26), I was able to meet with the child at least once in advance to help them feel at ease in my presence. In the remaining cases, I met children on

candidly share their perspectives of YOS supervision and thus were perhaps not overly affected.

¹⁴² This was a very difficult interview. I had met 18-year-old Declan a month or so previously when shadowing his supervision session. We established some rapport, and he had subsequently invited me to sit-in on future sessions whenever I liked. I suspected that this was partly motivated by his hope that he might have an 'easier ride' if I was present. I decided to approach him for interview instead, which he agreed to. However, on the day, he was disengaged and irritable, telling me when I asked about tape recording the interview 'No, you're definitely not doing that'. His responses verged on monosyllabic, and my efforts to encourage expansion seemed to annoy him further. Things came to head when he remarked to me that 'I don't really trust you, you're like a fed', which we consequently discussed and positively resolved (I re-explained who I was and the aims of the research. I had done so at the beginning of the interview, asking if he had any questions to which he had responded that he wasn't interested. But after re-explaining he exclaimed 'credit to you for doing this, it sounds interesting, good luck to you'). After this, he seemed less defensive and his responses were slightly more extensive. Declan later told his substance misuse worker that he had felt pressured by the questions and admitted that he had been smoking cannabis prior to the interview, which was understood by his worker to be the cause of his unresponsive and agitated state. This suggests that Declan had not been competent to give his informed consent to the interview, particularly given that it emerged that he had not initially understood or absorbed the information provided about myself and the study. This points to the importance, as Aldridge and Charles (2008) argue as regards to research with potentially intoxicated research participants, of being extra vigilant in checking that the research information has been understood, of being more alert to non-verbal signs of changing consent (such as disinterest and agitation); and training for research staff about the less obvious signs of intoxication (this may have been helpful with Declan, since the substance misuse worker had reportedly detected such signs at the time of interview, as he later informed me). I agree with their contention that it is problematic to exclude automatically intoxicated participants from research, unless obviously and significantly intoxicated, since intoxication can be difficult to identify and arguably discriminates against individuals who are under the influence (and thus may prevent research being undertaken with groups where such issues are more likely).

¹⁴³ Three children in each of the YOSs declined to be recorded. My interview with a fourth child from Shire YOS was also not recorded since it took place in the visits hall of a Young Offender Institution.

¹⁴⁴ The exception was 14-year-old Andrew, whom I had met on several occasions prior to the interview, yet he declined to be recorded. He appeared slow to trust his worker, and as even lesser known face, unwilling to trust me.

the day, although I had usually spoken to them on the phone beforehand.¹⁴⁵ Before beginning the interview, I spent time trying to build rapport and gain an insight into the realities of their lives,¹⁴⁶ which was especially important with the latter group. On a number of occasions, we played pool (in Shire YOS) or cards before and, sometimes, during the interview; although some children declined doing so, seeming to prefer ‘just to get on with it’. With several of the boys I had ‘followed’ in Shire YOS, I was able to spend time with them informally, one-to-one prior to the interview, during which we talked over tea and biscuits about general life, including their girlfriends, and ambitions. Supervision activities created similar opportunities with other interviewees, whereby we jointly participated in music group, cookery classes, and reparation. I shared small details about my own life in these interactions too.

These exchanges fostered rapport and seemed to help children to understand that I was independent of the YOS, which was a potential risk of being embedded. Yet I felt slightly uncomfortable in the one-to-one interactions. I was conscious that I looked considerably younger than I was, such that some of the boys believed I was only several years older than them, occasionally resulting in awkward invitations to parties and jokes to others that we were romantically involved. My attempts to build rapport were not always successful either. I sensed that sometimes children’s principal interest was in getting the interview over and done with, which I feared was a symptom of their supplanting supervision sessions and reparation hours; in their eyes, the interview was perhaps the better option rather than something they were genuinely interested in contributing to. In several other cases, my impression was that children were bewildered by my interest in their lives or perhaps saw it as a ploy to extract illicit information, and thus tended to clam-up rather than talk freely.

¹⁴⁵ In several cases, I had no prior contact with the child since they granted provisional permission to their supervisor and the interview took place the same day. Earlier on in the research, I would have attempted to use this first meeting to get to know the child and arranged the interview for a later date. However, towards the end of the research, intent on reaching the target number of interviewees, I became anxious not to lose willing participants, as had happened on several occasions through circumstances beyond my control and interviewed a number of children at the first meeting. This had mixed results: I was able to build rapport quickly with some children, which I felt helped them to speak freely in interview; whereas I struggled to do so with others and conversation was accordingly more stilted. Notably, I had a similarly mixed response with children with whom I had had previous encounters prior to interview.

¹⁴⁶ This included asking questions about how they spent their time; what it was like to live in the community; what non-sensitive detail about themselves unknown to the YOT could they share with me (and I reciprocated); what was going particularly well in their lives; and what were they most proud of. This questions were inspired by appreciative inquiry methods.

Within the interview itself, it had become clear early on that I would need to use more creative methods to aid children's responses. The first child I interviewed struggled, perhaps unsurprisingly, to articulate the qualities of his perfect worker. I subsequently developed flashcards of different worker characteristics, which I found to be an effective tool for stimulating discussion.¹⁴⁷ In addition, I started the interview with a life map activity, whereby I asked children to plot a line representing the ups and downs in their lives and, if they were comfortable doing so, to talk me through what had happened (I shared mine by way of explanation and to equalise the power imbalance). This exercise helped me to better understand how children perceived themselves and their offending, as well their imagined future life direction.¹⁴⁸ However, several children declined to take part in this activity, indicating that they did not want to talk about their past lives ('I'm not bothered about doing that'). It was sometimes a struggle to elicit children's visceral experiences of supervision. I attempted to address this through a variety of approaches, including sometimes invoking contemporary forms of communication ('what would you snapchat your friends about "being on YOS"? what would you post on Facebook?'), and asking them to rate their experience of supervision out of 10 and then discussing why they had so rated it and how the rating could be improved.¹⁴⁹ Although these approaches were moderately successful, in such cases I was left with a strong sense of only having gained a superficial understanding of children's perspectives. Sometimes I interpreted this as evidence that they attributed little meaning to it, at least at the time, as will be explored in Chapter 5. But in other cases, I believed that the explanation for their unresponsiveness lay elsewhere, including learning and communication difficulties, fearful attachment style and substance misuse. This provided a small insight into how the nature of children's lives are important shapers of their supervisory engagement experiences, as is the subject of later exposition.

¹⁴⁷ I asked the child to sort the cards into 'most important' and 'least important' worker qualities, and then to talk me through the reasons for their decision

¹⁴⁸ My experience was that this method offered a range of benefits, including beginning the interview at the child's pace, creating a relaxed atmosphere and providing a more comfortable medium for conversation about significant life events and self-perception than I believed would have been offered by direct questioning of these issues [see also, Heath et al's commentary on the benefits of using visual methods with young people (2009:116-131)]. In addition, I felt that the combination of methods (life map exercise, typical semi-structured interview questions and flashcards) helped to optimise children's attention span and engagement in the interview.

¹⁴⁹ In addition, I trialled using cards of community supervision activities (one-to-one meetings, reparation, groupwork, tag, referral order meetings), inviting children to tell me which of them they had participated in, what it had been like to do so, and which had been the most and least helpful and why. However, this did little to provoke discussion and reflection with children who had little to say and was unnecessary with those who talked freely.

Interviewing the professionals

In both services, I spent the initial months observing practice and building rapport with practitioners before approaching them for interview. In Shire YOS, practitioners were particularly receptive, responding positively to the emails sent (or personal contact) inviting them for interview and invariably arranging a time then and there. This seemed to be indicative of their acceptance of me. As one practitioner told me, she had initially been reticent ‘as we often get requests like this’, but had then realised the email was from me, ‘oh, it’s Ali, oh well that’s fine’.

In City YOS, the practitioners’ responses were much more varied, ranging from friendly (‘Yeah, happy to, book it in’), to lukewarm (‘I’m not averse to it’), to brusque. Amongst some of those who agreed to be interviewed, it was often difficult to find a suitable time and common for scheduled interviews to be postponed on several occasions or significantly shortened on account of workload. On several occasions, I had confirmed interviews with staff only to find that they were out of the office on the day. Several other staff left the service at short notice before an interview could be arranged. While this was disappointing and frustrating at times too, I endeavoured to be understanding and flexible since the interviewing problems were largely a consequence of the beleaguered state of the team (associated with high workloads and an impending inspection), as will be discussed in Chapter 7. My difficulties were likely compounded by the lack of rapport built with the team at that point (three months into the research), which I believed could only be helped by adopting a sympathetic approach. This ultimately resulted in the decision not to approach any more professionals for interview (having conducted 6 out of 20 by this point) until six months later, after the inspection was expected to have taken place and more staff had joined.

For many of the professionals, the interview seemed to be a therapeutic and uplifting experience. Some, particularly in City YOS, were initially ambivalent about the interview, and perhaps me too (as I had interacted little with some participants prior to it).¹⁵⁰ They saw

¹⁵⁰ During the course of the research in Shire YOS, I got to know the support workers best since initially the majority of my time was spent shadowing them in supervision activities and chatting on the car journeys in between. Due to travel logistics, I was also much more frequently based in one of the two Shire YOS offices, and thus became better acquainted with the case managers and specialist workers there. This compared to those in the other team whom I saw one every one-two months. In City YOS, although all staff were based in the same office, I interacted with some more due to sitting in on their supervision sessions, interviewing their supervisees, and our proximity in the office.

the interview as a one-sided in process, purely for my benefit. As one Shire YOS practitioner bluntly remarked when I asked if she had any questions before we began: ‘No, I’m helping you get your doctorate aren’t I?’. Yet, practitioners frequently commented that they had found the experience ‘cathartic’, and ‘helpful...to get everything out’. In this way, the interview often seemed to provide a much-needed emotional outlet for practitioners, which occasionally inclined to an invective about the organisation.¹⁵¹ This was perhaps facilitated by my empathetic approach, on which I may have unconsciously capitalised to aid rapport building and integration into the research sites. However, the research was inculcated with an interest in what was *most helpful* or *best* in supervision and supervisory relationships, discouraging predominantly deficit-orientated interviews and their associated limitations (Liebling, 2004).¹⁵² In this way, interview questions were somewhat informed by ‘appreciative inquiry’ thinking (see, for example, Bushe, 2011; Cooperrider et al., 2008; Liebling et al., 1999), with some practitioners accordingly describing the interview as ‘life affirming’.¹⁵³ More generally, such interactions played an important role in building rapport with practitioners, which in turn fostered their goodwill to helping access children for interview.

I did not formally pilot the interview schedules. However at the outset of my fieldwork, I circulated the interview schedules to the management team in both YOSs for their comments¹⁵⁴ and convened a workshop with a small group of PhD colleagues and my

¹⁵¹ Souhami (2007: 201) describes similarly intimate interviews with practitioners in her ethnography of a developing YOS, yet notes that her ongoing presence in the YOS thereafter prompted some natural anxiety about confidentiality. My experience was somewhat different in that the personal disclosures practitioners made in interview engendered further confidences of this kind. This was particularly so in Shire YOS where several practitioners continued to share their achievements, frustrations and worries with me.

¹⁵² However this did not prevent the assertion by one City YOS practitioner (and perhaps others) whom I had interviewed jokingly encouraging others’ involvement on the basis that ‘it’s anonymous, so you can rip into people’. While I understood this as a sign that I was seen as a trusted confidante, which may have aided the participation and openness of other interviewees, this may have negatively influenced the accounts they subsequently provided.

¹⁵³ The ‘appreciative inquiry’ method, co-founded in 1980 by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva, has traditionally been used as an approach to organisational change, characterised by a focus on identifying and developing the strengths of an organisation, underpinned by the appreciative assumption that something positive can always be found and built upon (Cooperrider et al, 2008). In the past 20 years or so, it has started to be used as a method for social research, with Liebling et al (1999) providing one of, if not the first, account (s) of deploying it in criminological research. This study does not claim to be an appreciative inquiry (Ai) of youth justice supervision. Rather, a tranche of questions were inspired by the Ai concern with identifying ‘the best of what is’ and imagining ‘what should be’. Examples of such questions in my research included: What works particularly well in the YOS? What are the best sorts of supervisory relationships you have had with children and what have been their key features? If you could imagine the YOS as the best it could possibly be, what would it look like?

¹⁵⁴ This only elicited comments from a Shire YOS senior practitioner on the schedule for children.

supervisor to discuss the schedules. These exercises led to the re-phrasing and addition of some questions. The initial months spent conducting observations in the YOSs provided a further basis on which to reflect and make revisions to the schedules in light of emerging issues. As Shire YOS was my first foray into practice, I interviewed my two ‘sponsors’ here first (an operational manager and a senior practitioner). These initial interviews were very long (nearly 2 hours), which I felt was impracticable given the significant pressures on practitioners’ time. I addressed this by removing a number of questions that added little due to the ‘standard’ responses they elicited, despite probing.¹⁵⁵ In both YOSs, I generally interviewed all of the practitioners before any managers (except for the sponsors in Shire YOS), to enable more probing questioning of the latter in light of what I had learnt. Virtually all of the professional interviews took place in private meeting rooms in the YOS offices,¹⁵⁶ aside from one that was conducted by telephone. All professional interviews were digitally recorded and usually lasted about an hour.

Case file research

All of the children consented to me accessing their case files. I later sensed that this was a point of apprehension for one child who, during the interview, remarked dejectedly of his extensive offending history that ‘you’ll read about it in my case file’. My impression was that he was anxious about me lifting the veil on his history, having got to know one another over half a year without any reference to it.¹⁵⁷ Where possible, with children’s consent, I read their case files before the interview, to enable tailored questioning and, as importantly, to aid rapport building (e.g. knowing that their birthday was the following week or that their baby was due imminently).

¹⁵⁵ Questions that fell into this category included ‘what does engagement mean for you?’ , ‘what is your aim in supervision?’, ‘What factors influence decision-making on your cases?’, ‘How do children’s wider circumstances affect the YOSs work with them?’. I found that practitioners tended to naturally address such questions in their narratives about their supervisory work and were much more reflective when they were not being asked such questions directly.

¹⁵⁶ For one practitioner interview, we had to resort to a quiet, enclosed breakout area due my failure to book a meeting room. Although he was happy to proceed despite the lack of privacy, in hindsight it would have been better to postpone until a private room was available. People walked past every 15 minutes or so, which disrupted the flow of the interview, and unsurprisingly made him self-conscious (however, he became noticeably more relaxed and talkative after the Dictaphone was switched off, suggesting this was an impediment too). Needless to say, I made sure to double check all room bookings for future interviews.

¹⁵⁷ In seeming support of this, he subsequently ‘played up’ to this identity as a prolific offender, telling me that he ‘burnt one school down to the ground’ and ‘had a knife and was going to stab my cousin, until I heard the busies [police] behind me’. His casefile did not appear to corroborate these accounts.

I commonly encountered incomplete and missing case file information, such as education details and records of supervision sessions. Sometimes children revealed key information that was not recorded in their case files, including recent experience of bereavement. In several examples, practitioners appeared to have misrepresented events with children that I had observed.¹⁵⁸ As Mason (2002:108) has noted, documents (such as case files here) should not be treated as ‘straightforward “factual records”’, but rather recognised as subjective accounts.

A second problem related to the ethics of assembling in-depth case studies on children’s experiences of supervision. It became clear when I was required to show the first detailed case study to the service manager to ensure it complied with data privacy regulations, that I had inadvertently exposed some significant, and until then hidden, holes in the child’s supervision. I subsequently reduced the level of detail collected from case files, to avoid a repeat of this situation and to ensure anonymity and confidentiality were protected.¹⁵⁹

Data analysis

Adaptive theory is characterised by its dual emphasis on the use of prior theory and development of ‘novel’ theory:

The word ‘adaptive’ is meant to convey that the theory both adapts to, or is shaped by, incoming evidence while the data itself is simultaneously filtered through, and is thus adapted by, the prior theoretical materials (framework, concepts and ideas) that are relevant to their analysis (Layder, 1998: 5).

Thus, I approached data analysis with ‘orientating concepts’ from prior theory and literature, which acted as important lens’ through which to order and interpret the findings (Layder, 1998: 109-111). I drew upon some concepts prior to and during data collection, such that they suggested lines of inquiry and informed ‘theoretical’ sampling’.¹⁶⁰ Desistance and attachment

¹⁵⁸ In one example, a group of children had been reported as ‘walking out’ early at 5.20pm of a group work session ‘without permission’, for which they were issued a warning. Yet, I had recorded that the children were told that the session was now finished (just before 6pm) due to disruptive behaviour, at which point they made to leave. No one had told them they needed to wait for permission to leave.

¹⁵⁹ This entailed providing a summary of supervision activities, including any salient quotes, rather than exporting the entire supervision record and anonymising identifying details (such as individual’s names, location and court dates) as I had done in the first case study.

¹⁶⁰ Theoretical sampling is a term that originates from classic grounded theory and remains a core tenant in constructivist grounded theory. Premised on concurrent data collection and analysis, it refers to the approach of seeking data to animate and elaborate the researcher’s theoretical categories developed from initial data (Charmaz et al, 2018). Layder (1998) advocates the approach, with the distinction that it should be informed by prior theory as well data collection.

were examples of such concepts. For example, I asked children about their hopes and expectations of their lives, based on the narrative desistance literature.

Analysis of my data was an ongoing exercise throughout the fieldwork and comprised a number of elements. The first of these involved the writing-up of the observations and interviews as this essentially comprises an early stage of analysis through which ‘you will develop a far more thorough understanding of your data’ (Bird, 2005; see also Lapadat and Lindsay, 1999). It should be noted that while I transcribed nearly half of the interviews during fieldwork (32 of the 72 interviews),¹⁶¹ the concentration of interviews in the final months of fieldwork meant this could not be sustained. These were therefore transcribed afterwards.¹⁶² However after each interview, I endeavoured to write a brief summary of the key themes that had arisen, as well as reflections on what had gone well and not.

The second stage was analytic memo writing, which comprised noting down, immediately following my weekly fieldwork visit, any key themes identified in interviews and observations and reflecting on possible connections between these, as well as contradictions and interpretations of the data. These memos operated as a running commentary on ideas and a place for ‘theoretical reflection’ (Layder, 1998: 59). I distilled and further developed these internal monologues into an extended single memo, typically on a monthly basis at the outset of fieldwork and reducing in frequency thereafter as my understanding of the data began to crystallise.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ This comprised 18 out of the 46 practitioner interviews and 14 out of the 26 child interviews.

¹⁶² Due to the large number of interviews still to be transcribed at the end of fieldwork, I decided to have the practitioner interviews transcribed by a professional transcription company that I had worked with previously in my part-time research fellow role and knew to be secure and reputable. While I would have preferred to transcribe all of the interviews myself due to its important role in informing one’s early analysis, I felt it would have been impossible to do so and finish the thesis within the expected timetable. I transcribed all of the remaining interviews with children myself because of the sensitivity of the data given their young age. Furthermore, in agreement with Lapadat and Lindsay’s (1999) view that transcription itself is an interpretative act, I attached additional importance to hearing and reflecting their often neglected young voices myself.

¹⁶³ However, were I to have my time I again, I would have continued developing the single memo on a monthly basis as this would have facilitated identification of gaps in my understanding of the data, albeit small, which did not become apparent until formal coding phase. The confidence I held in my thorough knowledge of the data, living and breathing it half of each week over 17 months, combined with difficulties of undertaking much of the fieldwork alongside a part-time job, made me neglectful of the importance of this regular reflexive activity.

During the latter half of fieldwork, I began to ‘pre-code’ and ‘provisionally code’ by hand the interviews I had so far transcribed.¹⁶⁴ These initial reflections on the data, together with the analytic memos provided the basis for presentations on the provisional research findings to the two YOSs; which I term *data validation workshops*. The presentations were tailored to each of the sites, and delivered to the management and practitioner groups separately (totalling four workshops). I gave a brief (15 minute) presentation on the findings and then invited participants to critique and discuss my interpretation. All of the workshops were delivered as part of the practitioner and management meetings, which guaranteed high attendance. The downside was that workshops were consequently limited to approximately 45 minutes in duration, which precluded detailed discussion of all themes; however I considered it unfeasible to occupy a longer period of practice time. The workshops provided an early opportunity to give something back to the research sites and enabled the participants to assist with interpretation by corroborating as well as sharing their additional readings of the data.¹⁶⁵ This was particularly important given that the research was concerned with participants’ experiences and perspectives of supervision. For this reason, it is a source of regret that I did not convene similar workshops for the children involved.¹⁶⁶

Informed by the feedback from these activities, I moved onto coding the data more systematically using the qualitative data analysis software Nvivo, since I had prior experience of it. The tool was essential for organising the vast amount of data collected, although one should be alert to the risk that coding carries of decontextualizing text (Mason, 2002). This aided the development of more fully formulated *core* and *satellite* codes (Layder, 1998: 56). While many codes were novel, emerging from analysis of the data (such as, ‘alienation’, ‘being the glue’ and ‘human boundaries’), others were derived from my prior reading (such as ‘burnout’, ‘reciprocity’ and ‘identity’). This process was guided by the relevance or ‘theoretical pertinence’ of the data, rather than line-by-line coding intended to maximise the

¹⁶⁴ The former refers to the ‘targeting of segments of the data because they seemed significant, but with no explicit awareness of why they were so’. Whereas the latter concerns the provisional labelling of text ‘which triggered some association with a particular concept, category or idea’ (Layder, 1998: 53).

¹⁶⁵ I was conscious that it would be some months before the final thesis or a summation of it could be shared since I was due to go on maternity leave a month after completing fieldwork.

¹⁶⁶ I had not factored this into the initial research design since I had planned to interview at the outset and conclusion of their orders, which I believed would allow for shared discussion and interpretation of their accounts. When it became clear that I would only be able to interview children on one occasion, it was an oversight that I did not plan any interpretation workshops with children to address this gap and instead focused on reaching the target number of young interviewees.

number of initial codes (as with grounded theory)¹⁶⁷ (Layder, 1998: 57).¹⁶⁸ To further aid coding, I convened a workshop with a small group of fellow PhD students and academic staff (including my supervisor) from the Centre for Community, Gender and Social Justice (CCGSJ) at the Institute. Comprising discussion of three interview transcripts (one child, and two practitioners), this proved invaluable for taking a step back from the data and seeing it through others' eyes.

In line with adaptive theory, I produced theoretical memos to capture my developing reflections about the properties of and interconnections between individual codes, and links with existing theory. Layder (1998) sees theoretical memos as fundamental to providing the space for reflection and elaboration, acting as a bridge between coding and theory development. However, I found myself making less use of memos as coding progressed, with theoretical reflection an implicit part of drafting instead. In hindsight, this approach may have hindered 'theoretical elaboration'. For Layder, typology-building, particularly in the context of ongoing research, is another critical component of theory generation, helping to 'fire' the 'theoretical imagination' through 'stimulating ideas, concepts and categories which are formed in terms of the questions why and how they are different' (1998: 73). I thus used typology-building as a tool of data analysis (regarding types of worker – child relationships). However, the main work of developing the typology began after data collection had finished, limiting the extent to which it could be further refined through theoretical sampling. I am cognisant, that as an individual with a background in largely information-seeking or policy-orientated research, at times I perhaps lost sight of the study's theoretical objectives, particularly during busy periods. In future research, to mitigate against this I would make ongoing and more significant use of theoretical memos and better ensure that data collection and analysis were simultaneous to optimise theory generation.

Translating the critical realist approach into data analysis

As well as using critical realism as a grounding philosophical position, I used insights from the perspective to guide the research questions and analysis. A key tenet of critical realism is

¹⁶⁷ While Layder sees such detailed line-by-line coding as cumbersome and potentially overwhelming, Charmaz makes a persuasive argument about this 'breaking open' analysis, which I am keen to try in future research (in 2018 chapter)

¹⁶⁸ It should be noted that my use of pre/provisional coding (i.e. open coding, similar to grounded theory) reflects Layder's original version of adaptive theory in *sociological practice* (1998), and not on the later iteration (2013) in which he advocates against open coding and instead for use of an initial coding template based on orientating concepts, with which I disagree.

Bhaskar's conceptualisation of social reality as multi-layered, comprising the 'empirical' domain – what we perceive and experience; the domain of 'actual' events that occur, which may be different from our perceptions; and the 'real' - the underlying 'generative mechanisms' or contributory causes of actual events. Furthermore, Bhaskar proposes that there are a 'multiplicity of mechanisms jointly producing the course of events', which are stratified so that 'underlying each mechanism there are others which explain it waiting to be discovered' (Collier, 1994: 46-9). Thus, critical realist inquiry is primarily concerned with causal explanations, in which one attempts to deduce the 'real' and 'actual' through studying their experienced effects (Oliver, 2012):

...critical realists approach causation critically, using the partial regularities, facts, and events we encounter in the social world as a springboard or gateway to understand the complex, layered, and contingent processes or structures which cause those regularities, facts, and events (Archer et al., 2016: no page).

In data analysis this translates into a concern with going 'beyond direct observation...to posit various other potential mechanisms that may be (in part or whole) neither manifest or readily observable, but that still have an effect' (Vincent and O'Mahoney, 2016: 6). Crucially, such explanations must be *contextualised*, entailing the question of 'what works for whom in what circumstances?' (Pawson and Tilley, 1997: 210). This perspective was particularly relevant for understanding supervisory relationships. Thus, for example, I suggest in chapter 7 that some practitioners' apparent reluctance to develop close bonds with children might be related to anxiety about managing such relationships (particularly in a care/control setting), which in turn may be influenced by unseen psychic defence mechanisms embedded in YOS organisational culture that encourage dispassionate relationships. Within my analysis, I sought to provide insights into the contextual factors that seemingly facilitated the development of close relationships between some practitioners and children, and not between others.

As a meta-theoretical position, critical realism is typically not aligned to a particular research methodology (Archer et al., 2016; Oliver, 2012). However, there are several methodological tools and approaches that are associated with critical realist inquiry. *Retroduction*¹⁶⁹ is central in this regard. This involves the researcher asking of the phenomena in question 'what must

¹⁶⁹ Bearing similarity to the method of abduction used in constructivist grounded theory, Oliver (2012: 10)

be true for this to be the case?’ or ‘what makes this possible?’. What follows is an iterative process of movement between the empirical data and theory to abstract the most plausible causal mechanism behind the event. This entails *theoretical pluralism*; that is, drawing on a variety of theoretical perspectives (at least the outset) to arrive at the ‘best explanation’. Thus, for example, through reading the accounts of supervisory relationships it became apparent that psychosocial theory and attachment theory might be relevant to understanding their nature and benefit. In the spirit of retroduction, I then closely examined the data in parallel with literature on the related theories, inferring the applicability of both theories. Since completing this study, I have learnt of several leading researchers’ advocacy for *critical realist grounded theory*, offering a clear and practical means of applying the perspective to research (see, for example, Oliver, 2012; Kempster and Parry, 2011). In future research, I am keen to use such an approach and contrast this with my experience of adaptive theory.

Limitations

There are inevitably some limitations to the findings consequent to the selection process of the sample of young interviewees and their characteristics. First, since children were almost exclusively recruited through their supervisors, with whom a good relationship may have been instrumental in their decision to participate (Johns et al., 2017), the sample may be biased towards those who were more positive about their supervisor. However, critical and indifferent testimonies from some children about some supervisors indicated that this was not a major limitation. Furthermore, as I generally interviewed children in *replacement* of a supervision meeting, it may be that a small number of children consented to this *precisely because* it enabled them to avoid seeing their supervisor, whom they disliked or felt indifferent.

Second, practitioners’ resistance to me inviting ‘uncompliant’ children to participate and difficulties arranging interviews with children who ‘disengaged’ from the YOS subsequent to giving research consent, almost certainly skewed the sample in favour of more compliant individuals. By virtue of their compliance, supervision may have been a more positive and meaningful experience for this group than for those who were not so engaged; although as Chapter 5 shows, there is evidence that some children attached little import to the experience

argues that ‘retroduction is simply abduction with a specific question in mind’.

(and this may have been an additional motivation for some participating in an interview as a replacement for supervision).

Third, it should be noted that half of the sample were serving a court-ordered community sentence for the first time and nearly two-fifths (10 out of 26) were serving relatively short orders (involving 9-months or less of supervision),¹⁷⁰ and as such had little experience of supervision. As I note in Chapter 5, this may have been a factor in the limited accounts some children gave of supervision (and the little meaning they attached to it); whilst others may have been more receptive to (and thus positive about) supervision as first timers. This might raise questions as to the transferability of the findings. However, youth justice statistics show that 73 per cent of children serving in community orders are now first time entrants (40 per cent) or have 1-2 previous cautions or convictions (33 per cent) (YJB/MoJ, 2020: 10.9). This suggests that the limited previous supervision experience of the sample is broadly representative of the current national cohort. In the absence of publicly available data about the length of youth community sentences, it is not possible to check the representativeness of the sample on this point. That said, on the basis of the high proportion of first-time and one/two-time entrants in the national cohort, it seems probable that many will be subject to short orders and thus will share some similarities with the study sample in this regard.

Fourth, there is evident possibility of social desirability bias in interview responses. This refers to the tendency for individuals to present a more favourable image of themselves in research situations, over-reporting positive behaviour or attributes and/or under-reporting those that are negative. For example, as a middle-class woman, positioned as a researcher within the YOS, children may have been more inclined to neutralise their past behaviour and emphasise their desire to 'go straight'. Likewise, as a researcher studying relationship-based practice with an established position¹⁷¹ in youth justice, practitioners may have accentuated this element of their work and/or either understated or emphasised practice frustrations in interview out of the perception that I held some 'sway'. However, I agree with Miller and

¹⁷⁰ This included four of the sample interviewed within three months of starting their first community order, typically because the order was three-months in duration. It should also be noted that 8 out of 10 children subject to short supervisory periods were on court orders for the first time.

¹⁷¹ As the deputy chair of national youth justice campaign group the Standing Committee for Youth Justice and involvement with some high profile youth justice research projects in a different role. However, my strong impression was that practitioners were not aware of these roles, particularly as I did not disclose this and was generally referred to as a student.

Glassner (2016: 56) that ‘rather than argue that this creates “bias” or makes the data of limited utility...paying attention to how our social positioning affects the interview exchange offers an important site for social inquiry’. As they argue, the situated accounts that are produced through interview provide insights into both the social world under study and how people make sense of their experience of it (2016: 56). Thus, children’s use of neutralisation (at least in certain settings) raised questions about why this might be and the potential implications for their engagement with the YOS, self-identity and potential desistance. With regards to practitioner responses, while there was a common emphasis on relational approaches in interview, examining why they perceived it as important and how this translated into descriptions of their work, revealed differing conceptions of the value, role and nature of relationship-based practice.

Chapter 4: The children on supervision

This chapter examines the lives of the children under supervision in the two YOSs. I focus on their wider life circumstances, as well as the ways in which these shaped their supervisory experience and its potential to help them. As McNeill et al. (2005) have noted, understanding the needs, deeds and characteristics of those who offend provides ‘a picture of the starting point for change’ as these ‘have important implications for supervision and the skills required to prompt and support reductions in re-offending’ (McNeill et al., 2005: 6-12).

I focus in particular on the characteristics of the 26 children in the interview sample, based on the information that children shared with me in interview, their case file documentation, and the material that I gathered through following their supervisory journeys. In addition, I draw significantly on the rich insights I gained from my day-to-day observation of YOS practice. This aspect of my research allowed me to access children whose experiences and characteristics were under-represented in the research sample, including girls and children living in out of area placements. Through doing so, I was able to gain a more complete picture of the needs and characteristics of those under supervision. Such knowledge is all the more important given the dearth of publicly available data about the needs and circumstances of children on community orders, as noted in Chapter 1.

Six core and interrelated themes ran through the narratives about children’s lives.¹⁷² The first of these was complexity, primarily in terms of the multiplicity of their needs and difficulties. Second, an overwhelming majority of children had experienced significant adversity at home, including abuse and parental estrangement. Third, most of the children had encountered problems at school, such as exclusion and victimisation by their peers and teachers. Fourth, a significant minority of the children had been subject to sexual and/or drugs-related exploitation, as well as other forms of victimisation; frequently, such experiences resulted in their criminalisation, which risked undermining the legitimacy of system, and supervision by extension. Fifth, street violence was an overwhelming issue in City YOS, with several children murdered during my time there, as well as stabbings and carrying weapons a depressing norm. Finally, the transitory nature of many children’s lives, characterised by

¹⁷² I was conscious of such themes during fieldwork, but their significance (in terms of frequency of appearance within the data and understanding the meaning and practice of supervision) only truly emerged during the

frequent and significant moves, as well as episodes of going missing from home, was incredibly destabilising. Appendix 4 provides national contextual information on these issues. The final part of the chapter examines the implications of these circumstances for children's supervisory experiences, focusing on engagement, the supervisory relationship and the provision of services.

Complexity

In recent years, it has been reported that the profile of children in the youth justice system has become more 'complex' than previously (Carlile, 2014; Deloitte, 2015; Youth Justice Board, 2015). The cohort are said to have greater needs (Deloitte, 2015; Carlile, 2014) and are likely to be more entrenched in a pattern of offending (Bateman, 2017). The incumbent Chair of the YJB accordingly refers to a 'smaller, more challenging cohort of children who offend' who are 'the most difficult to rehabilitate' (Taylor, 2016b: 2-7).¹⁷³ This is primarily understood to be a consequence of the diversion from the system of large numbers of children involved in low-level offending (Carlile, 2014; Taylor, 2016); although improved identification of need may have also played a role (Deloitte, 2015). MoJ data broadly indicates a more serious profile of the cohort, showing that the reoffending rate in the year ending March 2016 (42.2 per cent) was 5.1 percentage points higher than in 2008 (YJB/MoJ, 2018b: Table 9.1). However, Bateman and Wigzell (2019) contend that the data suggest that some groups of children, including those on community supervision, may actually be less entrenched in offending.

This aside, my data suggests a nuanced picture of the current youth justice cohort. On the one hand, the lives of many of the children whom I encountered were replete with adversity. There was consensus too amongst YOS practitioners, particularly in Shire YOS, that a significant and greater concentration of children had complex needs than in the recent past which had considerable implications for practice (see Chapter 7). Yet on the other hand, it was clear that children who had committed relatively minor and first time offences continued to be supervised in both YOSs. Some of these children had experienced multiple and severe welfare difficulties, raising the question of whether children had been subject to what

process of coding.

¹⁷³ References to the 'complexity' of the youth justice cohort can therefore be understood to relate to both its increased seriousness and level of need. In this respect, the language of 'complexity' appears to be an extension of the notion 'at riskiness', against which Phoenix (2009: 123) has levelled convincing criticism for its

Phoenix (2009) has termed ‘repressive welfarism’, whereby criminal justice intervention is justified on the basis of addressing children’s needs. Such rationales were evident in YOS workers’ accounts of practice, as is illustrated by the below extract:

I would say sometimes the offences for me sound like petty offences. Even though they've come to us on those offences when you delve into it there's like CSE [child sexual exploitation] issues, cannabis, mental health issues, there's other things, and that's a good thing because you think well maybe they wouldn't have committed those offences if it wasn't for all of the other things going on.

[Shire YOS, worker 9]

But some cases displayed few such welfare needs. In observation and interviews, I came across a significant minority of cases in which children were being supervised on court orders for relatively minor and first-time offences, including cannabis possession and altercations with peers, with seemingly little prospect of reoffending. Some practitioners felt that criminal justice intervention with children in these circumstances was unnecessary and counterproductive:

...I've got a three-month referral order, first offence for threatening to slap someone...it was a relationship she's been in with somebody and then she went to confront them and it turned verbal and she said 'I'm going to slap you one'. You know she's never been in trouble, she's got a job, she's at college, she's very very bright...She's trying to get into Cambridge University... And wants to do law and economics, and now potentially that's ruined for her because she kind of lost it and told someone she's going to slap her.

[City YOS, worker 1]

Yet there was a sense that other practitioners embraced the opportunity to work with children who were ‘fresh’ to the YOS because they were ‘enthusiastic’, ‘easier’ and provided ‘a massive chance to influence’. Working with such children seemed to provide welcome and, perhaps necessary, respite from involvement with ‘complex’ cases (see Chapter 7). Notably, there was a similar narrative about some children who were subject to formal out-of-court

conflation of risk and need.

disposals, who were variously referred to as ‘quick wins’ and ‘one hit wonders - you’re not going to see them again’. While some workers believed that YOS intervention had helped to deter future offending, it seemed unlikely that such children would reoffend anyway. In addition, there is little evidence to support the deterrent effect of criminal justice intervention on children, since developmental research indicates that younger adolescents, in particular, are unable to anticipate the consequences of their actions and continue to have difficulty with future planning into young adulthood (Steinberg et al., 2009).

Turning now to the interview sample (n =26), most of the children had been convicted of indictable offences,¹⁷⁴ with the most common being: violence against the person offences (35 per cent, 9 out of 26);¹⁷⁵ possession with intent to supply Class A drugs (23 per cent, 6 out of 26); and possession of weapons (19 per cent, 5 out of 26).¹⁷⁶ In total, nearly 90 per cent (23 out of 26) had been convicted of medium – high gravity offences (scoring 3 or 4 on gravity matrix (ACPO, 2013). This suggests a more serious profile than the national cohort of children sentenced at court, which shows that the most common offence types in the year ending March 2017 were summary non-motoring¹⁷⁷ (38 per cent); theft offences (16 per cent) and summary motoring offences (10 per cent) (YJB/MoJ, 2018b: Table 5.2). By comparison, violence against the person (6 per cent), drug offences (9 per cent) and possession of weapons (7 per cent)¹⁷⁸ comprise a relatively small proportion of offences for which young people were sentenced (YJB/MoJ 2018b: Table 5.2).¹⁷⁹

Many of the children had little or no offending history. Half of the sample (13 out of 26), split fairly evenly across both YOSs, were either serving their sentence for a first offence (7) or

¹⁷⁴ This includes triable-either way offences according to YJB classifications.

¹⁷⁵ The reader should note that I have classified the offences according to the YJB/ MoJ statistical reports, which treats common assault as violence against the person, whereas MoJ classifies it as a summary offence (YJB/ MoJ, 2018e)

¹⁷⁶ Other offences represented in the sample were: burglary (8 per cent; 2 out of 26); public disorder (2 out of 26); criminal damage (1 child); and theft, of a car (1 child).

¹⁷⁷ Examples of summary non-motoring offences include less serious criminal damage and unauthorised taking or driving a vehicle without consent.

¹⁷⁸ Other offences represented in the sample comprised the following proportions of children sentenced at court nationally in the year ending March 2017: 4 per cent for robbery/ burglary; 3 per cent for public disorder; 1 per cent for criminal damage; and 16 per cent for theft (YJB/MoJ, 2018b: Table 5.2)

¹⁷⁹ It should be noted that a slightly different comparator is provided by the national profile of proven offences by children (which includes cautions and counts all offences, rather than just the primary offences). This shows that the most common offences type were violence against the person (28 per cent); other offences (12 per cent), which include unauthorised vehicle taking; and criminal damage (11 per cent); and theft and handling of stolen goods (11 per cent). The offence breakdown used by the YJB statistics differ from the main offences types used by the MoJ (YJB/ MoJ, 2018a); p.19).

had one previous diversionary disposal (6). The circumstances of children's misdemeanours were often intimately linked with their experience of adversity. Nine of the children (35 per cent) had been convicted for altercations with their peers. Although several of the incidents had resulted in serious wounds, most had not. It was clear that many had been victims as well as the assailant in such interactions. As a case in point, 16-year-old Miles was convicted of assault by beating a peer who had been persistently bullying him. Two (8 per cent) of the children had been convicted of criminal damage and altercations in their family home and residential children's home, respectively. Notably, at a national level, there is a drive to reduce the criminalisation of children in care (Prison Reform Trust, 2016; Prison Reform Trust, 2017).¹⁸⁰ There was significant evidence of child criminal exploitation as a factor in children's offending too, as further discussed below.

Adversity at home

Over 90 per cent (24 out of 26) of the children in the sample had experienced adversity in their family lives. Most (23 out of 26) had experienced multiple or severe adversity in this respect, including familial physical and sexual abuse, domestic violence, parental estrangement and bereavement. As detailed in the subsequent section, for many of the children, this intersected with experiences of victimisation outside the family home, including sexual and criminal exploitation. In only two cases was there no evidence of such adversity.

Estrangement, abuse and neglect

Twenty-one (81 per cent) had experienced the separation of their parents and half (13 out of 26) were estranged from one parent, usually their father. Over three-fifths (16 out of 26) had been involved with children's social care at some point in their lives; five (19 per cent) were living in residential care; and two (8 per cent) of the children had been adopted. Nine of the children (35 per cent) had been physically abused or neglected by their parents, including two who were reported or strongly suspected of having been sexually abused by a family member. A further three (12 per cent) of the children had witnessed domestic violence at home. Six had experienced the severe illness of a parent, including mental ill-health, alcohol abuse and drugs overdose. One of the children had become the carer for his younger siblings as a result. Nearly a quarter (6 out of 26) of the sample had close family members who had historical or current involvement in the criminal justice system, including their mother (in three cases),

¹⁸⁰ This includes the development of a cross-sector concordat to reinforce agencies' statutory obligations to

father or step-father (in two cases), and/or brothers (in three cases).¹⁸¹ Practitioners reported that children's family relationships had a significant bearing on the development and nature of supervisory relationship, as discussed later.

Precious few of the children had escaped with only one family problem. The experience of Miles provides a stark illustration of the multiple and severe family adversity that some children faced, and the resulting emotional trauma. The sixteen-year-old was living with his step-father and had previously been accommodated in local authority care; he continued to be subject to a child protection plan. He had been removed from his family home, where his mother and brothers lived, due to concerns of sexual abuse and that his siblings were supplying him with illicit drugs. Both his mother and brothers had a record of involvement with the criminal justice system; there was no record of a relationship with his birth father. As well as abuse, there was evidence of family neglect, including Miles arriving at school without having slept and under the influence of illegal substances. Miles suffered with a daily soiling problem, which was understood to be an emotional response to his traumatic family experiences.

While much research has demonstrated the association between childhood maltreatment and offending behaviour (Smith and Thornberry, 1995; Widom, 1989; McCord, 1983), the concept of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is particularly relevant here (see footnotes for a definition).¹⁸² This is because it facilitates understanding of the cumulative and interrelated effect of household adversity on children's outcomes, which is particularly applicable to this sample given the multiplicity of such difficulties. There is some evidence that the traumatic stress resulting from such experiences can impair brain development,

prevent the criminalisation of looked after children.

¹⁸¹ In one case the nature of family adversity was unclear, as the only relevant information in the child's case file was that he had been adopted at an early age due to 'trauma-related incidents' and he did not want to talk about his past in interview.

¹⁸² Within health settings, adversity at home is often discussed within the context of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), a term originally developed in the US for a study of the effect of stressful events during childhood on health in adulthood. In recent years it has begun to enter the criminological discourse (Baglivio et al, 2015: 229; Fox et al, 2015; Baglivio et al, 2014). ACEs encompass ten experiences of childhood household adversity: emotional, physical and sexual abuse, emotional and physical neglect, witnessing domestic violence, familial substance abuse and mental illness, imprisonment, and parental separation/ divorce (Baglivio et al, 2015: 229). The original study, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences Study, took place between 1995 and 1997. See here for further information: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acesstudy/about.html>. For details of ACE approaches in the English and Scottish health systems see here: <http://www.aces.me.uk/in-england/> and <http://www.cph.org.uk/case-study/adverse-childhood-experiences-aces/> (all accessed 24th August 2018).

particularly the pre-frontal cortex and amygdala, which affect self-regulation abilities, thus increasing the likelihood of offending behaviour (see, for example, Evans-Chase, 2014). Several large-scale retrospective studies of juvenile justice-involved children in America have shown that ACEs are highly prevalent amongst children who offend, compared with the general population. Furthermore, multiple ACEs are significantly correlated with early onset, serious, violent and chronic offending, even when taking into account other adverse factors, such as antisocial peer association and low social-economic status (Baglivio et al., 2015; Fox et al., 2015; Baglivio and Epps et al., 2014).

Housing instability and homelessness

Trouble at home often translated into disruption in children's living arrangements. Over three-fifths (16 out of 26) of the sample had experienced considerable upheaval in this respect. Fourteen (54 per cent) had gone through at least one major move of residence, including into care or adoption, into temporary residential placements due to family conflict, and between family members. Sixteen-year-old Luke who was in residential care had experienced several such placements. Five of the children had been placed significant distances from their family home. Many children were 'thrown out' of home and would end up 'sofa surfing' between friends' houses in the area or travelling to other areas in lieu of anywhere else to go.

In three cases, children together with their families had experienced significant or multiple moves. Often this was to escape domestic violence, or as a result of eviction, and involved being temporarily housed. It was evident that such disruption was a source of emotional distress. Elijah, aged 15, was living in overcrowded accommodation with his mother and three siblings, and had experienced multiple and ongoing temporary accommodation moves. He frequently went missing from home, during which he was suspected of being subject to county lines exploitation. In Elijah's case file, his YOS officer detailed that 'his absconding and subsequent offending are linked to numerous accommodation moves, since the family's living situation...is uncertain'. Notably, nearly a third of the children in the sample (9 out of 26) had gone missing from their family or residential care home, sometimes as a result of family trouble; an issue examined later in this chapter.

Homelessness was experienced by four (15 per cent) of the children in the sample. There were concerns that another two – Tyrone and Malik – would become homeless as a result of

their conviction.¹⁸³ Notably, all of these children lived in the locality of City YOS. Eighteen-year-old Raheem and his family had been homeless two years previously, sleeping in doorways until his mother became ill and was admitted hospital. He told me in interview that his mother had also ‘kicked me out of the house’ more recently. Caleb (aged 15) had been made homeless after his mother had asked him to leave the home following an argument. He was subsequently coerced into county lines, an issue picked up later in the chapter. There was concern that Caleb continued to be at risk of exploitation since he resided in the family home alone, as his mother had returned permanently to her home country and his father lived elsewhere in the area without sufficient space to accommodate him. It was evident that such adverse housing circumstances had a detrimental effect on children’s emotional well-being, supervision engagement and behaviour, which I return to later.

Bereavement

Eight (31 per cent) of the children in the sample had experienced one or more significant bereavements before the age of 16. Two of the children had lost a parent or brother, while the loss of other close relatives (5 out of 26), including grandparents, was more common. The nature of the bereavement was unspecified in one child’s case file. These figures are likely to be an underestimate since such events were not recorded in two of the children’s case files; I only learnt of their bereavement in interview. Several other children did not want to discuss their life histories with me and thus I did not have the opportunity to ‘fill in’ any potential gaps in their case files.

The resulting emotional trauma was palpable in children’s narratives. In 17-year-old Dylan’s pre-sentence report (PSR), his YOS worker stated that the death of his grandparents had been ‘a source of a lot of emotional distress’. The death of Ryan’s uncle and grandfather was said by his mother to have had a ‘significant adverse impact’ on him; he represented this as a sharp drop in the life map he drew in interview.¹⁸⁴ Likewise did Tyrone, who had been told at the age of eight, that his pregnant mother, who was his only carer, would die of cancer (although she did not), and experienced the death of his uncle at the same time. He told me that he had experienced ‘anger issues in primary school’ following these events.

¹⁸³ Tyrone was at risk of being turned out of the family home, while Malik’s family had been told that they be evicted if he was convicted.

¹⁸⁴ The life map exercise involved the children drawing a line representing the ups and downs in their life, and

While the research evidence suggests that there is some association between childhood experience of bereavement and poor outcomes, including offending, psychological problems, and difficulties at school, most point to the important role of intervening factors in affecting the outcomes of bereavement. These include the extent of changes to a child's life brought about by the bereavement (Harrison and Harrington, 2001: 162) and the heightened effects of bereavement in the context of multiple disadvantage and trauma (which might include multiple bereavement) (Vaswani, 2014; Akerman and Statham, 2014). As Sharpe (2012: 60) puts it: 'individuals who are already vulnerable by virtue of living in chaotic and distressed families within disadvantaged neighbourhoods may, when confronted with the additional potentially disruptive experience of a significant bereavement, be exposed to "double jeopardy"' (Ribbens, McCarthy and Jessop, 2005: 63)'.

Education

Difficulties at school featured heavily in children's narratives as well as their case documentation, experienced by 89 per cent of the sample (23 out of 26). Sixty-two per cent (16 out of 26) had either been excluded from school (12) or had a managed move (3), including one child for whom the basis of his removal was unclear.¹⁸⁵ Overall, 35 per cent (9 out of 26) of the children's case files highlighted problems with attendance at school or college, although this is likely to underestimate the extent of the issue. A further four of the children had other school-related troubles, including bullying (1), several years of reported poor behaviour that was managed in school (1) and attendance at an 'EBD' school due to emotional and behavioural difficulties (2). Educational information was notably often missing or incomplete in children's case files. Conducting the life map exercise with children at the beginning of interviews filled-in these gaps in several cases.

Of those that had been excluded, ten (39 per cent) had been permanently excluded on at least one occasion, and two had experienced multiple fixed-term exclusions (suspensions). Several children had been excluded from school in their pre-teenage years and four (15 per cent) had been permanently excluded three or more times. Sixteen-year-old Luke told me that he had first been excluded from school at the age of 6 'because the I threw a chair at a teacher' and, since then, he had 'been to 12 different schools'. Five (19 per cent) had been out of education

talking through these.

¹⁸⁵ That is, it was unclear whether he had been excluded or had a managed move.

following their exclusion, but it was difficult to determine the duration of this non-involvement from all but two of the children's case files. Case file data indicated that 15-year-old Elijah and 17-year-old Ernest had been out of school for six and four months, respectively, prior to starting their YOS orders. While Caleb, aged 15, and Luke, aged 16, told me that they had been out of school for one and three years, respectively.¹⁸⁶

Both Daniel and Luke left school before reaching the statutory leaving age of 16 and neither were in any form of Education, Training or Employment (ETE) at the time of the interview. In other cases, children's case files were ambiguous as to whether they had left school early and this was not explored in my interviews with them. Although the majority of children had a troubled educational history, at the time of the interview, 81 per cent (21 out of 26) of the children were reported to be in some form of ETE. For a number of children, the YOS had played a key role in helping them to secure such placements. This was a factor in children's appraisal of supervision, as I discuss in Chapter 5.

School as a factor in children's offending

Children's adverse experiences of education and their offending behaviour were often interconnected. For four children (15 per cent) in my sample, their involvement with the criminal justice system was directly attributed – either by themselves or the YOS – to their actions at school or their exclusion from it. Luke (aged 16) told me that exclusion had resulted in him getting into more trouble:

I was just wondering the streets – why do you think I'm so streetwise? – getting bored and looking for things to do, I was out of the house before my mum was even up...I was smoking weed, and then things got worse, getting into trouble with the police.

Likewise, in Ernest's case file, his worker stated that 'this lack of structure [the exclusion], has directly affected Ernest's ability to make positive decisions and presented himself with time to associate with negative influences'. The link between exclusion and offending is well-documented. The Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime, a longitudinal study of a cohort 4,000 children who started secondary school in 1998, has shown that while children

¹⁸⁶ For a fifth child, 17-year-old Daniel, I was unable to establish how long he had spent out of school following his exclusion.

who misbehave are more likely to be excluded, there is strong evidence of the criminogenic effect of exclusion (McAra and McVie, 2012, 2007; Smith, 2006).

For 17-year-old Scott, his first time entry into the criminal justice system on a nine-month referral order had been precipitated by extensive bullying at school, resulting in him carrying a knife to protect himself. Another first-time ‘offender’, 15-year-old Lennox received a nine-month referral order for Actual Bodily Harm (ABH) following a play-fight at school that went awry. Lennox had badly cut another boy’s leg as part of a game that involved pinching and scratching each other with compasses.¹⁸⁷ I encountered several other such cases during observation.¹⁸⁸

School as a place of danger

In this light, it was evident that school was not a safe place for some children. In several cases, this was due to threats or violence from other children. This highlights the well-documented link between experiences of victimisation and offending amongst children (Smith, 2004). Fifteen-year-old Elijah had to leave school for safeguarding reasons after being stabbed. Similarly, Caleb, aged 15, had spent most of the academic year out of school due to moving to another city to live with a relative following threats to his safety from other children. Having returned to the area of City YOS, he was unable to attend his former Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) due to new threats to him relating to the murder of a boy in the area; the PRU was therefore exploring the possibility of educating him off-site. Some children spoke about ‘losing hope’ for their future as a result of poor or absent educational provision, which may have impeded desistance given the important role of optimism (Burnett and Maruna, 2004).

¹⁸⁷ Although it should be noted that the police report stated that the wound was not consistent with a compass.

¹⁸⁸ These include cases in which children were involved with the criminal justice system due to their actions at school, such as fighting with other children or possession of weapons. In all of these cases, their behaviour seemed to be connected to the wider adversity in their lives. For instance, In Shire YOS, a worker told me about the case of a 15-year-old boy he was supervising following a fight with a younger boy at school; he had been permanently excluded from the school as a result. The boy was being cared for by his older brother as their mother had cancer and was subsequently spending a lot of time in hospital. At a City YOS PSR meeting, I heard about the case of a 15-year-old boy who was due to be sentenced for possession of a knife at school, having been arrested by the police officer on campus. It was his first offence. The YOSs analysis was that he had been carrying the weapon to protect himself, since he had been stabbed and spent six weeks in hospital the previous year.

Exploitation and victimisation

Nearly a quarter (6 out of 26) of the sample had been exploited, threatened or attacked by adults unrelated to them. I learnt of many other cases of such treatment through observation of YOS practice. Over 40 per cent (11 out of 26) of the children had been threatened or attacked by their peers. These figures are likely to be significant underestimates since neither victimisation nor exploitation were a focus of interviews. Such experiences were often identified by the YOS as a factor in their offending behaviour and there were a number of examples where children had been criminalised as a direct consequence of exploitation or victimisation. As I discuss below, children's experiences of exploitation or victimisation often comprised grooming or threats by adults, were drug-related, or were of a sexual nature.

General exploitation and victimisation

In a number of cases, children had been convicted of offences resulting from their exploitation or victimisation by adults. These were noteworthy because they were in a minority of cases that involved exploitation and abuse by adults in way that was reportedly unrelated to sexual exploitation, gang activity or drugs. One of the boys, 16-year-old Luke had been 'hanging around' with a 40-year-old man known for burglaries and, after an alcohol-fuelled night with him, had woken up with all of the stolen goods in his bedroom, but said he could not remember anything of the night before. The YOS staff suspected that the older man had committed the burglary and given the stolen goods to Luke for safekeeping, but since this couldn't be proved Luke pleaded guilty to burglary, for which he was remanded in custody and later received a YRO.

In the three other cases I encountered during observation, children emphasised that they had been protecting themselves against the adult concerned, and felt that it was unfair that they had convicted as a result. Regardless of whether their accounts of events were 'truthful', it was evident that two of the children had a deep sense of injustice about their criminalisation, which may have affected their compliance and engagement. As a case in point, 17-year-old Saba, whose first referral order meeting I observed, had been convicted of assault of an Asian security guard after he forcibly removed her from a pub, since she was underage. She told the panel members that he had assaulted her in the process and felt that she was a victim too:

Saba told of how the security guard had forcibly dragged her out of the pub and had inadvertently popped open her bra in the process of doing so, which she had

found very 'humiliating and saw red'. She had ended up with many bruises, which she had showed to the police but they were not interested. She very forcibly said that 'I am the victim too; people are not listening to me about what he [the security guard] did'.

[City YOS, field notes, May 2015]

Saba's behaviour had been categorised as a hate crime, which she strongly disputed, in common with several other cases I encountered.

Child sexual exploitation (CSE) and abuse

Two of the children in the sample had been sexually abused, both by a family member. Tina, who was 17, had been sexually abused by a close male relative at the age of five. Her YOS worker understood this to be a key factor in her offending, which primarily comprised assaults and threatening behaviour. Concerns that Tina was being sexually exploited by adults in the community and her practise of going missing had resulted in the involvement of children's social services. It was clear that there was significant additional adversity in her home life, including estrangement from her father, as well as parental neglect and substance misuse, which had resulted in her mother's admission to hospital for an overdose.

In common with Tina's experience, I came across several examples during observation in which children, particularly girls, had suffered multiple counts of sexual victimisation by different assailants. A 12-year-old girl, whose case was discussed at a risk management meeting, was undertaking a six-month referral order for 'waving a knife around at school' and threatening to stab someone following a dispute with teachers; this was her first offence. She had been bullied and raped by her peers at school, as well as subjected to familial sexual abuse. There were also concerns that she was being sexually exploited by older men in the area. Her mother was also addicted to crack cocaine, as well as schizophrenic. She had told her YOS worker that she had flashbacks of the sexual abuse, which made her very angry, suggesting that her offending was linked to her traumatic experiences.

In both YOSs there were multiple examples of sexual exploitation of children under YOS-supervision. A common thread throughout these accounts was the interrelationship between CSE and other vulnerabilities, including disengagement from education, family adversity, and

mental ill-health (Berewolitz et al., 2012; CEOP, 2011; Cockbain and Brayley, 2012). In a Shire YOS girls' group session, several children reported that teenage boys in the area were grooming girls for sexual activity with men. In City YOS, there was evidence both that boys were coercing girls into sexual activity and that girls were grooming other girls for sexual activity with men; this was understood by YOS professionals to be gang-associated.¹⁸⁹ In one case, reported in a City YOS PSR meeting, a 16-year-old had been charged with sexual activity with a girl aged under 16; he and a group of boys had reportedly taken her phone in a fast-food restaurant and demanded that she perform oral sex on each of the group before her phone was returned. He had told his case manager that he was surprised to be in trouble consequently, since he had engaged in consensual oral sex with the victim several times previously. The boy was identified as a victim himself, having previously been robbed at knifepoint, and had other vulnerabilities including using 'skunk' most days of the week, hearing voices and being out of education.

There were several examples where boys had suffered sexual exploitation and abuse. At a PSR meeting, I heard about the case of a 16-year-old boy who had been sexually abused by his older brother (for which he had been sentenced to custody). He was additionally vulnerable by virtue of having had seven care placements in ten months and being a 'heavy cannabis smoker', spending £10 per day and £40-60 previously. Concerns were expressed about his emotional management and difficulty engaging with the YOS in his previous referral order and in the PSR process. In the discussion, the victim worker asked whether he had received any therapeutic support with regards to his sexual abuse, suggesting that ensuing anger or guilt issues may be a factor in his offending. The boy's case manager did not appear to have considered either of these possibilities and, instead, was planning to propose a higher tariff order due to his previous difficulties with YOS engagement. This was overruled by the manager, who proposed that he should be given another referral order since he was a victim too. Nevertheless, this case suggests the importance of practitioner understanding of the potential impact of such adversity on children's behaviour and engagement, to best support desistance.

¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, one worker told me that although some girls had not apparently been sexually exploited or abused, she felt their sexual behaviour was a form of self-abuse. She highlighted the case of a 16-year-old girl who had stated in the sexual health session that I observed: 'I don't want a relationship...I'm only interested in fucking and I've already got a fuck buddy'.

Drug-related and county lines exploitation

Four (15 per cent) of the children in the sample, all of whom resided in the area of City YOS, said that they had been coerced into holding drugs by older men, for which they had been convicted for possession with intent to supply.¹⁹⁰ Children described feeling ‘scared’ and ‘threatened’ into such activity. Seventeen-year-old Ernest who had been found guilty of possession of Class A drugs with intent to supply, told me that he had been left disillusioned by professionals’ lack of interest in his claims of duress:

I felt like society didn’t care about me. Police especially didn’t care about me cos’ they didn’t do no mad investigations. They just saw me with drugs, questioned me...then said ‘we’re going to give you an order, we’re going put you on tag, “Do this” basically’.

It was notable that YOS workers’ assessments often interpreted such claims as evidence of ‘minimising their behaviour’ or ‘poor problem-solving and consequential thinking’, which is a subject of further discussion in Chapter 6.

County lines exploitation of children or ‘going country’ was a particular issue in City YOS.¹⁹¹ In line with limited knowledge about the issue, it was apparent that county lines involvement often intersected with other vulnerabilities, including family adversity and going missing from home (NCA, 2017; Home Office, 2017).¹⁹² Two children in the sample here were suspected of coercion into such activity, with numerous other examples apparent during observation. Elijah, aged 15, was serving an 8-month referral order for possession of Class A drugs. He had been missing from home for several days. On returning home, his mother had asked him to empty his pockets where she found 10 rocks of cocaine. She called the police. Elijah said that he had been intimidated by an older male into holding the drugs for several days. Prior to our interview, he had recently been returned to court for breach, having not attended several YOS appointments while he was missing from home again (due to county lines). Caleb (aged 15) was on a two-year YRO for possession with intent to supply Class A drugs; a sentence that he regarded as unfair. He had been found hiding in a wardrobe holding

¹⁹⁰ This represented over a third (36 per cent) of the City YOS young interviewees.

¹⁹¹ County lines is the term used to describe the supplying of drugs by urban gangs to suburban areas, as well as market and coastal towns. Gangs typically use vulnerable children and adults to courier drugs and money (Home Office, 2017).

¹⁹² Other vulnerabilities that have been found to increase the likelihood of coercion into county lines include living in residential children’s care, CSE, economic difficulties, learning disabilities and mental ill-health.

cash during a police drugs raid of a flat in which he was temporarily residing. He found himself there – several hours from home – having contacted his cannabis supplier because he had nowhere else to go following an argument with his mother. His PSR assessed that he was coerced into travelling to the area along county lines. This was his first conviction, although several months previously he had received a triage.¹⁹³ These cases highlight the implications of such exploitation for children’s compliance and engagement with supervision.

The streets

The ‘streets’ were not a safe place for many of the children, involving experience of serious youth violence exploitation by gangs, and ‘carrying’ knives. These were particular issues in City YOS, with nine of the 11 (82 per cent) children in the sample here having carried offensive weapons (3) or been threatened with or subjected to serious violence by adults or other children (6).

Knife crime

Violent knife crime was particularly prevalent in the vicinity of City YOS, with several children being tragically killed as a result during my time there. As one of the managers, who had moved from a nearby YOS, told me: ‘there’s a much higher level of violence [around City YOS]...the amount of knives, the amount of stabbings...the intensity of it has really taken me by surprise’. One child in the sample –15-year-old Elijah – had been stabbed. A number of other children knew people who had been stabbed, including friends and relatives. Outside of my interview sample, it was clear that many children on the YOS caseload had been victims of stabbings (as well as ‘perpetrators’), with internal case discussions typically seeing statements, such as ‘he was stabbed in the head’ and ‘his brother was stabbed 7-8 times’. I was struck by the regularity of such events when, in one PSR meeting that I observed, a case manager exclaimed of a boy who had spent six weeks in hospital having been stabbed: ‘oh god, that was a really serious one then’.

Stabbings were commonplace to such an extent that for many children they were a norm in their lives. Elijah told me that ‘I wasn’t that surprised when it [the stabbing] happened...cos it happens a lot’. Likewise, 15-year-old Lennox, who had experienced the murder, by stabbing, of two friends and a relative in recent years had said to his supervisor that this was

¹⁹³ A triage is an informal out-of-court disposal.

‘just something that happens’. As 17-year-old Kordel explained: ‘It’s normal. It’s not shocking to hear about young people getting stabbed anymore because it happens so often, although it’s upsetting’. However there was evidence that some children were suffering with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of such experiences, for which the YOS were trying to access therapeutic support.

Gang-related victimisation

More general attacks and serious threats of violence were common experiences of children in City YOS too. Through observation, I heard about several cases in which children had been ‘attacked by older males’, ‘chased near his home by some males with hammers’ and ‘assaulted on a bus after a YOS appointment’. There was often strong suspicion or evidence that such incidents were gang-related.

Drugs often appeared to play a role in this activity. Aside from intimidation into holding drugs, some children were in danger because they were drug-dealing themselves. Fifteen-year-old Jackson, who was earning as much as £600 a day through such means, was at risk of being attacked, either for money or as a proxy for the gang with which he was involved. He travelled everywhere, including to the YOS, by taxi ‘so no one can stab me’ and when I met him in the height of summer he was wearing a thick puffa jacket to ‘protect’ himself. He had recently absconded to the beach following an argument with his mum, telling his YOS worker that one of the reasons for travelling so far was that it was the only place he could enjoy the sun in safety. It was not unusual for children to travel by taxi around the area for their own safety.

Violence as a norm?

Such cases added to the wider sense that violence and intimidation were interwoven into fabric of life for some children growing up around City YOS. To Caleb, who had grown-up in the area where ‘there’s lots of crime and violence’, such activities were normal; telling me, when I asked him how he felt about this, that ‘It’s all I’ve ever known’. Anderson (1999) suggests that children who grow up in such circumstances may become inured to violence, perhaps increasing their propensity to engage in such behaviour. As I note below, there was a perception too that weapons carrying was entrenched in some neighbourhoods, resulting in children ‘tooling up’ as a matter of course. Ernest told me that his move to the area, which he called ‘the bad side of town’, had precipitated difficulties at school and his involvement in the

criminal justice system; he saw his 'dreams' of success as unattainable in the deprived area, and felt lured by the 'glamorised' criminal lifestyle.

The code of the street

It was apparent too that there was an unwritten 'code of the street' (Anderson, 1999) that had the potential to draw children further into the criminal justice system. For example, 'snitching' was prohibited and would be countered with violence. Both Ernest and Jaylen had refused to snitch on those that had asked them to hold drugs and a weapon, respectively. Ernest explained to me his fears of the consequences of 'snitching', even though he perceived that doing so might have lessened the sanction he received:

...let's say I was to give someone drugs to hold and then they get arrested, but then they get released and nothing happens to them. And then a couple of weeks later, they come and I get arrested. I'm not stupid, I've been on the road for too long for me to know that they snitched. So, I might go to jail for two years, four years, but when I come back out, I'm going to find that person and I'm going to attack them, I'm going to get them. Tsss, it's just, it wouldn't work out it for me, so I'm like I'm going to ride this.

[Ernest, aged 17]

In a number of other cases, children had been attacked or threatened but had refused to report the culprits, for fear of reprisals. For those who were trying to resist further involvement in offending, there was concern that such victimisation would see them 'get dragged back into crime'. Ernest who had been threatened by 'a group of older men' worried that he would consequently have to 'take matters into my own hands...but I don't want my life to be at YOS or going to the police station anymore'. In a case discussion about children who were at the point of release from custody, there was concern that one boy was 'more vulnerable and risky' because his brother had recently been stabbed, increasing the likelihood that he would be attacked too or become involved in reprisals.

A further 'code of the street' was the importance of protecting one's own, even if this led to involvement in the criminal justice system. As 16-year-old James explained: 'I got in trouble for sticking up for my mates, and I'm always going to do that so that's not going to change'. One practitioner believed that such a mind-set made it difficult to escape offending:

...some of them...they're like, 'It's the way we do things...I was helping my friends and if he's in that situation I have to help him'. [One young person] he was like, "Yes, I would stab someone for my friend. They would do it for me"... [You] just try and put things in place to help him but you know he is going to come back [to the YOS] because he's so fixated that his friends are his family.

[City YOS, worker 15]

Notably, Johns et al. (2017: 11) argue that young people's protection of their peers emanates in large part from their societal exclusion; the more excluded they feel, the more important their peers become. This can result in a vicious cycle, whereby such behaviour occasions further criminalisation, intensifying their exclusion from society.

Carrying for protection

Given the frequency of stabbings and other violence, it perhaps unsurprising that 'carrying' knives and other weapons was common amongst the children involved with City YOS. Four (36 per cent) of the children in the City YOS sample were serving a YOS order for possession of an offensive weapon or bladed article. Through observation, I learnt of many other cases, including several instances of possession of 'machetes' and 'hunting knives'. The carrying of weapons was understood by both children and practitioners to be motivated by self-protection. As one YOS worker commented: 'why is everyone carrying a knife? Because they don't feel safe'. Both 15-year-old Jaylen and 17-year-old Scott told me that they had been carrying weapons for protection. Several practitioners perceived weapons carrying to be 'inbred' or 'sadly entrenched' in children's neighbourhoods and peer groups, which was understood as providing further impetus for possession.

An additional factor in weapons carrying highlighted by the children was the perception that the police could or would not protect them from risks on the street and, indeed, were often a threat. Fifteen-year-old Jaylen who was completing a three-month referral order for possession of an offensive weapon, told me: 'At the time you're getting attacked, only you can save yourself, the police can't help you'. Sixteen-year-old Tyrone similarly asserted that people would be less likely to carry weapons if they felt that the police were on their side.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Tyrone was serving a 12-month Youth Rehabilitation Order with Intensive Supervision and Surveillance for possession of a bladed article in a public place.

The transitory nature of children’s lives

Transience characterised the day-to-day lives of many children on supervision. It was common for children to live ‘out-of-area’, go missing for days or weeks, and, often relatedly, to move between counties, homes, and, in some cases countries. Over two-thirds of the sample had experienced at least one of these events (18 out of 26).

Out-of-area cases

Working with children in out-of-area care placements was a major feature of practice in both YOSs. This encompassed supervising (known as ‘care-taking’) children who had moved into the area from other YOSs, as well as having their ‘own’ cases supervised in other YOS areas. Most commonly this was because children were in care, and there was a shortage of care placements in their home area. However, in City YOS a small number of children were re-located to other areas to protect them from gang-related reprisals or CSE. Only two of the 26 children I interviewed were in out-of-area placements. But this is perhaps unsurprising given the short placements, difficulties with YOS compliance and episodes of ‘going missing’ that frequently characterised the lives of children who were accommodated out-of-area. Often children were only placed out-of-area for a matter of months, experiencing ‘brief’ and ‘fleeting’ supervision with the care-taking YOS.

It appeared that children were regularly accommodated long distances from their home area and, sometimes, in placements outwith their cultural heritage. This resonates with the findings of a thematic inspection by Ofsted (2014) that there is frequently a lack of consideration of the appropriateness of placements.¹⁹⁵ A case in point was that of 14-year-old Shekira for whom this issue had been a factor in her continued offending.¹⁹⁶

Shekira was girl of Black African ethnicity who was accommodated out-of-area in a care home in a largely white community. She had told her out-of-area YOS case manager that she consequently felt very isolated and was ‘really unhappy’. Despite consensus that she should be moved to another care placement, social services declined the request. Activities to improve her emotional well-being could not be accessed due to the placement instability. She subsequently absconded from the

¹⁹⁵ The inspection looked at the cases of 92 children living out of area. It also found evidence of delays in provision of mental health and education support

¹⁹⁶ I learnt of Shekira’s case during a City YOS PSR meeting.

home, whereby she was found by the police being 'picked up' by an older male. On return to the home, Shekira hit another resident who she believed had 'snitched' on her. She then assaulted the care home director who had intervened, knocking her unconscious, before assaulting another member of staff who tried to restrain her. She was accordingly due to be sentenced for three counts of assault by beating, for which the YOS were recommending a 12-month YRO. Shekira had also disclosed that she has been physically and sexually abused by an older man, and the care home had witnessed her mother physically abusing her during visits. The City YOS case manager believed that she was consequently expressing her emotional trauma through violence, although had not met Shekira.¹⁹⁷

Shekira's case encapsulates many of the problems children appeared to experience in out-of-area placements, including emotional ill-health, difficulties accessing support provision, and disrupted supervisory relationships, accordingly restricting the YOS's ability to help, which I return to later.

Moving between counties, countries and homes

Transitory existences were not just a symptom of out-of-area placements, but a general feature of the lives of many children on supervision. Over half of the sample (14 out of 26) had experienced at least one significant move away, typically involving separation from one or both parents. More generally, those on supervision frequently migrated back and forth between counties and, often in relation to this, between homes of family members and/or friends. A smaller number of children moved in and out of custody, and between countries, with the latter group's sometimes uncertain immigration status leading to further instability.

There were often multiple factors in children's transitory existences. The case of 17-year-old Nathan is particularly illustrative:¹⁹⁸

Nathan was on a 12-month YRO in Shire YOS. Most weeks he spent part of the time living with his girlfriend in another county, several hours away by train. Shire YOS had begun 'care-taking' Nathan's case for the YOS in the other area, several

¹⁹⁷ The case manager was basing the PSR on conversations with the out-of-area YOS case manager and the care home director. She said that she found it more difficult to write PSRs when she had not met the child.

¹⁹⁸ Nathan was one of a small number of children who I attempted to follow throughout his order, but due to the

months after he started his YRO. He said that some older men were 'after' him because he owed them thousands of pounds for drugs and had gone missing from home for several months as a result. Nathan missed seven of his YOS appointments and was subsequently returned to court for breach and put on a two-month tag and curfew. Shortly afterwards he was 'thrown out' of the family home, and found out that his girlfriend was pregnant so he moved back to the other YOS area. Several weeks later, Nathan was returned to court again to vary his curfew requirements since he was sofa surfing and unable to comply with the order.

In common with Nathan, a number of children migrated between their current living area and those in which they had previously lived to see their girlfriend, friends or family members who remained. This arose from out-of-area care placements but also as a consequence, like Nathan, of the child's family moving from one area to another. As is evident, this resulted in difficulties with compliance and engagement.

More commonly, children were moved between family members, often, seemingly, as a means to remove them from 'negative influences'. For example, 14-year-old Andrew moved in with his father in the locality of Shire YOS, after he was convicted of violent disorder when living with his mother hundreds of miles away. Andrew moved because his mother worked unusual hours, leaving him unsupervised and he had been associating with criminal peers during this time. In City YOS PSR meetings, I came across several examples of children having gone to stay with family members, elsewhere in the UK and abroad, in order to 'refocus' their lives. Some of the children had experienced multiple care placements too.

Going missing

A significant minority of children on supervision went 'missing from home' for days or, in some cases, weeks at a time. Of the 26 children I interviewed, case file documentation indicated that just over a third (9 out of 26) had gone missing, usually on several occasions. The figures may underestimate the extent of the problem among the sample, since case file documentation was sometimes incomplete, particularly in City YOS.¹⁹⁹

itinerant nature of his life, I was unable to observe more than two of his supervision sessions or interview him.

¹⁹⁹ Perhaps as a reflection of this, one child (Raheem, aged 18, City YOS) made passing reference to experience

Experience of going missing was concentrated amongst the Shire YOS interview sample (6 out of 15), compared to three out of 11 (27 per cent) in City YOS. Yet it was evident that ‘going missing’ was a substantial and growing issue in City YOS, with cases commonly highlighted in internal meetings and workers telling me that ‘many more are going missing from home’.²⁰⁰ There were a variety of reasons cited as to why children went missing, including being ‘thrown out of home’; ‘rebellious against parental boundaries’; sexual exploitation; unhappiness in their placement; ‘keeping their head down’ in response to threats from other children and adults; drug use; and, in one case, due to a failed asylum application. In City YOS, going missing was frequently linked to involvement in county lines, as outlined above. There are likely to be other factors in children absconding from home not uncovered here, since this issue was not a focus of my data gathering.

It was evident that ‘going missing’ had multiple consequences, including family moves, exploitation, offending and breach. Furthermore, for Sheldon and Luke in Shire YOS, both aged 16, going missing from home had been a key factor in them being taken into care (under s.20 Children Act 1989).

The implications of children’s backgrounds for supervision

Here I discuss the implications of children’s characteristics and backgrounds for their supervisory experiences. This was not a focus of the research, but was a recurring theme in the data that raised important questions about the purpose of supervision and the definition of helping relationships in this context. I examine the three most prevalent themes. These were: compliance, engagement and legitimacy; the supervisory relationship; and access to YOS supervision and wider support. Further research would be beneficial to deepen understanding of the impact of children’s backgrounds and characteristics on their experiences of supervision.

of ‘going missing’ in interview, yet no such information was recorded in his case file.

²⁰⁰ I personally encountered two cases of children going missing, where interviews with children who had consented to the research could not go ahead because they went missing for several weeks.

Compliance, engagement and legitimacy

Compliance

Children's needs were perceived to shape their compliance with supervision in several important ways. Adversity and turmoil at home, including neglect, arguments and housing instability, were regarded as a significant factor in non-attendance at appointments. The below quote is illustrative:

So recently his mum decided – she was in a two-bedroom property, and she decided she was going to go into a one-bedroom one which obviously leaves no space for him – it's just a case of he has to look after himself. So at that time, he didn't attend for two appointments in a row. When we met with him, and he explained all this, I said, "Well, actually, that was what was going on for him at the time, we're not a priority now."

[Shire YOS, manager 4]

Movement between areas and going missing was often associated with non-compliance. As noted earlier, 15-year-old Elijah was breached for having missed his YOS appointments while he was missing from home. While observing practice, I came across many other examples of children who did not attend appointments because they had gone missing or were in a different county. Frequently this was linked to difficulties in their home lives, such as out-of-area placement instability or troubled family relationships, which sometimes resulted in being 'thrown out' of home. It is noteworthy that the adverse nature of children's lives – and consequent difficulties with non-compliance – was cited by practitioners as a prime reason for excluding children from the research, as discussed in Chapter 3.

In some cases, children were returned to their referral order panel or court for breach. It was evident, perhaps unsurprisingly, that non-attendance had the potential to fundamentally affect children's supervisory experiences. By children's and practitioners' accounts, breach had mixed effects on the supervisory relationship, future compliance and perceived legitimacy of supervision. This ranged from resentment, relationship breakdown and further compliance difficulties, to resulting in 'fantastic' relationships and engagement. This seemed to depend on a variety of factors, including the quality of the existing relationship, the worker's clarity

about the consequences of non-compliance, and previous workers' responses to non-attendance.

More generally, practitioners emphasised the importance of a home life that was able to support and actively encourage children's attendance at YOS appointments (e.g. with reminders), in line with the youth justice engagement literature (Hart, 2011). For example, by one worker's account, it was common for girls to miss appointments over the school holidays because they had been tasked with caring for their younger siblings: 'In summer time, I find that a lot of the girls become carers for their mums when the young ones are off school, so they don't attend then'.

Engagement and emotional well-being

The adversity of children's lives not only affected their attendance at supervisory meetings, but also their ability to engage meaningfully with them, a neglected area of youth justice research. Robinson and McNeill (2008) use the terms formal compliance and substantive compliance to distinguish between these two forms of behaviour. Carers' perceptions of the YOS and the value of supervision were widely understood as a key determinant of children's normative attitude and degree of meaningful engagement in supervision. As one practitioner stated:

...a lot of it is about their family background. If you're working with a young person where the family don't trust professionals, that is a really difficult barrier to get across, because as soon as they leave you, and as soon as they go home, they're being told, "Don't trust this person. Don't trust them. Don't tell them this. Don't tell them that."

[Shire YOS, worker 12]

In view of this, practitioners frequently suggested that for a relationship to help, it was often equally important to have a constructive relationship with the child's parents or carers.

Several practitioners also highlighted the impact of children's home lives on their mental and emotional capacity to engage with supervision. For example, one worker described the traumatic background of a young female client, which included childhood sexual abuse, 11 placements during her two-year period in care, and the recent temporary removal of her new-

born baby. The worker stated that while she engaged well with supervision, she would sometimes call to say that she was not in the right state of mind to attend; which her YOS worker understood and accepted. In a demonstration of non-verbal empathy (Nugent, 2015), another worker noted the importance of providing breakfast in group work sessions, suggesting that this had a bearing on children's emotional and mental ability to benefit from supervision:

...home is where the heart is they say, that's where it needs to start, get them a decent home to live in, how they can go out feeling good about themselves if they haven't even been able to have a shower or a change of clothes, or had breakfast. That's why any of the group sessions that I do, we always supply breakfast.

[Shire YOS, worker 13]

It was evident that children's emotional well-being often suffered from living out of area, multiple moves and going missing. Children were said to feel 'lost and out of place' and 'emotionally fragile'. This appeared to have a detrimental effect on their substantive compliance. For example, one support worker told me that a child with whom she was working from another area had 'mentally moved back anyway' suggesting that she was no longer meaningfully engaged in supervision. Seventeen-year-old Ernest's case file indicated that his emotional well-being had improved as a consequence of the permanent housing of his family back in the area of City YOS following a number of moves, stating that: 'he feels more positive and relaxed now that all of his families [sic] belongings are no longer in storage and his family are much happier'. These case examples indicate the importance of an empathetic supervisory relationship to demonstrate understanding of the realities of children's lives and offer supervision that is sensitive to difficulties and realistic about goals. In turn, such an approach is likely to foster legitimacy and engagement.

However, for children who were in the midst of severe adversity, some practitioners expressed the view that supervision was 'pointless' since they 'cannot put their mind into supervision'. Yet, they reported difficulties with persuading the courts and referral order panels to vary the order and content of work to reflect this, an issue that is discussed further in Chapter 6. Related to this, repeated non-attendance was understood to severely disrupt and circumscribe the content and the purpose of supervision. As Nathan's case manager

expressed in exasperation ‘we’re not achieving anything in sessions because of [his] chaotic attendance’.

The links between children’s experiences of exploitation, victimisation and criminalisation, raises further questions about their perceptions of the legitimacy of youth justice supervision and engagement. I wondered how children felt about involuntary supervision who were often under its auspices as a result of crimes committed against them. In this regard, as is discussed in Chapter 5, although many of the young interviewees felt their criminalisation was somewhat or wholly unfair, it was striking that all had seemingly accepted the need to comply. They appeared to feel powerless to object, complying out of a sense of dull compulsion; although in some cases the supervisory relationship fostered a sense of legitimacy and meaningful engagement. It was a limitation of the research that I was unable to speak with any children who felt a deep sense of injustice about their criminalisation, to the extent that they did not comply.

The Supervisory Relationship

The adversity in children’s lives had significant implications for the supervisory relationship and their needs of it. I focus here on three significant themes within the data. These are the impact of early relational experiences; inconsistent care experiences; and authority figures.

Home lives

Beginning with children’s home lives, there was evidence that their parental/ carer relationships had a critical effect on the development and dynamics of the supervisory relationship. Children’s experience of rejection in the home was often understood to be translated into their relationship with workers, as explained by one manager:

...there was a young person who was particularly hard to reach... he would go from angry to frustrated tears within ten seconds...He didn’t bond well at all with females over a certain age...in this particular case his mum left...walked out the door one day and he was left with his dad and his brother, and they were his role models. But saying that, everybody else in his life also left at some point. So for him there were two things, I think. One: he was so angry and never got the closure with mum because he never saw her, so an older female, if you like, he may have been associating that unconsciously with his mum. “I’m angry at you.”... The other one was he would maintain a certain amount of contact, so say six [sessions]

– then at the sixth session he'd be like, "That's it." And then he'd cut off, and that could have been because he knows as you get further down the relationship someone's going to leave, or reject him, or something else.

[Shire YOS, manager 4]

Starkly apparent in this child's story is the psychological process of *transference* at work, whereby he displaced the emotions about his mother onto female workers of a similar age. Furthermore, his withdrawal from supervisory relationships could be interpreted as an avoidant insecure attachment style, formed as a defence mechanism to experiences of rejection. In contrast, other children with troubled home lives appeared to seek intensely close relationships with their workers. A case in point was 15-year-old Molly, who had witnessed repeated domestic violence at home and been placed in care by her mother on Christmas Eve the previous year, since which she had lived in four different care placements. I observed a supervision session between Molly and her YOS worker Karen, in which Molly was largely unresponsive and hostile (particularly with me). There were however sparks of illumination in Molly during exchanges of fashion advice and discussion about a poster they were making, which included pictures and selfies taken in shared activities:²⁰¹

Karen tells me that when they first met, Molly was exactly the same with her [unresponsive and hostile] and she was dreading working with her out of concern that all the sessions would be like that. However, she says that Molly has attached to her; Molly has a reputation 'for attaching to everyone, because of her attachment issues'. She gives an example of Molly trying to give her items and also dying her hair red like Karen's within a week of them meeting, which she doesn't think is a coincidence. However, she says that Molly doesn't seem to have the same strength of bond with her social worker, and blames her for some of her problems in social care.

[Shire YOS, fieldwork notes, October 2015]

Molly's initially defensive response, followed by her apparent desire to become intensely close with Karen, might be understood as an insecure ambivalent attachment pattern in

²⁰¹ This is a pseudonym.

response to her violent and rejecting home life. In addition, Molly's preferential treatment of Karen and blame of her social worker is suggestive of the psychic defence process of splitting and idealisation. Her apparent idealisation of Karen – through attempted gifts, fashion advice and emulation – could further be understood as form of defence against the anxiety-provoking (controlling) aspects of Karen's role (Turney, 2010: 145). While some professionals acknowledged the unconscious dynamics at play in their relationships, as in these two accounts, the extent to which these were managed in supervision was unclear. Did Karen read the signals as idealisation and try to address this or did the (superficially?) positive relationship act as a barrier to her intervening effectively?

Indicating the relevance of attachment theory and the notion of a secure base, some YOS workers believed that it was precisely *because* children lacked relationships with their families or other adults that the supervisory relationship assumed particular significance in their lives. It was a common theme in practitioners' accounts of helping relationships that the child 'hasn't felt loved or cared for at home, and he doesn't feel like his parents give him that attention' and that, accordingly, 'they're craving some sort of emotional or practical support'. Practitioners understood that, as a result, sometimes their interactions with the child 'will be the only positive relationship that they do have', 'the only consistent individual in their life' and 'the only person that they can rely on'. This was particularly felt to be the case on longer term orders. Related to this, one practitioner reflected that positive relationships were often developed with children who already had experience of such relationships:

The kids that you get a good bond with quite often have got something strong like a strong parent or a strong adult in their life, or some protective factors that enable them to make those relationships.

[Shire YOS, worker 5]

This further accords with attachment perspectives that children with a secure base of attachment are better able to form relationships with others, because they have a foundation of trust, self-assuredness, safety and emotional regulation (see also, Harvey, 2007: 174). However, some practitioners observed that 'not everyone wants a relationship' or 'don't necessarily need it', particularly if they are 'low risk' or on short orders (e.g. less than six months), in agreement with Trevithick (2003).

Inconsistent relational experiences

Children's transient life circumstances often translated into fragmented relationships with services. As one of the manager's in Shire YOS outlined, these were typically characterised by short interactions with multiple YOS workers and other practitioners:

...they are in a placement in this area with maybe one or two care staff changing on a rota system. And we're involved with them, and we may see them once a week, we may see them twice a week, but again, people are coming into their lives quite briefly and they haven't got that consistency.

[Shire YOS, Team Manager 3]

Children in such situations, particularly those living in care out of area, were often seen to experience difficulties in forming relationships. It was common for practitioners to describe them as 'very difficult to engage', 'difficult to build a relationship with' and their relationship as having had a 'rocky start'. But, as above, there were some cases where children seemed to demonstrate a stronger need for close relationships with their supervisor as a result of the inconsistencies in their lives. Thus children in such circumstances tended to form a close relationship with their YOS worker or none at all, as one worker articulated:

...kids in care tend to struggle with any relationships so if you're going to get a kid that is over-attached it might be a kid in care. If you're going to get one who really won't engage at all, it's probably a child in care.

[Shire YOS, worker 5]

It was evident that the difficulties practitioners experienced in working with children from out of area had a significant bearing on their formal and substantive compliance as well as their general experience of supervision. As I detail in Chapter 7, inconsistencies in supervision, including changing workers and high use of duty contacts, could further fragment children's experiences of supervision

Relationships with authority figures

As well as parents and carers, it was clear that children's relationships with *professional* figures of authority were a key influence on the nature of their relationship with their YOS worker and engagement with supervision. Most commonly, practitioners noted the negative

impact of poor interactions with teachers and the police, particularly with regards to building trust:

...if they've had a particularly bad experience with a professional, whether it's a teacher or police, police are a big one, they start to put the barriers up a little bit and they can be not as trusting of you.

[Shire YOS, worker 10]

Another worker suggested that the effects went beyond this, highlighting the difficulties sometimes experiences in effectively challenging children who had problematic educational histories because they had only ever 'been excluded and never challenged'. It was clear that previous experiences of YOS workers were an important determinant of relationship formation and engagement too. For example, one Shire YOS case manager related the case of a child that she had recently started supervising who 'had got away with literally doing nothing, I mean nothing' on a referral order with his previous YOS worker. She was concerned that he would continue not to attend his YOS appointments as 'I think he feels now that, these are his words "If I ignore you for long enough you'll go away"'.

Adverse experiences of the police, teachers and care staff were depressingly common amongst the children I encountered. Yet, it was notable that the young interviewees only ever highlighted their police interactions as a determinant of their initial perceptions of the YOS. For example, 16-year-old Malik remarked that:

...the side I thought was against me is actually with me, innit, but of like law and justice and stuff yeah, the people at YOT are the only ones I like, I don't like anyone in the policing force.

Thus, there was a sense that the police and YOS were regarded as part of the same 'justice' contingent, with experiences of the former readily translated to the latter. As one YOS worker explained: 'some young people just don't want to talk because I'm part of the system and I work with police and it's my fault that they're here because I'm a YOS officer'. This links with Ross et al.'s (2008) work, built on by Lewis (2016), regarding the importance of 'interpersonal schemata', based on previous interactions with authority figures, in shaping expectations of supervision staff.

Practitioners frequently highlighted the innate distrust of professionals amongst children who were involved in gang or serious youth violence. Such suspicion was a phenomenon that I encountered repeatedly myself as a researcher embedded in the YOSs, particularly in City YOS, as discussed in Chapter 3. The unwritten code of the street counselled against disclosure of information to professionals. As one YOS practitioner described, this could have a paralysing effect on supervision:

So there's one young person now and I've had him for over a year, and I think he's said a maximum of 30 words to me the whole year, he says 'yes', 'dunno', 'no', for the whole session and that's difficult...his father was a high ranking gang member, his mum's been in [name] prison...I think he's just been taught from a very early age not to disclose anything.

[City YOS, worker 3]

In attachment terms, such detachment could be understood as indicative of epistemic vigilance and mistrust. In circumstances like this, it is difficult to see how involuntary, time-limited supervision can penetrate such defensive adaptations such that trust can be fostered and meaningful exchanges engendered, raising questions as to its purpose.

In contrast, while some children shared experiences of difficult schooling and relationships with staff – including teachers ‘who didn’t care’, ‘abused their power’ and ‘bullied’ – they related this to their self-belief and future prospects, rather than as shaping their expectations of the supervisory relationship. As an illustration, Ernest told me that he had lost hope for his future following periods of alternative education in unsuitable settings and his eventual exclusion from school: ‘I just didn’t care anymore, everything was just messing up...he [the head teacher] just gave up on us, he did not care’.²⁰² In this respect, it was notable that several children contrasted their experience of the YOS and their worker who ‘is my side and cares’ against other services and agencies who are ‘against me and don’t care’, as discussed

²⁰² This aligns with research findings about the impact of such school experiences on children’s wider behaviour and offending. The Edinburgh Study (Smith, 2006) provides clear evidence of an enduring relationship between children’s positive attachment to school, particularly attachment to teachers, and less misbehavior and offending. More generally, Maruna and LeBel (2004) draw upon evidence from educational psychology of the ‘Pygmalion effects’ (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1992) of teachers’ beliefs in a student’s ability and their resultant performance at school. Applying these lessons to the criminal justice field, they posit that people are more likely to change and have the self-belief they can do so if others around them believe that they can (Maruna and LeBel, 2004: 7).

further in Chapters 5 and 6. In these cases, it appeared that prior experiences of uncaring services acted as important basis for the relationship with their YOS worker, rather than a damaging template.

In summary, the adverse nature of children's backgrounds seemingly had far-reaching implications for their experience of supervisory relationships. The evidence presented here suggests that helping relationships will be those that provide consistency; an ability to distinguish themselves positively from the faceless penal establishment to foster trust; insight and responsiveness to the difficult realities of children's lives; and be grounded in an awareness of the unconscious dynamics and attachment factors inherent to best manage the relationship.

Access to YOS supervision and wider support

The impact of street violence

The threats posed by 'street-life' had important implications for YOS supervision. Most obviously, in a number of cases, children were precluded from attending appointments at the YOS office, such were the risks to their lives. This often meant that children were seen at home but, in one particularly serious case, appointments had to be held at a council building with security guards. This fundamentally altered the nature of supervision since group work programmes – which formed a significant element of most children's community orders at City YOS - were only delivered at the YOS and therefore inaccessible to children in such circumstances.²⁰³ It remains to be seen whether this adversely affected children's perceptions of the quality or legitimacy of supervision, particularly since those who attended groupwork expressed mixed views on its usefulness (see Chapter 5).²⁰⁴ The risks children faced from others had the potential to affect their compliance with and perceptions of the legitimacy of the YOS too. Both Jackson and Ernest expressed uncertainty about attending group work due to their concerns that this would put them in danger, respectively worrying that 'there may be beef with some of the others [children] there' and that the timing of the session (finishing at 6pm) put Ernest at greater risk of violence from a group of older men 'who are looking for me'. Notably, in both cases, the children had decided to attend when their supervisors had

²⁰³ Although the YOS was in the process of exploring whether programmes could be held outside of the YOS.

²⁰⁴ It should be noted that I was not able to interview any children who had been prevented from attending the YOS offices due to the risk to their safety.

pressed them for further details to pass onto the police, declaring that they were not ‘snitching’.

The impact of children’s transitory lives

Children’s movement between areas often resulted in disjointed supervision manifest in changes to supervision content; pauses to meetings and reparation activities; and difficulties accessing school, college and wider educational provision, which likely curbed YOSs’ abilities to help children and potentially children’s perceptions of the value of supervision. For example, 15-year-old Caleb told me that ‘getting back into school’ was the main factor that would help him stay out of trouble; yet despite recognising his YOS workers’ efforts to realise this, he was doubtful they would succeed as ‘they ain’t got much power’. His later comments suggested that this had shaped his view of the purpose of supervision and the supervisory relationship: ‘there is no point trying to find out what problems I supposedly have if they can't support me with them’.

I was struck too by the implications for Pre-Sentence Report (PSR) writing of the difficulties with accessing information about transitory children, and the potential effect on sentencing outcomes. Continuing with Caleb’s story, he was categorised as ‘high risk’ in his PSR due to the number of ‘known unknowns’ in information about him and the need to ‘err on the side of caution’. He received a two-year YRO and, as noted in the next chapter, despite perceiving this as unfair, said that he had accepted it; although his case file indicated that he had not attended on eight occasions in the 10 weeks since the order began, raising questions of his engagement.²⁰⁵

Furthermore, the often short-term and sometimes uncertain nature of placements limited the quantity and type of work they could undertake with children, as one team manager highlighted:

We have some young people coming in from out of care, from out of area, and they might be in this area for two months before they move onto somewhere else. It’s quite difficult to do a lot in a short period of time. [Shire YOS, manager 3]

²⁰⁵ One of the occasions was recorded formally as a ‘failure to comply’, while a further three were recorded as failures to comply with sufficient explanation. The other four occasions were recorded as failure to attend with no explanation provided, raising questions about the accuracy of the information and the worker’s response to Caleb’s non-attendance.

This was perceived by practitioners to adversely affect relationship-building and, in turn, children's compliance and engagement. It seems likely to have had important implications for children's perceptions of the legitimacy of supervision too, although the inherent difficulties in accessing children in such circumstances meant that I was unable to collect data on this from children themselves.

Summary

This chapter has sought to provide an insight into the characteristics and backgrounds of the children on supervision in the two YOSs. What was manifest in the lives of virtually all of the children was the multiple and severe adversity they faced at home, in education, through exploitation, on the streets, and as a consequence of their transient lives, with their criminalisation, often directly, because of these difficulties. It was further evident that the adversity of children's lives had wide-ranging implications for their supervisory experiences, including defensive adaptations, such as insecure attachment and the idealisation, denigration and deep-rooted distrust of workers. This provided a background to their own perspectives on supervision, and critically shaped their capacity to comply and meaningfully engage. Street violence-related risks regarding the location of supervision, as well as experience of disjointed YOS support and services in out-of-area placements seemingly impacted on children's access to supervision and wider support.

Seen through the lens of psychoanalytic theory, it is clear that if children's experiences of authority figures have been characterised by hostility, they will be defensive and hostile themselves – as a means of self-protection. When coupled with the insights from the social work and youth work literature, the findings here indicate that the types of supervisory relationships best placed to help will be those in which workers are able to empathise with the difficulties faced by children, offer genuine care and acceptance, and overcome children's negative projections, transferences and distrust through containment and consistency. To do so, workers must be able to recognise and manage the unconscious dynamics at play and practise in a context that is conducive to this and provides consistency. This raises critical questions about the capacity of YOSs to attend to such needs and fulfil its duty to prevent offending (Crime and Disorder Act 1998, s.37).

Chapter 5: The children's perspectives and experiences of supervision

Children's perspectives on their supervisory experiences is a neglected topic (with some notable exceptions).²⁰⁶ Yet it is being increasingly recognised that those in receipt of criminal justice services are 'expert witnesses' (Barry, 2007) with rich insights into what they need to change (McNeill, 2005; Prior and Mason, 2010). As Drake et al. (2014: 23) contend, 'young people's accounts of their experiences can provide critical perspectives on the successes and limitations of current policies and practices that are inherently unique and prospectively illuminating'.

In this chapter, I examine the children's perspectives and experiences of supervision, drawing on the data gathered through interview with the sample of 26 children and observation. While professional perspectives are the subject of the following chapter, they also feature here as a lens through which to interpret the children's accounts, and vice versa. The first part of the chapter explores the children's perspectives of their offending, sanction and selves, focusing on the implications of these for their engagement with supervision and their needs of it. Building on this theme, the second part of the chapter examines the children's perspectives on the meaning and helpfulness of supervision.

Self-narratives and implications for supervision

A central aim of the research was to examine the pertinence of children's narratives regarding their engagement with supervision. How did they view their behaviour? What were their perceptions of the fairness of their penalisation? How did their narratives of offending and fairness of sanction shape their attitudes towards supervision? A secondary aim was to explore the extent to which current theorising on 'desistance' is meaningful for children, and the implications of this for supervision. As noted in Chapter 2, relatively little attention has been paid to the distinct issues that are potentially raised by the application of desistance theory to children. Do they have narratives of criminality (notwithstanding labelling theory; see, for example, McAra and McVie, 2007; Becker, 1963, Lemert, 1967)?²⁰⁷ Do they need to

²⁰⁶ These include: Johns et al, 2017; Phoenix and Kelly, 2013; Sharpe, 2012; and France et al, 2012. However, in none of these studies were children's experiences and perspectives on supervision the main focus.

²⁰⁷ By narratives of criminality, I mean whether they identify as offenders or demonstrate attitudes that are 'pro-

reconstruct their identity? What implications does this have for their supervisory experiences?

As such, I asked children for their reflections on their offences and whether they thought it was fair that they had got into trouble for their behaviour. To gain further insight into their narratives of offending and self, I elicited the children's hopes and expectations for their futures, in accordance with the evidence for the role of hope, optimism, clarity of vision and strong self-determination in desistance (amongst adults) (Maruna, 2001; Burnett and Maruna, 2004; Burnett, 2004). In this respect, I asked them what they expected they would be doing with their life in a year's time; what they would ideally like to be doing in five years' time (their vision of the 'good life'); and what they felt they needed to do in order to achieve those aspirations.

Narratives of offending, sanctions and self

Offending and self

My initial analysis showed that the children often characterised their offending as a thoughtless mistake or a product of their environment, or both. Due to its pertinence to better understanding such narratives, I subsequently employed Matza's (1964) neutralisation theory and Maruna's (2001:175) adaption of Schonbach's (1990) analytical framework to code the children's accounts of their offending for neutral reports, concessions, excuses, justifications and refusals.²⁰⁸ Concession and excuse narratives were particularly dominant. Children were most likely (19 out of 25)²⁰⁹ to focus on the wrongness of their behaviour, typically describing it as 'silly', 'stupid' or 'dumb'. Daniel, for example, in response to being asked what he thought about the offence (a dwelling burglary) explained: 'It's a bit ridiculous like...I dunno, it's shite, it's stupid things...there was just absolutely no need for it, it was just opportunity'. This fits with previous research findings that both children and adults often depict their offending as stupid (Maruna, 2001; Jamieson et al., 1999).

criminal' (Beyond Youth Custody, 2017a: 6-7).

²⁰⁸ Neutral reports involve describing the incident without excuse, justification, or reference to its negativity (such as 'it was a bit of fun'). In a concession narrative, the individual takes full or partial responsibility for the incident and acknowledges it as wrong. Excuse narratives entail acknowledgement of the wrongdoing and assigning blame to someone or something else (such as the effects of drugs, or the bad influence of one's peers). Justification accounts comprise acknowledgment of their role in the offence, but deny that the behaviour was wrong (examples including denial of injury). In a refusal, the individual avoids responding to questions about their offending.

²⁰⁹ In this section, a sample of 25 of the children is used as I did not ask children for their perspectives on their

Two of the children (Ryan and Dylan) expressed particular shame (evident throughout the interviews and case files), using terms such as ‘out of order’ and ‘terrible’. My sense was that they both felt especially distressed by their behaviour. Dylan had been convicted for malicious wounding and various counts of assault, for punching and seriously biting another child as part of a preceding verbal and physical altercation. He seemed reluctant to reflect on the incident in interview (refusal):

AW: So I know a little bit about your offence and why you got YOS, but what do you think about what happened?

Dylan: Well obviously it was terrible and that but um [pause for several seconds, I sense he is uncomfortable talking about the offence]. I dunno. I dunno what to say.

His case file stated that he had been upset by the offence and subsequently questioned his values, suggesting that it was affecting his self-identity. He reoffended shortly before the end of his order and was remanded to adult prison (as he had turned 18 by this point). While some previous studies have found that shame is an important motivation for desistance (King, 2013a; Leibrich, 1994), these two cases resonate with Maruna’s (2001) contention that self-blame may have adverse consequences if internalised. Although Maruna (2001) sees this as a particular risk for individuals for whom offending is a lifestyle, the fact that the boys had no prior convictions may suggest that children, given the formational stage of their identities, may be particularly prone to such internalisation. It is perhaps no coincidence that both boys’ apparent questioning of their self-identity in light of their offences, was set against the background of the deaths of their grandfathers. As Gadd (2006) notes, loss often brings into focus ones projections onto others, identification and questions about the self.

Nearly 70 per cent of the children’s accounts featured excuses (17 out of 25). Seventeen-year-old Chris, who had been convicted (for the first time) for criminal damage to an unoccupied house and two counts of assaulting a police on his way home from a party, reflected that a combination of bad circumstances were to blame:

It was pretty stupid really but I think it was just... it was a mixture of different components that came together that didn't bode well really, like drugs, my brother

offending until after the first pilot interview.

was there, the atmosphere and stuff, and then the police coming, so all of it together was really a recipe for disaster.

Chris also suggested that adolescence was a factor in his behaviour: ‘it was all fine until I was about 13, then I did misbehave a bit, I didn't really get on with my parents, but I think it was just being a normal teenager’. In this respect, around a third of the children (9 out of 25) partly accounted for their offending as a symptom of immaturity, explaining that they had since ‘grown up’ and now recognised ‘it was just stupid’. This accords with previous research findings that individuals often describe their shift towards desistance in terms of maturation (McMahon and Jump, 2018; Beyond Youth Custody, 2017b; Farrall et al., 2014; McIvor et al., 2004; Graham and Bowling, 1995). Related to this, for some of the children here, young age may have acted as an additional guard against the internalisation of a criminal identity. This is because it allowed them to attribute their behaviour to immaturity or their age-based inequality, foreclosing the possibility that it was a symptom of a character or personality default. Maruna suggests that avoiding identification with the latter traits is an important mechanism for maintaining a self-view of ‘bad behaviours, but not bad selves’ (2001: 136). Thus, although children may be more ‘malleable’ to negative identities (Nugent and McNeill, 2017), they may also well-placed to resist these.

For a number of other children, there was a strong sense that their relative powerlessness to change their circumstances (such as where they lived), what Phoenix terms their ‘age-based material inequalities’ (2016: 134), had contrived situations in which some events became difficult to escape. This aligns with previous research on adolescents’ narratives of offending, which has found that situational circumstances ‘beyond one’s control’ are often blamed (Rajah et al., 2014: 293; see also Jamieson et al., 1999). Fifteen-year-old Jaylen, for example, lived in an area in which knife crime was prevalent and had been convicted for possession of an offensive weapon. He suggested that although he was wrong to have had the weapon, carrying was a legitimate means of protection:

I did have it, so yeah, I really shouldn't have had it on me, it's bad when you have the wrong intentions...At the time you're getting attacked, only you can save yourself, the police can't help you, I'm not saying it's the best thing to do [to carry a weapon] but you have to do all you can to protect yourself.

In doing so, he gives both concessions, excuses and justifications for what happened. In this way, about a third of the children gave sometimes conflicting narratives of their offending, both describing themselves as at fault and not. This accords with Maruna's (2001) finding that those who have offended want to take responsibility for their behaviour but also establish themselves as in accordance with moral values. They thus often provide a 'chaotic jumble' of different narratives, feeling 'worthy of blame' for some behaviour but regarding other incidents as beyond their control (2001: 134).

Overall, a smaller number of the children gave justifications (5 out of 25) for their offence(s). As an example, James, who was serving a YRO with intensive supervision and surveillance for various counts of assault and possession of offensive weapons, justified this on the basis that he had been defending his friends. Four of the children's accounts include neutral narratives, with three making reference to their offending sometimes being 'just for fun'.

Most importantly then, the overwhelming majority of the children accounted for some, and usually all, of their offending by way of neutralisations (Matza, 1964), chiming with previous findings on adolescent narratives of offending (Rajah et al., 2014; Jamieson et al., 1999). What does this tell us about their wider self-identity? In one of the few applications of narrative desistance theory in the youth justice literature, *Beyond Youth Custody* (2017a) present such accounts as indicative of a pro-criminal identity (even if the child does not identify as a criminal per se), insofar as explanations of ones offending as permissible or demanded by circumstance (e.g. for status or security) are conducive to criminality.

Yet, the narratives of most of the children in this study pointed to a more complex interpretation. As noted above, many gave multifaceted accounts of their offences, often describing the behaviour as *wrong* and *accepting responsibility* for it, as well as *excusing* or *justifying* it. This points to a more optimistic conceptualisation of the children's identities. While neutralisations elicited through interview should be 'interpreted cautiously' (Maruna and Copes, 2005: 260²¹⁰), the children's variable narratives, combined with their conventional future aspirations (which are picked up later) suggests that they commonly held conventional, albeit contingent, moral values (Maruna, 2001; Matza; 1964). Furthermore, important questions are raised for how such narratives should be understood and responded to

²¹⁰ As noted in Chapter 2, there is some evidence that interviews invite such narratives.

in practice by evidence that using neutralisations for one's offending may aid future desistance (Maruna, 2001) and resilience thinking that offending can provide an unconventional means of maintaining a positive self-identity (Robinson, 2016) (see Chapter 2).

Narratives of sanction

Overall, the children expressed a range of views regarding the fairness of having been 'given YOS'.²¹¹ A slightly higher proportion described it as fair (9 out of 24), compared to those reporting it as unfair (7 out of 24) or identifying both fair and unfair elements (8 out of 24).²¹² However, there was a significant divergence of views between the two YOS groups. None of the children in City YOS perceived their sanction to be wholly fair, with many (6 out of 11) seeing it as unfair. In contrast, children in Shire YOS most commonly felt their sanction to be fair (9 out of 13), with only two regarding it as unfair.

My sense was that this dichotomy was related to the differing profile of the two groups' offending and perspectives of the legitimacy of the criminal justice system. As such, the majority of children in the City YOS sample had been convicted of weapon or drugs possession offences, which were widely regarded by children and practitioners as a product of intimidation and exploitation. In contrast, those in Shire YOS had mainly been convicted for assaults on their peers, as well as family members and professionals, which were described by some YOS practitioners (but not by children) as an emotional response to adversity. The key point here is that the children in City YOS tended to regard their offending as a contextual outcome of their wider life circumstances (and thus the decision to sentence them may seem particularly unfair), in a way that those in Shire YOS generally did not. As importantly, although children across both YOSs generally gave unfavourable accounts of the police and judiciary, those in City YOS were significantly more likely to highlight fears about safety and prejudice, and talk in terms of anger and hate in relation to these structures. Furthermore, a high proportion of the young interviewees in City YOS were from a BAME background, with mistrust of the criminal justice system found to be significant in such communities (Lammy, 2017). Viewed through the lens of procedural justice (Tyler, 2006), it appeared that the children in City YOS were less likely to feel that either their treatment or

²¹¹ I asked children whether they felt that it was fair that they had got into trouble for the incident(s). Some questioned whether they should have been criminalised or convicted at all; whereas others commented specifically on the length, intensity or type of sentence.

the decision-making process about them were fair, to the detriment of their perceptions of the legitimacy of the criminal justice system (particularly the police and judges in this context).²¹³

That said, it was notable that the majority of the children (17 out of 24) perceived their sanction as reasonable (insofar as it was entirely or somewhat fair). This closely accords with the accounts of the children in Phoenix and Kelly's (2013: 431) study, all of whom perceived it as appropriate to have received a YOS order 'if only because they all recognised that, if someone is convicted of a crime, they should be punished'. They argue that this represents the children's responsabilisation insofar as they had accepted the system's normative judgement 'about their culpability and blame-worthiness' (2013: 431). However, the section above suggests that the explanation is more nuanced, since the children often expressed regret for their behaviour, yet did not see themselves as wholly responsible. Thus, while the children's acquiescence to being punished may imply their responsabilisation, my interpretation is that it is also indicative of their acceptance of their powerlessness to challenge or change the circumstances that shaped their behaviour and its criminalisation. This is indicative of 'dull compulsion' (Carrabine, 2004: 67; Bottoms and Tankebe, 2012: 148), of which more later.

Narratives of future

Around two-thirds of the children outlined conventional visions for their future lives, which they were hopeful of achieving. These typically included 'a good family, a good home, a good job, good friends and a good lifestyle and social life'. Such narratives bear remarkable resemblance to those of the young adults in the Sheffield Desistance Study (Bottoms and Shapland's, 2016; Shapland and Bottoms, 2011). Several children expressed especial optimism and aspiration for the path ahead, as with 17-year-old Ernest:

I don't want to settle, I wanna exceed. I wanna travel the world and see more things and know more people, help people out, and do better things, and do something that will actually contribute to your life and other people's lives.

²¹² Two of the children were not asked for their views on the fairness of their sanction.

²¹³ It should be noted here that Tyler's framework for measuring legitimacy is premised on procedural fairness (i.e. of decision-making and treatment) and not on fairness of outcome (i.e. sentence). However, I have drawn on procedural justice theory to understand the children's views of the legitimacy of the system since the children frequently tended to conflate fairness of treatment, decision-making and outcome.

This is strongly reminiscent of the redemptive scripts used by desisters in Maruna's work, whereby 'making good involves taking control over one's life and using that life to contribute, accomplish something, and leave a positive legacy' (2001: 150).

Other children were not so optimistic. Luke (aged 16) was the one interviewee who seemed resigned to a life of crime:

I first got into trouble when I was seven, just nicking from shops, silly stuff, and now [he points to the end of the life map, labelled 'aged 17', where he has drawn a vertical line down] there is no turning back. This is it for me.

Similarly 18-year-old Declan told me that he was currently 'pretty content...I could do it [change], but I don't want to do it at the moment'. Fitzpatrick et al. (2015) discovered similar such narratives amongst their sample of 14 youth-justice-involved boys, interpreting them as a protective strategy against the threat of future disappointment. Similarly, Maruna (2001) found that some of his interviewees seemed express acceptance of their criminal fate or emphasise their decision to remain offending as means of exerting control over their lives.

Four of the children talked in terms of 'winning big' as their future vision, including 'becoming a billionaire' or as Lennox put it 'get rich or die trying'.²¹⁴ Fitzpatrick et al.'s (2015) research suggests that such narratives are common amongst adolescents, although they found that further probing revealed meaningful underlying sentiments, such as the desire for security. However, Maruna (2001) contends that 'big score' aspirations indicate a disconnect between intentional actions and outcomes, meaning that it is seen as unnecessary to play by the rules. Further research would be beneficial to better understand the pertinence of such narratives amongst children.

A number of the children were much more unsure of what their future would hold. Some struggled to envision their life ahead ('I'm not sure really, I don't know yet'). Others saw several possible paths, like 16-year-old Ryan:

²¹⁴ It is possible that the children in my study may have misunderstood the question, believing it to be about their dream future vision rather than their version of the 'good life'.

I could be in college on an apprenticeship or I could be smoking weed and doing drugs, that's the other one...I definitely need to improve my anger because I won't be able to get a job if I don't sort it out because I hit things too much.

This is reminiscent of Paternoster and Bushway's (2009: 1115) theory that individuals who offend imagine 'possible future selves', which comprise 'a blueprint for self-change to lead one toward a positive possible self and away from a feared self'. Several, like 18-year-old Raheem, expressed ambitions to work (in mechanics or construction, in his case) but were uncertain whether they could achieve this:

I need to stop coming here, I hardly reoffend but I get nicked all the time for silly stuff. Most of the time I've been caught it gets NFA'd (no further action). I've been arrested like 20 times, but I've only been convicted like four or five times, that says a lot. The police don't ever think I've changed.

In this respect, even those who displayed optimism about their future mostly talked in terms of plans 'hopefully' or 'probably' transpiring, suggesting that there was an element of doubt as to their self-determination. This is consistent with Fitzpatrick et al.'s (2015: 175) finding that children were often ambivalent about achieving their future goals - feeling a sense of 'hopefulness and hopelessness', which seemed to be framed by previous experiences of instability and unpredictability, as well as structural constraints.

Such uncertainty is also perhaps unsurprising given their young age, particularly as for most it was a routine experience that others made decisions about their lives, be it parents, residential carers, social workers, judges or YOS practitioners. Furthermore, some children's difficulty in envisaging their ideal future lives is likely a facet of their neurodevelopment, which is ongoing during adolescence and characterised, in part, by limited future orientation (Steinberg et al., 2009). This may be further exacerbated by experience of trauma (Beyond Youth Custody, 2016), which was prevalent in the children's life histories.

Implications for supervision

Engagement

The perceived legitimacy of one's community order has been theorised as an important basis for normative compliance (Bottoms, 2001), with Robinson and McNeill (2008) arguing that it is the principal foundation for substantive engagement. In this respect, the vast majority of

the children were resigned to being on a YOS order, regardless of their views of the offence(s) and the fairness of their criminalisation. Caleb (aged 15) indicated the unfairness of the two-year YRO that he had received for possession with intent to supply Class A drugs, having been a victim of county lines exploitation: 'No [it's not fair], because I didn't personally commit no criminal offence, I was just in the environment'. Yet he recounted that, on being informed of his sentence, he had thought: 'It is what it is'. One could interpret such narratives of evidence of the legitimacy the children conferred on the system, since a key measure has traditionally been 'perceived obligation to obey the law' (Tyler, 2006: 45; Bottoms and Tankebe, 2012).

Yet, as touched upon earlier, I argue that this amounts to 'dull compulsion'. Bottoms and Tankebe (2012: 148) describe it thus:

...where there is a radical power differential between the rules and the ruled...the powerless have mixed emotions: they feel that someone has to hold the power ; that the current authorities do hold effect de facto power and are therefore useful in ensuring a basic flow of essential services; that in consequence the power-holders are, in Weber's terms, a minimally valid authority; that powerless people have no way of challenging this de facto power anyway; and yet that it is impossible to accord to the power-holders any genuine normative authority or true respect.

For this reason, as they observe "perceived obligation to obey the law"...cannot be straightforwardly equated to legitimacy... [as] there are several reasons other than true legitimacy why people might express feelings of obligation to obey the law' (Bottoms and Tankebe, 2012: 165). This might explain why some children, like 16 year-old Malik, formally complied with their orders ('it has to be done hasn't it') but refused to substantively engage at first ('I felt like I was wrongly sentenced...so I didn't care for anything they [YOS] were saying to me innit').

However, applying this concept to prisons, Bottoms and Tankebe (2012) argue that while dull compulsion frequently exists, certain regimes and the behaviour of individual prison officers do facilitate true legitimacy. Such thinking was evident in the children's contrasting narratives about the legitimacy of their orders, the YOS and YOS officers. Notably, while the children seemed equivocal as to the legitimacy of their orders, most came to see the YOS

itself as a legitimate entity.²¹⁵ They viewed the YOS as unrelated to sanctioning decisions, laying blame on the police and courts. As 16-year-old Ernest explained:

The trial was scary like. I hate all this police system. To think that someone can just take me and lock me away for long, and yeah, especially as I'm being trialled for something I didn't do... Yeah, being at court and all these police, it's not me, I try to stay away from it...But YOT to me, I prefer YOT because it feels like I've got a mentor, someone that I can talk to, and they can give me their advice, and things like that. But being in court is not a nice feeling.

The key point for Ernest, as with several children, was that the YOS, unlike other authorities, was on his 'side' (of which more later). Raheem (aged 18), in contrast, was particularly critical of aspects of his YOS experience. He had been sent to custody for what he perceived as an unfair breach by the YOS and, more recently, had been arrested outside the YOS immediately following an appointment, which he described as a 'YOS set me up'.

Importantly though, he seemed to blame the specific workers rather than the YOS itself, highlighting several YOS practitioners who had helped him, as discussed later. This points to the dialogic nature of legitimacy (Bottoms and Tankebe, 2012), as well as underlining the important role of the supervisory relationship - and the normative attachment that can result (Bottoms, 2001) - in engendering substantive compliance (Robinson and McNeill, 2008).

Supervision approaches

It was evident that children's narratives had significant implications for the nature of supervision too. For about a third of the sample, interviews and observation indicated that they had consistently demonstrated conformist self-narratives. These children had committed few or first-time offences, which they regarded as mistakes in an otherwise positive record. Their offending seemed to have stopped as quickly as it had started, reminiscent of Matza's (1964) conceptualisation of 'juvenile delinquents' as 'drifters' whose offending is almost coincidental.²¹⁶ Chris's (aged 17) account is illustrative:

²¹⁵ However this may reflect the fact that the sample were mostly recruited through YOS workers and therefore likely to be biased towards those who were positive about the YOS and their workers.

²¹⁶ Although it should be noted that difficulty tracking the children's long-term outcomes made it impossible to explore this further.

I didn't think I needed any support with anything because I knew what I did was wrong, and knew where I had gone wrong, but I also could understand why other people might think that I needed some, so I thought I'd just go along with it.

This resonates with Lemert's (1951) description of experimental or situational deviant behaviour that does not become part of the individual's identity, which he terms primary deviance.²¹⁷ As such, for these children, the concept of cognitive change seemed much less relevant, adding weight to contentions that this may be unnecessary for desistance (Laub and Sampson, 2003) and that it may be most applicable to persistent offenders (Murray, 2012; McNeill, 2009). This is particularly relevant given evidence that an increasing proportion of children subject to supervision are first time entrants, more than quadrupling from 9 to 40 per cent between 2008 and 2019 (YJB/MoJ, 2020, table 10.9; Bateman and Wigzell, 2019: 15). Conversely, for two of the children, Ryan and Dylan, their apparent questioning of their self-identity despite minimal previous offending, points to its fragility and significance during this life stage, perhaps particularly when set against a background of wider emotional turmoil. In both cases, the risk is that supervision (and wider criminal justice contact) may destabilise their pro-social self-identity or reinforce doubts about self-worth, particularly given evidence that adolescence is a period of malleability (Nugent and McNeill, 2017) and they may accordingly be more susceptible to the potential labelling effects of the criminal justice system (McAra and McVie, 2007; Robinson, 2016). Thus for these children, perhaps the YOS's principal task is to recognise and develop their existing or faltering pro-social self-identity (without condoning their misbehaviour), rather than seeking to change it; in other words, an *adapted desistance* approach to children. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 indicates that the supervisory relationship harbours the potential to play a key role in this regard.

More generally, the often tentative nature of both the children's future visions and confidence in their ability to author their own destinies suggested the need for practitioners to focus on nurturing their self-determination and positive imagined future selves. The desistance evidence indicates that a key means of supporting children's positive narratives necessitates

²¹⁷ He contrasts this with 'secondary deviance' whereby 'the deviants acts are repetitive and have high visibility, and if there is a severe societal reaction, which, through a process of identification is incorporated as part of the "me" of the individual'. Importantly he sees primary deviance as the precursor to secondary deviance, with the latter brought about through repeated sanctioning and the resulting stigmatising and labelling effect (Lemert, 1951: 76-77).

working *with* rather than *against* neutralisations. This is not to say that no challenge is required; indeed as the helping relationship literature attests, the mark of transformative interactions is constructive challenge rooted in empathy (Seal and Harris, 2016; Lewis, 2014). Yet discourses within the two YOSs valorised interpretation of neutralisations as evidence of ‘behaviour minimisation’ requiring unequivocal challenge, rectification and responsabilisation (see Chapter 6). Challenge by youth justice practitioners often seemed to lack attentiveness to the adverse backdrop against which children’s offending occurred or a concern with promoting children’s strengths. This is perhaps reflective of the wider youth justice context in which risk-thinking is deep-rooted, (Hampson, 2018) a tension between care and control endures, and there exist related concerns that being ‘too soft’ may lead to accusations of unprofessionalism (Phoenix, 2009).

Robinson (2016) and Maruna (2001) are instructive here. From a resilience perspective, Robinson (2016: 26) argues for narrative approaches that focus on understanding the child’s self-story while also helping them ‘to find other ways of experiencing power and constructing identity’. As she explains:

Reframing behaviours in this way does not mean colluding when behaviours are harmful or even self-defeating, but it does enable services to recognise young people as having competences and capacities, even though they may be misapplied. This then shifts the focus from problems and deficits for the practitioners to address, and creates space for co-constructing visions and practical steps to move forward (2016: 30).

A positive supervisory relationship sits at the heart of this approach, as it necessitates a ‘safe relational space for young people to address complex issues’ (Robinson, 2016: 27). This is echoed by narrative desistance theory, which views the practitioner task as acting as ‘normal smiths’ (Lofland, 1969: 214) who help the individual to ‘rework’ their self-narrative by allowing, at least partially, for neutralisations but, crucially, emphasising their redeeming values and showing how these provide an opportunity to change (Maruna, 2001: 142).

At first glance, such perspectives might be viewed as at odds with the helping relationship literature, which emphasises the importance of *challenge* in transformational bonds, as discussed in Chapter 2. Yet there are clear parallels in the notions that positive relationships (centred on genuineness, empathy and warmth) that confer feelings of self-worth provide the

fundamental foundations for such dialogue, self-reflection and change. Benjamin and Gadd's psychoanalytic work reminds us that if that relationships are to prompt identification, recognition and, ultimately, self-development, the individual must feel understood by another person who they recognise as a meaningful other. Critically, the other's difference – which here refers to contrasting perspectives on offending – must 'not be felt as a coercive command to be "become" the other' as this will provoke a defensive response, negating the possibility for new perspectives (Benjamin, 1998: 96, cited in Gadd, 2006: 182). Taken together, these perspectives point to the importance of supporting children's development of positive self-identities through approaches that combine sensitive challenge with an emphasis on strengths, and are premised on meaningful relationships. There are obvious constraints to putting such an approach into practice in a youth justice context, including the time-limited nature of supervision and the imperative presented by a child's immediate risk of reoffending (Robinson, 2016). However, this should not preclude such principles informing and guiding YOS work with children. This is not least because of research findings suggesting that narrative work can be effective, particularly when combined with support to build social capital so that individuals can sustain positive self-identities in practice (Rajah et al., 2014; McNeill et al., 2012).

The Children's Perspectives & Experiences of Supervision

What did it mean to be 'on YOS'?

The overwhelming narrative about 'being on YOS' was one of 'I just need to get it over and done with'. Nearly three-quarters of the children (19 out of the 26) described it in this way. This resonates with previous research findings that children experience supervision as 'something that they had to do (because the court ordered it) but not something which helped' (Phoenix and Kelly, 2013: 431). Yet, for the children here, it was evident that such accounts of supervision masked a diversity of experiences and perceptions of its value. They construed YOS as 'something to get through' in both negative terms - as an obligation, as a punishment, and as detrimental – and positive – as providing another chance and supporting them through a difficult journey of change, as is explored below.

Just an obligation

For some, like 17-year-old Daniel, their perception was that they neither needed help nor could the YOS provide help. Thus attending YOS was 'more of an obligation...I just see it as

annoyance in my day sort of thing, that's all it is'. He saw supervision as something 'I just get over and done with as quick as possible and then go'. Several of the children talked about the importance of having their appointments earlier in the day 'to get it out of the way'.

It was notable too that while many of the children described supervision as onerous, for some it was a relatively insignificant part of their lives. As Malik told me, who was serving a 12-month YRO with ISS:

It's just normal now innit, I don't think nothing, I just think I have to come to this place and do what I gotta do innit. It's not something I look forward to... [AW: And afterwards?] Just ready to get on with my day innit, get on with doing what I gotta do.

Conversely for a number of others, and particularly those who had spent much of their adolescence going to the YOS, it was a significant burden, as with 16-year-old Tyrone:

Just thinking about coming to YOT is long to be honest, because I've been here since I was like, it's like every birthday, I'm unlucky to be honest because I got arrested when I was 13, first YOT appointment was on my birthday turning 14, I think 15 I had court cases close to my birthday, and this year [too].

Thus, for these children, there was also a sense that 'coming to YOS' had impeded them from moving on with their lives (although some felt that the encumbrance of attending YOS had prevented them from getting in further trouble, of which more later). This resonates with McCulloch's (2010: 401) finding that many of the probationers in her small-scale study of community service supervision in Scotland, viewed the process of desistance as beginning after they 'got through' the rigmarole of supervision.

Punishment

Four of the children construed their YOS order as a punishment, with two specifically depicting reparation in this way. Notably however, although Ben and Declan believed that a key purpose of their YOS order was to punish them, they did not experience all of it in this way. The following exchange with 18-year-old Declan is illustrative:

AW: Can you describe to me what being on a YOS order is like, are there any words or feelings that spring to mind?

Declan: *It's not like a punishment, but it is a punishment in a way, a bit annoying.*

AW: *What's annoying about it?*

Declan: *like trying to be on time, coming out of my way here is annoying.*

AW: *And why do you say it is like a punishment but not?*

Declan: *Because it is a punishment, that's what I'm here for. But it's not too bad. I just come here and chat shit. And I like [YOS worker].*

In contrast, returning to 18-year-old Raheem, he had believed that a key purpose of YOS was to provide help, but he interpreted their breach of him for non-compliance, his subsequent imprisonment and 'ridiculous' licence conditions as evidence of their reneging on this obligation, as well as a wider intention to perpetuate his punishment. As he told me:

I think coming to YOS is to set me up, to trap me and put me back in jail...I don't understand the doorstep curfew, like before I got breached for tag as my mum kicked me out of the house. I don't think it's fair that I've got a curfew again as I already had one before I got jail and then I did jail, I've done my time and now I've got a curfew again. Why put me on curfew? It's like they want to put me back in jail again...I feel like it's trying to trip me up.

While he refers to the YOS here, it is notable that throughout the interview he levels blame at particular YOS workers who had let him down because 'she gave me a bad report...she was doing me dirty' and 'she wasn't hearing what I was saying' (and praises others who have provided help and understanding). He seemed to have been hopeful that his new worker could help him, but felt she was no longer on his side following his arrest immediately after a YOS appointment: 'I would have trusted her, she might have been able to help me, but now I know she's with them, there's no loyalty to me'. Such comments raise questions about the notion of the 'therapeutic alliance' in YOS practice (see Chapter 8).

In this sense, it is apparent that children's interactions with their workers was a key determinant of the degree to which they experienced supervision as a punishment or not. While Declan and Ben believed punishment was a key aim of their order, their positive view of the workers and some of the activities led them to attenuate this view. The reverse seemed

to be true for Raheem. This suggests one way in which, as Phoenix (2016: 136) writes, referencing Carlen (1983), ‘regulatory intervention need not be the same as punishment’.

YOS singled out as different from other agencies

The children’s lives were often characterised by involvement with an array of statutory services, whom they commonly perceived as having acted unfairly. Within this context, it was notable that three of the children emphasised that ‘the people at YOT are the only ones I like’. YOS workers were contrasted with those from other mainstream services (often school and children’s social care) because they were the only ones on their ‘side’. Such was the case for 17-year-old Tina, who explained that while social services had withdrawn, implying their involvement was unwelcome anyway, the YOS had been a constant support:

AW: Has the YOS helped with that [staying out of trouble] or do you think it’s something you’ve decided on your own?

Tina: It’s like, the YOT have been there more, I dunno I can’t explain it. ...they’ve [YOS] been there the whole way through, because there was social and that involved and they got off my back and then YOT just carried on, just helped...they’ve been like looking out for me really.

Similarly, Ernest and Malik who both spoke in particularly negative terms about their experience of the police and court (as well as school, in Ernest’s case), contrasted this with their positive YOS interactions. I was particularly interested in such narratives given evidence that negative experiences of professionals, especially the police, can adversely affect children’s engagement with supervision (see Chapters 2 and 4). However, as is illustrated by Ernest below, this is not a foregone conclusion:

...basically on the streets, people just think that people that are working with the law are basically a police guy, you’re no good like, you can’t help me in any way, you might as well arrest me, so. But it’s not like that, people in YOT are like, I find that some of them, actually want to help you, like they wanna get you out of the situation, they want to give you advice and just make you go clean.

Thus, while criminal justice professionals are seen as synonymous with the police in his community, he sees the YOS as different because some of the *people* have been *there* for

him. Crucially, it appears to be the child's worker that determines whether or not such divides can be bridged, as explored later.

Another chance

Just under two-fifths of the children (10 out of 26) portrayed supervision as providing another chance or a 'lucky escape', such was their perceived risk of imprisonment or a more stringent YOS order. Notably, 7 of the 10 children who expressed such views were in Shire YOS. The apparent focus on consequential thinking in supervision here, as discussed in the next section, may be one explanation for this. Many accordingly made reference to feeling 'relieved', 'happy' or 'glad' to have 'got out [of court]' and 'got YOS', and yet saw it as arduous too. Sixteen-year-old Jake's account below was typical in this respect:

AW: What about your experience of being on it, how has it been?

Jake: No, that's about 5 [out of 10 rating],²¹⁸ I don't really like it but obviously I have to do it don't I, but I'm a bit lucky because three of the times I've been arrested for assaults, I've been arrested for affray, and if you get affray on your record you can get sent down for a year, but all the charges got dropped for that, so I got assaults.

AW: So you feel like you've been lucky?

Jake: Yeah, lucky, very lucky.

AW: And you said it's like a 5, is there anything that could be different about it to make it a 10?

AW: No, because it's a ball ache having to do it, but obviously you have to do it don't you?

Ernest, however, was slower to view his YOS order as a welcome reprieve, since he did not see himself to blame for the offence.²¹⁹ He had been scared that the magistrates would 'lock

²¹⁸ As can be observed, Jake rated his experience of the YOS out of 10 (with one being negative and 10 being positive), which was a method I adopted part-way through the research as a means of garnering an overall appraisal of supervision, explained further in Chapter 3.

²¹⁹ As detailed in the previous chapter, he was serving his order for possession with intent to supply class A drugs, which he said

me up away for long...for something I didn't do'. Although he received an 8-month referral order, he had been initially disheartened by this. Nonetheless in time he had to come to view supervision as an opportunity to change:

...I thought it was going to be loooong, like 'I'm doing this for something I didn't do, it's going to go on my record', so at the time I just thought to give up, like, ahhh, yeah, I just thought to give up and go out there and just become a criminal, like, forget YOT, forget the court, forget my family, forget everything, I'm just going to go out there and get money and then leave this country, that's what I was thinking at first. And then I was like, 'naah, there is a better side to life in [town] than this, all these things that are happening for a reason and it's taught me a lesson, so, just try it out, be good, then, came to YOT, saw that [current YOS worker], like, was kind of like, a happening person.

Ernest's account suggests that his gradual acknowledgement of YOS as a positive event was both a personal realisation and linked to the high regard in which he held his YOS worker, of which more later.

In contrast, an eleventh child, 16-year-old Tyrone, was less certain about whether a YOS order represented a 'lucky escape'. Although he noted the helpfulness of YOS, he noted that a custodial sentence would be a shorter and, thus, perhaps 'easier option':

...it's a help until you get tired of YOT, you get tired of it and fed up...I've got to the point where I don't care about my sessions, like I want to pop off my tag, I just don't care because it's all long, but at the same time, you're going to end up in jail and to be honest, if I was to end up in jail now, and have like six months, do three months, it would be less that I've got on this but at the same time, in a way, that might not be how I want it to be.

It is notable that all of but one of the children who depicted supervision as something of a 'lucky escape' also reported that it had been beneficial in other ways, ranging from particular interventions to talking with their YOS worker, as I explore in the next section.²²⁰ This

that he had been intimidated into holding for an older male.

²²⁰ The one exception, Elijah, had only been on his YOS order for a month, which was too soon to judge its helpfulness.

echoes Farrall et al.'s (2014: 126-127) finding that some probationers understood probation as having had a positive impact both because it had spared them from prison and due to what they learnt during the order. As the authors note, while such realisations did not make desistance from crime inevitable, it seemed to contribute to a 'self-awakening' that change was needed. This certainly seemed to be the case for some of the children, although I was unable to assess the long-term impact of such accounts on their behaviour.

The impact of YOS supervision

A key aim of the research was to determine children's views of the helpfulness of YOS supervision and its role in any changes in their lives. Drawing on Farrall's (2002) study of probation, I asked them the following the questions:

- What, if anything, have you learnt on your YOS order?
- What, if anything, has been good or helpful about your YOS order?
- Has your YOS worker done or said anything that helped you? If so what?
- Has the YOS or your YOS worker done or said anything to help you stay out of trouble in the future?
- How, if at all, has your life changed since your YOS order? And, if so, what's made the biggest difference?

The aim of these questions was to gain an insight into the support provided by the YOS and workers that 'went beyond' children's offending and offending-related issues as well as its impact on their lives (Farrall et al., 2014: 124). The last question was designed to explore the wider factors in any life change.

Reflections on supervision – did it help?

The overwhelming majority of the children (23 out of 26) felt that supervision had been helpful in *some way*. Only one child reported that it had not been helpful at all.²²¹ For two other children – Elijah and Luke – they were unclear about the helpfulness of supervision, although both viewed it as having potential to help.²²² The children distinguished between

²²¹ Although, notably, he perceived the wider criminal justice process to have positively affected his behaviour, as explored later.

²²² Elijah had only been on his order a month and my interview with Luke was curtailed due to visiting times in the Young Offenders Institution being cut short, which precluded explicit discussion about the helpfulness of supervision. In this section, I will therefore only refer to the sample of 24 who expressed views about the

the helpfulness of supervision and its impact on their behaviour (offending and drug use). Of those who reported supervision as useful, nearly two-fifths (9 out of 23) believed it done little to effect change in their lives or keep them out of future trouble. Notably, the majority of children taking this view (7 out of 9) were in Shire YOS, although analysis provided no clear and credible explanation for this.²²³ As an example, 18-year-old Daniel reported the helpfulness of the drug safety information provided by the YOS, but said of his life ‘I think it's changed for the worse at the minute’. However, research findings about the impact of probation indicate that it takes time for its benefits to come to fruition (Farrall et al., 2014). There was some evidence of this amongst the children here, as illustrated by 16-year-old Tyrone’s reflections:

I'll have [YOS officer] saying 'yeah, so what's going on?', it's more in your head, without you even realising, but that's when you think of it after it. This was like a year and a half ago but now you think about it now, you realise certain things.

Notions of supervision as ‘planting the seeds of change’ was a common theme in practitioners’ narratives too, as Chapter 6 shows.

As has been found in previous youth justice research (Phoenix and Kelly, 2013), many of the children (12 out of 24) struggled to discuss their specific YOS orders and interventions. Some of them had very little to say about any of the work. Any perceived benefits tended to be briefly recalled and little expanded upon. A case in point was 16-year-old Josh, who initially told me that he had not learnt anything on his order, but with further probing he briefly talked about its helpfulness:

AW: So you've done work about victims and anger management too haven't you? [Josh: Yeah]. So is there anything that you've done that you've thought 'oh, that's quite good' or 'that's made me think'?

Josh: [Nods] actually, probably, yeah, about the victims.

helpfulness of their YOS order.

²²³ The most likely explanation related to that there were a significantly smaller proportion of first time entrants in Shire YOS (13 per cent) compared to City YOS (46 per cent), perhaps suggesting that the Shire YOS sample contained more children who were ‘entrenched’ in their offending and, accordingly, more difficult to help. However, 4 of the 7 children expressing the view that supervision had not helped them were either a first time entrant (2) or serving their first conviction (2), indicating that this was not an adequate explanation.

AW: *So what makes you say the victims?*

Josh: *Umm, I dunno.*

AW: *Don't worry, it's fine to say you don't know. Can you remember what you did in the victim session?*

Josh: *Just, like, thinking like about how the consequences are and everything, and that.*

AW: *And how did you feel that was helpful?*

Josh: *Because it makes you think, like, if you did it again and that.*

It was notable that children who had little to say about supervision often spoke at relative length about their experiences of the police station or court. They also often appeared distant and impassive in supervision sessions, and left hastily. I interpreted this as evidence of the limited meaning of supervision to them, at least at the time. Yet, as Farrall et al. (2014) have convincingly demonstrated in their study of probation, even if the positive impact of supervision is later recognised, probationers find it hard to identify what aspects resonated and why they did at that particular point in time. The same may be true for some of the children here.

Unfamiliarity with supervision may also have been a factor in some children's limited accounts. Seven out of the 12 children who struggled to discuss their order were subject to supervision for the first time. Practitioners reported that children new to the youth justice arena often felt bewildered by the 'alien' nature of YOS supervision, as Chapter 6 shows. Children in such a position may therefore find it harder to absorb and reflect on their experiences, since they are trying to make sense of these themselves. This may be particularly true for those children who have special educational needs, including learning and communication difficulties, as are prevalent amongst the youth justice population (Bryan et al., 2007). In this respect, seven of the children who had little to say about supervision had social, emotional and behaviour difficulties, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

For other children, supervision was evidently meaningful. They were quick to highlight the positive impact of supervision, but found it difficult to identify how and why it had been so. Tina emphasised at the outset of our interview that her YOS worker was ‘the one that’s helped me’ but found it rather harder to explain why:

A lot of things have helped me with the YOT, it’s just I’ve been on it that long, I can’t remember yesterday, never mind all of the other bleeding appointments...It’s like the YOT have been there more, I dunno, I can’t explain it...I really don’t know how to say it.

This very much echoes the findings of Farrall et al. (2014: 123-124) who describe ‘the somewhat ephemeral nature that prevent unambiguous identification of exactly which benefits accrued to probationers through the work of their officer’.

What helped most?

This section primarily explores children’s experiences of one-to-one supervision, since this was my main area of research interest. I focus on the principal approaches employed in supervisory interactions in the two YOSs: *interventions* and *talking*. Notably, the YOSs placed different emphasis on these: in Shire YOS, interventions were the dominant means of working with children, while workers in City YOS tended to focus on talking.²²⁴ It is important to note that in attempting to distinguish between *interventions* and *talking*, I recognise that such clear boundaries do not necessarily exist in practice (not least because interventions usually involve some talking!). The key distinction is that meetings using *interventions* made use of activities or props, such as worksheets, games, and picture cards, and were more overtly structured. In comparison, work that centred on *talking* did not make use of interactive tools and were loosely structured (nonetheless it was evident that workers guided such discussions, often with particular outcomes in mind).

²²⁴ Notably such approaches seem to have evolved, or were driven by an individual team manager, rather than being a deliberate strategic decision. In both YOSs, individual workers departed from the prevailing approach. These matters are discussed further in Chapter 6. In addition, as I detail in Chapter 3, the reader should be aware that my understanding of the prevailing approaches in the two YOSs was shaped by access to supervision sessions, which particularly in Shire YOS tended to focus on several supportive YOS workers (although the data gathered through observation has been considered alongside casefile and interview data to gain a more complete picture).

Interventions

Nearly half of the children (11 out of 24) recounted that interventions had helped in *some* way, with several highlighting the particular positive effect of such work on their lives.²²⁵ Of these, nine of the children were under supervision with Shire YOS, which is unsurprising given that they made greater use of this approach.

Anger management and consequential thinking

For several children, anger management work was a key benefit of supervision. Both Ben and Jake viewed such interventions as instrumental in supporting their behaviour change; while Dylan seemed more ambivalent, reporting that he had learnt ‘how to control my anger a bit more’. For others, like Josh, such work was of no use because ‘I didn’t feel like I needed anger management or anything in the first place’ (although of course, some may describe interventions as unnecessary because they are reluctant to confront the difficult issues they raise).

Ben told me at the outset of the interview that his order was ‘helping me like stay out of trouble’, viewing the interventions he had completed on anger management as central to this:

AW: So what kinds of things is it doing to help you stay out of trouble?

Ben: They basically like sit down and do loads of sheets with me and like on the phone and that, and they tell me like what will happen next if I get into trouble...but they helped me like figure why I get angry, who it affects, and like the overall consequence of it.

AW: Has it helped you to not get angry as much or to stop things happening when you do get angry?

Ben: I do get angry quite often but not as much as I was before, like, and it has helped me a lot, do you know what I mean?

It is notable, however, that Ben made reference to the significance of understanding ‘what will happen next if I get into trouble’. He reiterated this later:

²²⁵ A further three children (Miles, Jaylen and Kordel) were largely noncommittal about the benefit of specific interventions, equivocally stating that the work had been helpful in response to prompting.

It's been good; it gives you insight to what it could lead up to if I don't stop with my anger and that, and obviously it has helped me...We done a sheet ages ago on consequences of what things that could happen, and I've been told as well that if I do anything now I will get put in prison for whatever I do.

Similarly, 16-year-old Jake reported that ‘...I've done anger management and that, and it's stopped me getting angry a lot’, believing this would help him stay out of trouble in the future. Yet, he identified the most helpful aspect of supervision as the realisation, through conversations with his YOS worker, that he risked a custodial sentence if he continued offending.²²⁶

The apparent meaningfulness of such work to the children here is notable given that commentators have argued that the prospect of incarceration is unlikely to have a deterrent effect, given that children's offending behaviour is characterised by impulsivity (Bateman, 2016; Hibbert and Stanley in evidence to House of Commons Justice Committee, 2009). Moreover, even though children may see the rationale of such arguments, they may struggle to apply these when faced with adversity (France et al., 2012). In this respect, we cannot know whether the children were able to translate such realisations into desistance, since this study did not track their offending. However, as Farrall et al. have argued with respect to probation, it may be that such insights nurture a ‘self-awakening’ (2014: 125-127), whereby children become aware of where their current path might lead and the availability of other options.

Several others highlighted consequential thinking as the most helpful aspect of supervision. As Dylan told me: ‘Yeah, it's all been helpful, the consequences, thinking through the consequences before I do things. I didn't used to do that’. Sixteen-year-old Josh commented similarly, in reference to work he had completed on victim impact, that it was useful ‘thinking like about the how the consequences are and everything...because it makes you think, like, if you did it again and that’. He said that he had not thought in this way before. It is worth noting that these children had very little to say about their supervisory experience overall, which, as outlined above, I interpreted as evidence of its limited meaning to them.

²²⁶ This was Jake's first conviction, thus arguably he would have been unlikely to receive a custodial sentence for a subsequent similar offence (assault).

Yet, it is significant that this was one of the few aspects they singled out as useful.²²⁷ It has been well argued that work focusing on children's thinking-skills risks pathologising their offending (Phoenix, 2009) and overlooks the important role of context in their behaviour (Johns et al., 2017). But, arguably, there is merit in such work if it is offered as part of support focusing on children's wider lives, is strengths-based and non-stigmatising.

Staying safe

For many of the children, the main value of intervention work was that they felt better able to stay safe and protect themselves as a consequence of the information imparted in sessions – regarding drugs, stop and search, and relationships. Often such work related to the child's offence. A case in point was 17-year-old Chris, who was completing a 12-month referral order for offences committed under the influence of alcohol and drugs:²²⁸

AW: Is there anything that has been good or helpful about the YOS order?

Chris: It has been helpful, like [YOS worker], some of the talks we've had have been helpful, but I knew it all before like, so just being reminded of it's just helpful.

AW: Are there any examples of anything that you've talked about with [YOS worker] that you've found helpful?

Chris: Just about drugs and stuff and being safe when going out at night time and stuff. I've always thought I was safe and stuff but when [YOS worker] talks about some of the examples, it kind of reminds myself that I could be doing more to be keeping myself safe when I'm going out.

In City YOS, a lot of intervention work was undertaken through groupwork activity (rather than one-to-one sessions),²²⁹ where much of the content resembled personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE). This involved workshops on rights, responsibilities, sexual health and first aid, as well as legislation that was particularly pertinent to their lives,

²²⁷ Although it remains to be seen whether and to what extent they were able to put these lessons into practice outside of the YOS environment. Dylan for example was remanded into custody for a further offence shortly before his community order ended.

²²⁸ As detailed in Chapter 4, Chris's offences included criminal damage and two counts of assaulting a police officer.

²²⁹ In City YOS, children's one-to-one sessions were often paused (depending on the intensity of order) while they completed the groupwork programmes. Children also completed intervention-focused work in one-to-one sessions, such as on victim impact, but the majority of such activity appeared to take place in a group setting.

including joint enterprise and stop and search. Some of the children found this particularly useful. As 16-year-old Malik reflected:

Malik: Sometimes it can teach you certain things innit. Like when I was on that thing I learnt about like joint enterprise innit with [programme]... Yeah you know that was probably the most helpful thing as before I never used to know about joint enterprise.

AW: So how has, kind of, knowing about joint enterprise helped you?

Malik: It's just knowledge innit, it's good to know about the law and certain things. Know what you can and can't do.

Often such information was not new to children, but as with Chris above, they reflected that it had been helpful to be reminded. Others, like 16-year-old Tyrone, were sceptical of the use of being told information they already knew: 'cos the sessions to be honest, the sessions we have are informing you, but they don't help, it's nothing that you don't know'.

It was notable that four of the eleven children who reported the usefulness of interventions, highlighted the work that they had completed on alcohol and/or drugs in particular. Daniel, for example, was doubtful that supervision would *help* him to stop offending:

I do try but I just see it as an annoyance in my day sort of thing, that's all it is.

Personally me, it doesn't help me, I don't know why, I don't really like pay attention to any of the stuff.

However, he felt that he had *learnt* about drug safety during supervision, which he valued: '[I've] learnt a lot about drugs and drugs safety, that's useful information that I've received from the YOT... Because I take a lot of drugs and it's nice to know what I'm doing or what I'm taking'.

Optimising engagement?

The delivery method for interventions appeared to shape children's perspectives on this aspect of supervision too. Several interviewees were particularly critical of what they regarded as the trivial nature of intervention work. As Ryan commented:

It's dead annoying because it's like doing child work, I'm treated like a four-year-old...it's just wasting time, it's not going to help, well I can't see it helping but it could...They ask me what words mean, stuff like that and I've got to label bodies, which is ridiculous.

He particularly wanted help with controlling his anger, noting that 'I wanted something that would actually help me like learn'. The inadequacy of interventions was such that he reported that supervision was adversely affecting his mental well-being. As he told me: 'I don't mean it in a strange way but I kind of feel like shooting myself when I come to sessions, like once a week it makes me want to (pause) yeah...I was depressed so that's why I started smoking...and this makes me feel depressed'. He had accordingly asked for his supervision appointments to be more challenging, which they had translated into giving him weekly rather than fortnightly appointments, which potentially risked exacerbating his emotional ill-health.

Lennox was similarly critical of the perceived futility of some intervention work. He had received a warning for disrupting a groupwork session, which seemed to stem from his perception that it was 'just pointless' making posters:

Lennox: How was that going to change a criminal, drawing a picture? It was just a waste of time.

AW: And what did you think about getting a warning from it?

Lennox: It got me more mad, it was wanting me to go out there and do something stupid and say like forget YOT.

AW: So that's how it made you feel, just 'forget YOT'?

Lennox: Forget YOT, just like I couldn't care if I committed a crime now.

As is evident, he identifies his frustration with the session and subsequent warning as a potential stimulus for re-offending and disengagement with the YOS. Coincidentally, at this time he was allocated a new YOS worker due to staff turnover, with whom he quickly built a

close relationship, which seemed to provide an impetus for his ongoing participation, as discussed later.

However for several children, the interactive nature of intervention work was the aspect of supervision to which they responded and valued. As a case in point, 14-year-old Andrew was often withdrawn in supervision, avoiding eye contact and giving short answers of just a few words to his YOS worker.²³⁰ Yet during the two intervention sessions I observed, involving photo cards and the use of a short film respectively, he appeared far more engaged; his face lit-up and he gave longer responses. Notably, these were the interventions he recalled and described as helpful in interview. This suggests the importance of tailoring supervisory activity to children's cognitive abilities, in line with responsivity element of the RNR model (Andrews, Bonta and Hoge, 1990), and as discussed further in the following chapter.

An additional interpretation was that for some children, the meaning derived from such activities related to their role in aiding the development of a positive supervisory relationship and YOS engagement, rather than direct learning. Thus, for 16-year-old Luke, who had been on YOS orders from the age of 12, intervention work seemed to serve as an important stepping stone to gaining trust before the 'real work' could begin: 'I've had to do some of the games again. I've done every bit of work that YOS have got, so now it is about talking more, and sorting out my problems. At the beginning I wouldn't tell them anything, but I've got to know them and trust them'. However, if such work is to act as a vehicle for trust and rapport building, it likely needs to be experienced as both *engaging* and *meaningful*.

Talking

A majority of the children (15 out of 24) highlighted talking to their YOS worker as the most helpful aspect of supervision, with it appearing to act as a conduit for multiple forms of support. This adds weight to previous research findings that young people attach significant importance to talking with their supervisor when it comprises a meaningful interaction (Shapland, Bottoms and Muir, 2012; Barry, 2007; McCulloch, 2005). Those who valued talking were split broadly evenly between the two YOSs (8 in Shire YOS and 7 in City YOS), which is noteworthy given that Shire YOS appeared to place less emphasis on this. For some, like 15-year-old Jaylen, talking was a valued source of advice:

²³⁰ Although as I note in Chapter 3, Andrew was one of several children who seemed, understandably, particularly conscious of my presence and thus his reticence may have been aggravated during observation.

AW: *How helpful or not has your YOS order been?*

Jaylen: *Some stuff was helpful...the stuff with mum and school, since then me and mum's relationship is better and I'm doing better at school, before my punctuality was awful and now it's improving.*

AW: *So what about your YOS order has helped with those things?*

Jaylen: *Talking about it, If I'm late for school constantly, I know the reason why I'm late, but sitting down and talking to someone about the reasons why I'm late and what I can do about it, it helps, I think 'I can do that'.*

He later told me that his life changed had much for the better during his YOS order, reflecting that: 'Just having someone to talk to about it [has helped]. If I didn't have someone to talk to about it, I would be doing the same things'.

For others, it was a gateway to practical help, which was also interpreted as evidence that their worker cared, akin to the findings of Rex's (1999) study of probationers' experiences of supervision. As 16-year-old Malik reflected:

Malik: *Cos, like [YOS worker] she actually cares innit, and my old YOT worker, they actually cared, so it's not like talking to a YOT worker, it's talking to someone that I know.*

AW: *How can you tell that they care? What kind of stuff do they do?*

Malik: *Like if I ask [YOS worker] to do anything for me within reason she'll do it, like, I don't know, you can just tell someone cares about something, she always says that 'I care about my young people'.*

Children not only valued the advice and assistance provided by their YOS worker, but also the opportunity to *talk to* them. This accords with Farrall et al.'s (2014:128) observation that the positive impact of probation 'was as much about what they [probationers] had the opportunity to say to their officer as to what their officer said or did for them'. It seemed that children valued just having *someone* to speak *to* about their lives, often because they lacked

sufficient opportunities to do so with other adults around them. As 15-year-old Lennox explained:

AW: And the one to one sessions, do you feel like you've learnt anything from them? [Lennox: A little bit]. OK, have you got any examples of stuff you've learnt?

Lennox: I dunno, it's just like every week you've got someone to talk to about how your week has gone, stuff like that, what you've been doing.

AW: Do you feel like it's helped in any way having that?

Lennox: Dunno, people, don't get enough attention, just the way you get your socialisation, one-to-one with someone, if you need help with something they can help you, so yeah.

It is notable that Lennox appreciated talking to his YOS officer about his *general life*, as well as the practical help she provided. His case notes show that his meetings with her primarily focused on his personal troubles and ambitions, including the relationship with his girlfriend, coping with the loss of friends and relatives to knife crime and progressing his interest in football coaching.²³¹ He highlighted that little time had been spent focusing on his offence, telling me that 'I just don't like to bring it up...so with [YOS worker] she tries to divert speaking about it, but she has to sometimes'. Sheldon too recounted the helpfulness of talking about 'everything and anything' with his previous YOS worker:

...like with [previous YOS worker] I used to talk about everything, like the baby, when I was going out with [girlfriend], how me and [girlfriend] have been and shit, but now with that other woman we just talk about my behaviour and stuff... [previous YOS worker] did help me because I could talk about anything with her.

The importance of 'proper friendly conversations like about college and stuff, and just life' was a common theme in interviews. What children seemed to value here was both a listening ear about personal matters, and discussion of life experiences that were unrelated to their

²³¹ I was unable to observe any of Lennox's supervision meetings with the YOS worker to whom he refers here because she was concerned that it would adversely affect their interactions, particularly because she was his third YOS worker during the course of his order. However, I did observe a meeting with his first YOS worker, which involved a worksheet focused on victim empathy.

offending. This may have served several valuable purposes. Drawing on the helping relationship literature, such dialogue is likely to have communicated the worker's personal interest in children's lives, beyond the remit of 'offending behaviour', indicating their genuineness, and providing the opportunity for demonstration of care and empathy, all of which are fundamental relational building blocks. From a psychosocial perspective, children's sharing of their troubles and anxieties may have acted as a form of *containment*, whereby the worker is able to carry and temper the difficult emotions involved. As explained in Chapter 2, over time, such tolerant and understanding responses from another may be internalised by the recipient. Viewed through an attachment lens, helping children to feel able to talk openly and, by implication, understood may build *epistemic trust*, and, in turn, increase their ability to participate meaningfully with supervision, accept constructive advice and foster resilience.

As suggested in the literature, such conventional topics of conversation may also help to convey and confirm children's essential normality, increasing their self-worth and enabling them to better recognise their own (and potentially others') 'human-ness', aiding desistance (Seal and Harris, 2016: 132). In this respect, children valued conversations about their plans and hopes for the future too. Ernest stressed the benefit of supervisory interactions that 'assist in the building of a better life rather than simply try to contain risk' (Ward, 2010: 55):

...let's say I came here and every day we just talked about drugs and me getting arrested and all those things, it would just play on my mind, and we don't just talk about negative things, cos if you always talk negative, then you're going to think negative, so you talk a bit positive, and you say 'well this has happened but how can you move on from it?' ... like all of this is basically to show me that like, cool, you've done things in the past, but there is a better way, like, you can try, go to school, get an education, get a job, there's a better life out there.

Thus it seemed that for some children, talking with their YOS worker helped them both to make sense of their current lives and see the opportunity for a better one. Such narratives demonstrate the potential for YOS workers to act as 'normal-smiths' (Lofland, 1969: 212), whereby they 'provid[ing] help to offenders to convey to them that they can desist from offending' (Farrall et al., 2014: 63).

However, not all of the children were positive about talking. For 13-year-old Kieran, talking was ‘boring’. Sixteen-year-old James seemed to feel it was similarly tedious: ‘...we’ve just been sat here for an hour and half talking about healthy relationships. And I hate talking. I’d rather be doing things like playing pool’. Even for Jaylen, who found talking to his YOS worker particularly helpful, his meetings were too long as ‘there was just so much talk, it dragged a bit’. Whereas for 15-year-old Caleb he was critical of talking because ‘it’s like my privacy is being invaded’. In this respect, both Luke and Matthew, valued talking with their worker but found this difficult too. As Luke told his YOS worker while I was in the car ‘you mess up my head sometimes with all your talking’. As I note above, it was also evident from observation that some children struggled with ‘just talking’, preferring interactive interventions (of which more in Chapter 6).

YOS workers and supervisory relationships

A key aim of the research was to examine the operation and effects of the supervisory relationship. In this section, I consider children’s perceptions of their YOS worker, including their helpfulness and role in any positive change. To this end, I asked children whether their YOS worker had done or said anything to help them; how well they had got on with their worker and the reasons for this (and which they got on best and least well with, if they had more than one); to describe their ideal worker (using flash cards); and what impact it would have on their supervisory experience if they did not like their worker.

Almost all of the children gave a positive appraisal of their YOS worker. Raheem was the only child who was explicitly critical of his current supervisor, while Sheldon had recently been allocated a new worker whom he ‘didn’t really know’; however, both described good relationships with at least one previous worker. Notably, while Shire YOS children tended to have good relationships with their primary YOS worker, with whom they met regularly, nearly half (7 out of 15) were either disparaging (3) or equivocal (4) about their case manager, whom they saw infrequently (on average once a month, although it could be more or less often depending on the worker). This was not an issue in City YOS, since children only had one YOS worker (although some saw specialist staff too, such as the substance misuse worker).

While all of the children had a good relationship with their current or previous worker, it was evident that these lay along a continuum, with some more beneficial than others. For the

majority, a good relationship comprised getting along with their worker, which they directly linked to both formal and substantive compliance (Robinson and McNeill, 2008). Dylan, like many others, said that he would stop attending appointments if he did not like his worker: 'I probably wouldn't end up coming if I didn't get on with him'. Some children, like James, conceded that they would formally comply but would not actively engage with sessions: 'I would hate working with them and I wouldn't want to go, I would have to go, but I wouldn't speak to them and I would make their job harder'. Linked to this, a number of children said they would be disinclined to be honest or open in sessions, as illustrated by Ben: 'I would be less likely to tell the truth, I would be less likely to tell them whatever's happened, or whatever they ask'. This resonates with previous youth justice research findings regarding the centrality of the supervisory relationship to engagement (Phoenix and Kelly, 2013; Gray, 2013a; Ipsos MORI, 2010).

For these children, the good effect of such relationships appeared to be limited to compliance, at least at the time. Ryan, for example, said that his YOS workers had neither done or said anything that had been helpful. Yet he got on well with his primary YOS worker and emphasised that 'I wouldn't do it [supervision] if the reverse was true. [YOS worker] tries to [help], I can tell she tries and she wants to; she does, it's just the work that doesn't do anything, it just annoys me'. Other children, such as Josh, seemed ambivalent about the helpfulness of supervision (as noted earlier).²³² However, he liked his YOS worker, and this seemed important to him insofar as it had made supervision a better experience: 'He's a nice guy isn't he? Funny as well. Easy to get along with...I dunno, it would have dragged if it wasn't someone who I got along with'.

For other children, the supervisory relationship appeared to be of much more significance to them and their ability to change their behaviour. Lennox told me that his YOS worker had played a central role in the improvements in his life:

AW: Ok, so do you feel like your life has changed since you've been on your YOS order?

Lennox: Kinda, positive.

²³² As detailed above, Josh struggled to comment on his supervisory experience and said little in the several sessions I observed. My sense was that the process was of limited meaning to him.

AW: *And what do you think has been responsible for those changes?*

Lennox: *My YOT worker, she's helped me out.*

With his worker's support he had been able to have his order revoked early for good progress, achieved a place at college and begun coaching at a football club. He reflected that it had been particularly significant that she always had made time for him:

AW: *Is there anything you would pick out as being helpful, as stuff she's said or done for you?*

Lennox: *Um, she would never push me to the side, she always makes me her main what's the word? AW: Focus? Lennox: Yeah.*

AW: *Ok, so what kind of stuff has she done then that makes you think that?*

Lennox: *Dunno, she just seems like she's got all the time in the world to me, that's it to be honest. If I need her there for a phone call or something she can always be there.*

Lennox appears to have interpreted this as evidence of his worker's especial concern for him as a person, a factor that previous research has found to increase probationers' commitment to move away from crime (Rex, 1999; Leibrich, 1994).

With several children, there was clear evidence of 'normal-smithing' at work (Lofland, 1969: 212; Farrall et al., 2014: 63; Rungay, 2004: 416). Ernest, for example, highlighted that his YOS worker had written him a positive court report:

AW: *So what kinds of things has he helped you with or given you advice about?*

Ernest: *So, first of all, from the time I became arrested, he's been my mentor, so that kind of helps my case, he wrote a really good report for me, to the court, yeah, when the judge read what [YOS worker] had written for me, he was like, 'ah, this has really changed my aspects of thinking about you', so, yeah, he gave me a chance.*

He later described a sense of empowerment and hope after seeing his YOS worker: ‘And I don't know how [YOS worker] helps me, but he just helps me. Like every time I leave [YOS worker] I just feel different, I get out of here and look around [town], and I feel different, all positive’.

As another case in point, Tina transformed during the time I spent in the YOS, shifting from reticent and withdrawn to chatty and engaged, confident and looking significantly healthier. She attributed this in part to the YOS ‘being there’ for her throughout, and stressed that her YOS worker was ‘the one that’s helped me’. Aside from the worker’s honesty and listening skills, it was apparent that Tina valued the genuine care and concern that she had demonstrated by going the extra mile:

Tina: I like her because I can speak to her about anything and she'll just listen and be honest back.... say if I ask her to do something she's not the person that will let you down, she'll do it all the time, so I trust her.

AW: And you said that she cares about you, so what has she done to show that?

Tina: Cos, I dunno, I've had her for that long if she goes to a police meeting and my name would get brought up, she'd be like worried and stuff so she'd get straight on the phone [to me].

However, returning to 18-year-old Raheem, his perception was of one YOS worker acting as ‘deviant-smith’ (Lofland, 1969: 214) because of the poor pre-sentence report she wrote about him, which he interpreted as evidence that ‘she was doing me dirty’ and ‘hungry to send me to jail’.

Structure

For a number of children, a primary benefit of supervision was that it provided structure to their lives;²³³ a view that was echoed by professionals (Chapter 6). Some particularly appreciated that YOS activities had supplied something to do. Tina described that attending girls’ group at the same time each week ‘for a few hours to keep me occupied’ had been one of several aspects of supervision that had been of ‘help with getting back on the road that I

²³³ It should be noted that while group work and some one-to-one appointments were held at the same time each week (or fortnight) there was a high degree of variation. Some workers attached particular importance to meeting with children at the same time each work, but this was less apparent with others.

needed to be on'. James, who was critical of all other aspects of his order, suggested that reparation had been the only benefit: 'reparation, I like it as it gets me out of the house...it's kept me out of trouble'. More explicitly, Tyrone identified that attending the YOS had constrained his involvement in additional offending:

...I can't lie, if there was no such thing as the YOT, it would have been way worse, everything would have been way worse...because in a way, YOT keeps you against your will, and sometimes, you won't see it when you're 13, 14 but it kind of slows you down in your tracks from doing something worse, if you know what I'm saying... like you've got to think about 'oh, I've got YOT today' everyday, like you wouldn't be thinking about that, you'd just be doing what you're doing, no consequences, you'd just be trying to dodge the police, they'd be nothing kind of holding you in place....but without even realising, this is what I'm saying, that is the good thing that comes out of it.

For Dylan, the significance of supervision related not just to the obligation to attend appointments, but also the YOS's organisation of a college place for him:

AW: OK, so would you say things have things changed at all over the past year? Or has everything been roughly the same?

Dylan: It's changed because I wasn't going to any education or anything like that and I go to education now, so that's changed...I had no choice really, I had to do what they said or I could have gone to jail...I got kicked out of school, didn't really go to school, just hanging around with people that got into trouble a lot, and that's exactly what I did. And then the incident happened and YOT sorted it out for me really. They put a bit of structure into my life and gave me a timetable.

Related to the structure provided by supervision, a number of the children highlighted their experience of 'being on tag'. All described it in negative terms, including 'horrible' and 'bad'. Fifteen-year-old Caleb indicated that being on tag was 'difficult' because of the associated stigma and discomfort, as well as the restriction it placed on his time: 'You feel like a pigeon. It's irritating, it cuts my foot. It's not nice having to be on tag; you can't stay out anywhere; you've always got to be checking the time'. However, Tyrone and Miles identified

that the experience, whilst unwelcome, had also been beneficial because it ‘slows you down’. As Miles reflected:

AW: What was being on tag like?

Miles: Shit, but it made me sort my head out, it made me think more. [AW: What was bad about it?]. You’ve got to be in at 7, you can’t go out.

AW: But it sounds like it was quite good as well?

Miles: Yeah. My dad weren’t worrying as I used to go missing for weekends, days on end, he didn’t know where I was, cos I wouldn’t tell no-one or anything, and then I’d go home feeling rough, go into school, and taking all my anger out on my school because I didn’t want to be there.

Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory and subsequent developments of it (Mouzelis, 2008) are a helpful lens through which to view the children’s narratives. Giddens (1984) sees the relationship between structure and agency as one of duality, where structure is both the medium of human action (internal to the actor) and the outcome of it (external to the actor), through the internalised routine of social life.²³⁴ Central to his theory of structuration is the notion of ‘routinisation’, an unconscious commitment to ‘habitual modes of activity’ as a means of achieving ‘ontological security’. He observes that in situations of extreme disruption, which give rise to ‘radical ontological insecurity’, actors are forced to reflect on how to respond (i.e. change) and reintroduce order, and thus have some control over their choices (1984: 60-64). His notion of ‘the dialectic of control’, sees subordinate actors as able to influence those who are dominant through the resources available to them, in an continually shifting balance of power (1984: 16). Understood in this way, the benefit some children derived from compliance, would be explained by their internalisation and subsequent reproduction of the routinised supervisory structure, suggesting their legitimisation of it. Some of the children’s attribution of their positive change to such structure could be seen as evidence of the effects of disorientation that some experienced as a result of their offending behaviour (of which more below), which may have provided further impetus to seek refuge in the stability of the supervisory routine and move away from offending.

However, this is a somewhat narrow view of change (in this case, desistance), suggesting it as only possible in the context of disrupting events. Giddens' theory is also unable to account for why some children reluctantly adhered to supervision, feeling they had little choice to do otherwise in light of the power imbalance over which they perceived they had little control (thus conferring little legitimacy on it).²³⁵

Building on Giddens, Mouzelis' (2008) theory of dualism sees agency and structure as distinct. Mouzelis (2008) presents a more complex view of the constitution of structure, identifying not only institutional structures (i.e. rules/ norms) as in Giddens' model, but also those that are relational or figurational (i.e. interrelationships between actors) and dispositional (Bordieu's (1990) *habitus* i.e. internalised social structures). Actors are able to make choices and exert influence, but their capacity to do so is shaped by the interplay of a number of factors over time, these are: external (i.e. the objective dimension) and internal (i.e. the subjective dimension, in the form of internalised dispositions) structural constraints and enablers; the degree of power one has relative to other actors (based on economic, political, social or symbolic capital); and interactions, both as internal reflexive conversation with oneself and external dialogue with other actors (Mouzelis, 2008: 192-213).

Farrall, Bottoms and Shapland (2010: 553) take this further, emphasising 'that actors' own perceptions of both the institutional structures and their immediate surroundings are what then guide their "choices"; such perceptions will be founded both on their previous experiences as well as how they see themselves. As they go on to explain, there is thus potential that in trying to desist, an actor may 'also start to change their own perceptions of what those structures are, how they are valued, and their personal identity in relation to these structures' (2010: 553). Seen through this lens, the children's adherence to the supervisory structure and its perceived positive effect, might be explained as the upshot of an interplay of a variety of external and internal factors, such as: recognition of their lack of autonomy vis-a-vis the criminal justice apparatus; changes in personal relationships, such as with family and partners; motivation to desist; the movement towards a positive view of supervision as harbouring potential to help, and a subsequent shift in self-narrative as someone who is trying

²³⁴ For Giddens (1984), structure refers to rules/ norms and resources.

²³⁵ Giddens' structuration theory is also unable to account for why other children were unable to participate in the routine of supervision, owing to the adversity of their lives, or perhaps their disinclination towards it.

to change. This provides a much more cogent model for making sense of the children's narratives about structure.

Wider forces of change

While many of the children indicated the helpfulness of supervision, other factors had often been equally, if not significantly more, important in any positive change.

Penal and social welfare processes

Particularly notable was the number of children who spoke about the sobering effect of their arrest and subsequent appearance at court, even if they were not able to realise the benefits of this at the time. As a case in point, 16-year-old Miles was serving his third community order, having been charged with 11 previous offences in two years since he entered the youth justice system. His Asset assessment noted that 'he found court upsetting and was tearful during sentencing, but this does not appear to have affected his progress towards desistance'. However, at the point of interview six-months into the order, his behaviour was reported to have improved dramatically, which he linked to his experience of court:

AW: We talked about this a bit at the beginning, but what's been the biggest change in your life so far?

Miles: Just keeping out of trouble and not going down that road anymore because I've done enough for me age anyway and I can't be bothered going down that road.

AW: and what do you think has made you decide to do that?

Miles: Because standing in front of that judge made me learn.

AW: What was it like going to court? [Miles: Not nice.] What was not nice about it?

Miles: Just standing in the dock.

Although he identified several other factors in his positive change, including alternative education provision, YOS provision, including tag, and a more stable home life, his court

experience seems to have acted as something of a ‘trigger’. For Tina, it was children’s social care rather than criminal justice processes that prompted her to change:

AW: So what do you think has made the biggest difference so far, because you’ve clearly changed a lot?

Tina: Uh, what it was, it was when they had a meeting, it might have been last year or the year before, and they said, if I didn’t change my ways, my little brother would have got took off my mum, so it started from there. It was like a family support meeting, there was YOT workers there, there was police there.

Parallels can be seen in the children’s narratives with Lofland’s (1969) work on the potential of disorientating events (such as personal crises as well as criminal justice practices, like those above) in identity change. Such experiences not only make an individual vulnerable to the adoption of a deviant identity, but, when accompanied by social support, can also facilitate their movement towards a ‘normal identity’ by way of ‘have[ing] reached bottom’, thus ‘promot[ing] disaffection with deviance’ (1969: 252-260). But as with other children, it took time for Tina to translate the recognition that she needed to change into reality, as well as additional support, including from the YOS.

Agency and maturity

A number of the children highlighted their personal responsibility for changing their lives, often relating this to having ‘grown up’ (Rutherford, 1992). Returning to Tina, she emphasised that a key factor in her progress ‘is myself as well’, reflecting: ‘[getting in trouble] It’s not worth it, I’d rather just get on with it [life]...I think I grew up’. Miles, similarly, indicated the role of personal agency and maturity in the improvements to his life: ‘I’ve done enough for me age anyway and I can’t be bothered going down that road’. The ‘hassle factor’ of criminal justice involvement also seemed to play a role in their decision to stop offending, echoing Barry’s research (2007: 416).

Nonetheless, as illustrated by Ernest, it was evident that children required stability in order to recognise and capitalise on opportunities for ‘self-awakening’:

AW: So how do you think you’ve changed say over the past year since you’ve been involved with the YOS?

Ernest: *I've gotten more mature....Basically, it's like this, when I'm in school yeah, I feel secure, I'm getting my education, I'm doing something for my future, I'm interacting with other people, which is good for communication, teachers are helping me, they are showing me things, I basically feel like I'm secure, I can go home and feel safe and wake up and come back to school the next day, but when you don't go to school and you're outside, and you're on the streets, you realise the reality of life, like, without money you can't buy things, without knowledge you can't really, how do I say it, you can't really do anything.*

AW: *OK. So, going back to this [life map] then, things were going down, where are things now?*

Ernest: *So, I pulled my confidence back up, moved by bad friends away, what else, got myself together, and then I'm trying to get into college and I'm trying to do good things for myself and I'm thinking positive and being optimistic, so yeah.*

His talk of the importance of 'security' in change is notably reminiscent of the attachment concept of the 'secure base' as a foundation for positive outcomes (Bowlby, 1973; Harvey, 2007; Ansbro, 2019). This underlines the role of children's wider circumstances in shaping their ability to move away from offending.

Social processes

Half (7 out of 14) of the children who reported positive change in their lives, highlighted the central role played by the wider social context, in accordance with probation research (Farrall, 2002; McCulloch, 2005). Sixteen-year-old Tyrone, who had served YOS orders almost continuously since the age of 13, had seen an 11-month gap between his previous and most recent conviction. Although he perceived supervision to have been significant in this respect, he credited his mother in particular:

To be honest it's always my mum, cos if my mum weren't about then boy like yeah, like I'm a good person but at the same time, I wouldn't want to be doing good, so much that I would probably be doing crazy things than what I was doing before, like I wouldn't really be thinking or caring, but right now, I've got my mum and she's having a child, I've already got brothers and sisters, there's things what I've

already done and yeah, it's not gone well, so how can I make it better? Even if I've got to make things better not by the greatest ways, I can still make things better.

For several other children, while supervision had been helpful, the key arbiters of change in their lives lay elsewhere, often in the form of new intimate relationships, mirroring Barry's (2007) findings. Seventeen-year-old Chris who had only been convicted once reflected on the limited impact of his YOS order since 'the incident was a one off, I think I've not really changed that much, just more aware of the consequences, just more aware really'. Yet, he explained that his life had become more stable: 'probably [due to my] girlfriend, because I've not really had time to mess around or anything'. Likewise, 16-year-old Adam, reported that 'I found my girlfriend and things have been getting a lot better' (he also highlighted the positive influence of school).

Summary

This chapter sought firstly to examine the implications for supervision of children's perspectives on their offending, sanction and future. I found that children tended to use neutralisations for their offending, enabling them to maintain a positive sense of self (Matza, 1964, Maruna, 2001). Most articulated conventional visions for their future lives, but seemed uncertain whether they would be able to achieve these. Related to this, the concept of identity change seemed irrelevant to some of the children, who consistently demonstrated conformist narratives and had few, if any, previous offences. Collectively, this suggests the need for a subtle, yet significant, adaption to desistance thinking with children: to focus on nurturing children's existing and provisional positive self-identities and visions, rather than on the replacement or reconstruction of their self-identity. This underlines the critical importance of empathetic relationships through which practitioners are able to appreciate, yet gently challenge children's neutralisations (rather than viewing them as faulty thinking in need of responsabilisation), foster their redeeming values and future aspirations, and facilitate opportunities to put these into practice. Although children displayed mixed views about the fairness of their sanction, they were near unified in their resignation to 'doing YOS', which seemed to represent dull compulsion, rather than true legitimacy (Bottoms and Tankebe, 2012).

The second aim was to investigate children's views of the helpfulness and meaning of supervision. In this respect, the children generally described supervision as 'something to get

through'. Yet, this masked a diversity of views as to its value, with some characterising it as a 'another chance', several as 'punishment' and others seeing the YOS as the 'only ones on my side'. The overwhelming view was that supervision had helped in *some way*, yet they often struggled to describe *how* it had done so. That said, it was clear that the talking and relational aspects of supervision were the most influential. There was evidence too that wider social and personal processes played a central, and sometimes more important, role in positive change than supervision. The next chapter looks at the professionals' perceptions of the helpfulness of supervision.

Chapter 6: The professionals' perspectives

The previous chapter began to answer my central research question about whether supervision helped. To complete the picture, I now discuss professionals' views of what aspects of supervision they thought were helpful – or not. While recognising that there is no objective 'truth' regarding the nature of youth justice supervision, taking account of the perspectives of both the children's and practitioners' perspectives has allowed me to build a picture of its events and practices that has 'greater accuracy and validity' (Layder, 1998: 9). In addition, practitioners, as those 'on the ground', are key mediators of youth justice policy insofar as what is translated into practice is dependent on their application, interpretation, and possible resistance (Muncie, 2015). Thus, examination of their perspectives and experiences provides important insights into how the work of supervision is done.

This chapter draws primarily on the interviews with 46 YOS professionals, comprising 37 practitioners and 9 managers, as well as the data collected through observation.²³⁶ I begin by exploring the professionals' perspectives on the ways in which supervision helped children. As shall be seen, there was often a disconnect between what they perceived to help and their ability to practise in this manner, with the YOS environment an important mediator in this respect. Picking up on this theme, the second section considers the professionals' views regarding the limitations of the nature of supervision, focusing on notions of its 'irrelevance' and position as a 'tiny cog in their [children's] lives'. The third section explores the ways in which the professionals' made sense of their work and conceptualised success within this context.

In what ways, if any, does supervision help?

To elicit the professionals' views on what aspects of supervision were helpful, I asked them the following questions:

- How do you approach working with children?
- What aspects of YOS supervisory practice seem to have a particularly beneficial effect on children?

²³⁶ Professional interviewees were split fairly evenly across the two YOSs, with 20 professionals interviewed from City YOS and 26 from Shire YOS (encompassing four and five managers, respectively).

- What aspects of YOS supervisory practice seem to have little effect/are unhelpful for children?
- What do you see as the key ingredients of successful YOS work with children?

As with the questions I put to the children, the aim here was to encourage the professionals to reflect on how supervision helped in its broadest sense – rather than in a way that was confined to the children’s offending (such as specific programmes or interventions).

‘You’ve got to treat each young person differently’

The professionals tended initially to express the view (24 out of 46) that no single component of YOS work could be described as universally helpful given the diversity of children’s needs and experiences. As one worker put it: ‘no one thing fits every person’. This narrative was particularly widespread in Shire YOS, with two thirds (16 out of 24) of those expressing such views based here.²³⁷ Instead, practitioners emphasised the importance of *tailoring* work to children’s needs:

...you've got to treat each young person differently dependent on their upbringing, their environment, how they're learning, their learnt behaviour, each child will act differently and engage differently.

[Shire YOS, worker 14]

For two-fifths of the professionals (19 out of 46), adapting supervision to children’s *learning styles* was a central means of putting this principle into practice. This was particularly widespread in Shire YOS, highlighted by 54 per cent of interviewees (14 out of 26), compared to a quarter (5 out of 20) in City YOS.²³⁸ They conceptualised the learning styles approach broadly. There was much evidence of practice inspired by educational thinking that individuals have a preferred mode of processing information and, accordingly, will be more

²³⁷ In City YOS a related narrative about ‘diversity’ (Farrow et al, 2007: 24-26) was apparent within the context of Pre-Sentence Report (PSR) meetings. This included discussion about implications for the sentencing recommendations of the child’s age, gender, ethnicity and learning difficulties. However this was only mentioned by one professional in interview.

²³⁸ It was evident that while some practitioners drew on the approach primarily as a tool for engagement (‘just as a tool for getting started’) or to begin sessions (‘to create a really good discussion base’), other workers used it as a principal basis for working.

inclined to learn from receiving material in this way (Pashler et al., 2008, which has little evidential basis, of which more later).²³⁹ The below extract is illustrative:

*...Some people like a very visual approach, so if you use something like cartooning, for example, that makes a lot of sense to some young people. If they enjoy it and find it interesting, they're far more likely to learn...I think you need to meet the young person's learning needs...because that's what the young person needs to best learn how to avoid reoffending.*²⁴⁰

[Shire YOS, manager 1]

Others understood the approach in terms of tailoring supervision to children's communication needs, given the high prevalence of speech, language and communication difficulties amongst those in the youth justice system (Bryan et al., 2007). As one worker explained:

*...the 17 young people I had, they all had mental health difficulties or learning needs...So my learning style changed a lot. A lot of them couldn't read or write, so it's like I'll be creative...So what kind of exercises can you do or is it about watching a video, is it something very visual?*²⁴¹

[City YOS, worker 13]

In this way, they emphasised the importance of not making children feel 'uncomfortable' or 'inadequate' by using styles with which they 'struggled', such as talking, writing and reading. Several practitioners seemed to interpret the approach as a means of strengths-focused working. For example, one explained that:

Through their learning style I will ask them, for instance, with the [X] boy he likes art, so I said to him: "Would you want to draw?...Drawing your answers because that's your skill. [City YOS, worker 8]

²³⁹ Learning styles are most commonly categorised as 'visual', 'kinaesthetic' (i.e. tactile) and or 'auditory'.

²⁴⁰ As is apparent in the extract, the notion that a key role of the YOS was to *teach* children how not to reoffend was often underlying the prominence of learning styles. This was associated with an assumption of the role of 'individual responsibility and/or pathology' (Phoenix, 2009: 123) in the children's behaviour, as discussed in the next section.

²⁴¹ It should be noted that although there is some overlap between recommended methods for working with learning challenged children (such as use of visual aids to support understanding) (The Communication Trust, 2010) and learning styles, they are distinct approaches. While there are case examples of the effectiveness of learning styles with children identified as having learning difficulties, there is a need for rigorous research

Use of individual learning styles was accordingly described as ‘creative’, ‘inventive’ and ‘think[ing] outside the box’. The practitioners’ belief in the importance of delivery styles to engagement resonated with some of the children’s views, as outlined in the previous chapter.

It was unclear what had influenced the credence of the approach, since managers described it as having naturally evolved over time.²⁴² Yet it seems probable that it is a manifestation of the Risk Need Responsivity (RNR) model (Andrews, Bonta and Hoge, 1990), in which the ‘Responsivity’ element bears resemblance to practitioners’ narratives about learning styles.²⁴³ As Bonta and Andrews (2017: 180) state: ‘the *responsivity principle* refers to delivering treatment programs in a style and mode that is consistent with the *ability* and *learning style* of the offender’. However, the authors only broadly explain learning styles as taking account of the individual’s specific characteristics, such as maturity, verbal intelligence, and emotional and mental well-being (Bonta and Andrews, 2017).²⁴⁴

Yet evidence suggests that the learning styles approach itself has a low or negative effect (Educational Endowment Foundation, 2018; Pashler et al., 2008), as reiterated in Charlie Taylor’s Youth Justice Review (2016b).²⁴⁵ One might argue that this is less relevant to supervision, since it is not an educational setting in the strictest sense, but of particular pertinence is the finding that categorising an individual as a specific type of learner can result in the presumption of a fixed method of learning, which can impede their ability to learn in other ways and ‘undermine their belief that they can succeed through effort’ (Educational Endowment Foundation, 2018; Pashler et al., 2008). Such concerns were evident amongst two of the City YOS practitioners:

(Davis and Florian, 2004).

²⁴² That said, in both YOSs some managers expressed a strong belief in taking account of children’s diversity (as well as that of staff), suggesting that professional ideology was a key factor in employment of the approach.

²⁴³ The RNR model, based on meta-analyses of what works, comprises three elements: matching the quantity of treatment to the level of risk (i.e. likelihood of offending) presented by the individual (i.e. those who are highest risk will attract the most intensive level of services); targeting intervention to address their ‘criminogenic needs’ (i.e. those that are strongly correlated with their offending); and delivering the intervention in a way that optimises the individual’s responsivity. RNR has been highly influential in youth justice, informing the development of the Asset assessment and the Scaled Approach (Adler et al, 2016).

²⁴⁴ The authors do not specify what techniques should be employed to ensure interventions are responsive to the individual’s learning style and abilities, aside from recommending that ‘styles and modes of service that are verbally and interpersonally demanding’ should only be used with ‘high functioning persons’. While the specific responsivity of supervision was not the focus of this research, the emphasis on educational learning styles (despite the broad interpretation) suggested a relatively narrow application of responsivity.

²⁴⁵ This conclusion is based on limited research in the education field.

I've had a young person who had been diagnosed with ADHD for a number of years, quite aggressive in school, all the symptoms of ADHD in terms of his focus and concentration.... And I think he actually came up as kinaesthetic...But I then realised that actually this is a very bright and academic young person and although he'd been directed to go down the more practical route education wise and career wise, there was actually a lot more depth to him... Sometimes we were talking for an hour and a half, two hours, and this was someone that was sort of bouncing off the walls at school and wouldn't sit down. So that's why I don't always look at conventional methods, and I sort of take it on a case-by-case basis, and really just judge. Or gut instinct tells me how the best way is to work with that young person as opposed to what the pro-forma sort of should be.

[City YOS, worker 4]

But the vast majority of my work with young people, which often goes against what we say we should do if we're trying to find out a person's learning style, is talk with them. So I've never in all my years struggled – so some young people you struggle with but in fact if you're sat down with a young person for half an hour and over time you eventually get to have even a small conversation, that can be a really big milestone for them. So whatever we've identified as their learning needs, I've never really found a young person who has a problem with talking.

[City YOS, worker 5]

There are links to be made here with desistance theory. Although, as outlined above, part of some practitioners' motivation for adopting such approaches was to focus on the child's strengths and skills, it is evident that rigid application of the learning styles approach in YOS practice could undermine children's self-efficacy and future potential. It is interesting therefore that both workers indicate that they are contravening YOS management by following their professional intuition and expertise, and working outwith of the learning styles approach. In other words, they appear to feel that doing what is expected by the YOS is incompatible with doing what is needed to help children. This was a consistent theme in practitioners' narratives, as discussed later in the chapter.

In this respect, while there was much emphasis by practitioners on the importance of following a child's learning style, it was apparent that several factors shaped the extent to which they 'practised what they preached'. First, the practice culture in the two YOSs seemed to affect what types of method were most commonly used. As detailed in the previous chapter, *interventions* tended to form the basis for supervision in Shire YOS, while *talking* did in City YOS (although in both YOSs some workers departed from the prevailing approach²⁴⁶).²⁴⁷ Accordingly, most of the 44 supervision sessions I observed in Shire YOS used visual or kinaesthetic methods, such as picture cards. In contrast, while I was only able to observe six sessions in City YOS, four of these comprised talking (auditory).

Second, within this context, there was some evidence that practitioners tended to favour the methods with which they were most comfortable. The below extracts are illustrative:

I think just discussing things is not good...where I have not taken a pack out have always been a lot shorter, less engagement and less information that you can gather from the young person just from talking to them. I think taking a tool is important...I think when you go and just talk to them and don't prepare it is always a nightmare.

[Shire YOS, worker 7]

...you've got a lot of the structured intervention sheets and sort of ways of working with young people, there are some young people that I think benefit from that quite greatly...But the way that I am, the way that I approach people and the rapport that I build up with them almost instantly, I don't always feel the need to be using a lot of worksheets and having a lot of structure in that kind of way, rightly or wrongly.

[City YOS, worker 4]

²⁴⁶ For example, in City YOS, the most junior practitioners seemed more likely to use worksheets.

²⁴⁷ As noted in the previous chapter, there was a somewhat blurred line between what comprises 'interventions' and 'talking'. Interventions typically involved a tool or prop, such as a worksheet, picture cards, or an app. Although they tended to involve some talking, this was closely structured around the tool/prop. In contrast, talking interventions did not involve any supporting tools, and thus were less rigidly structured. Instead practitioners commonly described using their prior knowledge of interventions and the child's needs to guide the discussion.

There was a sense from those that emphasised their preference for interactive methods that they were somewhat reliant on such ‘tools’ and perhaps (consciously or not) uncomfortable or nervous about talking with children. This can be linked with Ruch’s (2014: 2155-6) finding, in her small-scale UK study of relationships and communication in contemporary social work, that practitioners frequently experience communication with children as inherently ‘uncomfortable’. This was attributed to a number of interlinking factors, including the organic, multi-layered and unpredictable nature of communication, which required practitioners to think on their feet and ‘look beyond the presenting behaviour’, and bureaucratic requirements that were perceived to preclude practitioners from meaningful engagement. Of particular relevance here, Ruch (2014) notes that many of the practitioners consequently retreat to proceduralised approaches, which can be interpreted as a defensive response to such difficulties.

The final point is that the utilisation of particular learning approaches by practitioners was significantly shaped by operational factors, including time and resources. As one practitioner put it: ‘if I’m completely honest when I was doing the [X] stuff, because it was that full-on and they’re weren’t enough staff, sometimes I’d find myself just grabbing anything or using the same resource for everybody’. In a similar vein, some managers attributed the use dominance of talking in sessions to a lack of preparation. The role of such factors in shaping practice and the supervisory relationship, is the focus of the next chapter.

‘It’s all about relationships’

It was apparent from the practitioners’ narratives that the majority (26 out of 46; 57 per cent) believed that the supervisory relationship was a key determinant of the helpfulness of supervision. The proportion of workers expressing this was similar across the two YOTs (58 per cent in Shire YOS; 55 per cent in City YOS). This chimes with previous findings about professionals’ views of youth justice supervision (YJB; 2004; Ipsos Mori, 2010; Marshall, 2012), as well as of probation across Europe (Shapland et al., 2012: 15-17). When I asked practitioners about their approach to working with children, many made explicit reference to the importance relationships,²⁴⁸ as with this worker:

Umm, and I just try and set up a relationship, a working relationship, because I think that's what works, that's what the research about counselling interventions

²⁴⁸ This may be a reflection of workers’ awareness that the supervisory relationship was a particular interest of

says, that the key factor is the relationship between the client and the practitioner so I just try and treat young people with the kind of respect that they deserve, show them the interest that they deserve.

[City YOS, worker 2]

Others expressed the view that it was ‘better’ to have a good relationship, but did not regard this as a central element of practice. This was largely because other factors, such as the child’s readiness to change and home life, were believed to be more important in desistance (of which more later).

The professionals commonly considered compliance to be the principle benefit of the supervisory relationship (26 out of 46). In this way, it was understood to underpin every aspect of supervision, as one worker explained:

If you haven't built up a relationship with a young person you can't achieve anything, you can't work effectively with them, they're not really going to listen to you, they're not going to be interested in coming to appointments, they're not going to be interested in engaging.

[City YOS, worker 11]

Some workers linked the relationship principally to formal compliance (Robinson and McNeill, 2008). But more often, it was seen as imperative to facilitating substantive (Robinson and McNeill, 2008) and normative (Bottoms, 2001) compliance rather than ‘just going through the motions’. As another professional explained:

Some people can comply even if they don't get on. What you tend to lose is that softer side of things...where the young person will disclose things to one worker but wouldn't disclose to another; things where a young person will do something for one worker but not for another. They might go off for an interview because they don't want to let that worker down.

[Shire YOS, manager 1]

As this quote indicates, there were understood to be multiple and wide-ranging benefits to children's substantive engagement through a positive supervisory relationship. Practitioners often (19 out of 46) emphasised that children were more likely to be open about the realities of their lives. This was felt to better enable the YOS to keep children safe and provide further insights into how to help them:

...they're able to still come in and give you a little piece of their life and it might be quite personal and quite sensitive that you've got to the stage in terms of building that relationship that they're able to do that...it also then means that...the more they give me, the more I can then work with. So it then means I can sort of use my skills and my experience to try and see how things can be addressed.

[City YOS, worker 4]

This accords closely with some of the children's assertions that they 'wouldn't really talk' to a YOS worker that they did not like.

The relationship was perceived not only to encourage children to *talk*, but also to better *absorb* the substance of supervision. In this respect, a number of practitioners (7 out of 46) believed that it meant that children were 'going to listen to you' and will be 'more inclined to take on board what you're doing'. A similar proportion of interviewees (8 out of 46) believed that a positive relationship increased the likelihood that children would accept being challenged by their worker, in line with the research evidence (McCulloch, 2005; Trotter, 1999):

For me, if I've got that jokey banter relationship that has its boundaries then I've got that relationship where I can say 'come on mate, you're being a bit of a dick there', as blunt as that 'you know shouldn't have missed that appointment, you know you shouldn't have done that, come on wind it in a bit', we can sort of challenge them as a friend would, as I would with my best mate or something like that, it's having that sort of relationship where they feel that 'I probably am a bit out of order there' or 'I shouldn't have let [worker] down because I've got their best interests at heart'.

[Shire YOS, worker 8]

Such approaches were evident in a number of the supervision sessions I observed. For example, in City YOS, Ernest's worker light-heartedly declared that he had a 'bone to pick' with him for repeatedly overrunning his curfew, which was followed by a constructive discussion about the reasons for this.

A fifth of workers (9 out of 46) talked of the potential of a positive relationship to engender a child's commitment to stay out of trouble. Most commonly, they believed that such relationships, through demonstrating dedication and care, built children's personal loyalty to 'do the right thing' by their worker:

I think that's maybe the driving force for some of the young people that I've worked with in the past in so much as them staying out of trouble, it's the fact that not only do they not want to maybe disappoint family but they also don't want to disappoint you, because you've put a lot of time and effort into them, from the outset, from the first assessment report, to intervention.

[City YOS, worker 6]

The importance of a caring relationship with one's supervisor resonates with probationers' views from a wide range of studies over the past fifty years (Shapland et al., 2012). One of the most often cited is Rex's (1999) finding that probationers' decisions to desist appeared to be inspired by the personal and professional commitment shown by probation officers, which seemed to generate a sense of obligation to stay out of trouble. Although none of the children talked about feelings of personal loyalty to their workers, such notions were implicit in several of their accounts. Linked to this, it was apparent that the nature of the relationship was an important indicator and determinant of practitioners' own commitment to the work and their emotional well-being (of which more in Chapters 7 and 8).

Nearly a third of the practitioners (14 out of 46) highlighted the role of the supervisory relationship in building children's self-belief:

...just put out the opposite message: "You can do anything you want. It's up to you." The hard part is deciding what you want to do, isn't it? Not actually doing it. That's why I was saying about it's so important to have the same person. It's like broken record syndrome. The more times you say it; they're getting fed it.

Eventually it's like propaganda isn't it? You've done your anti-propaganda and hopefully some of that has gone in...They can change their story whenever they want. It's just about whether they believe they can do that or not.

[City YOS, worker 14]

Such accounts are indicative of 'de-labelling' (Maruna and LeBel, 2010: 81) and 'normal smithing' at work (Lofland, 1969: 212; Rungay, 2004: 416; Farrall et al., 2014: 63). This fits with several of the children's descriptions about how their worker had helped them to stay out of trouble. However, as was so here, some of the practitioners' narratives implied inadvertent responsabilisation of children's behaviour, appearing to underplay the role of social and material circumstances in the ability of children to realise such aspirations (of which more later). In addition, while building children's self-belief was perceived to be beneficial, it was notable that most did not directly link this with children's ability to desist, but instead interpreted it as sign that the relationship, and thus supervision 'have made a difference' and 'must be doing something right'. As I explore later in this chapter, such 'soft outcomes' were the key basis on which practitioners measured success.

'Rethreading the holes in the safety net'

The provision of welfare support was perceived by the majority of YOS practitioners (27 out of 46) as a principal value of supervision, particularly for children experiencing severe adversity. They most commonly understood their role in terms of being the 'glue' or 'conduit' coordinating the input of other support services. As one worker explained: 'It is probably inevitable that this child is going to act out for a period of time and what they need is that safety net of people...our job [is] to constantly... re-thread the holes in that safety net'. It was noteworthy that practitioners sometimes perceived themselves as the sole person or service 'fighting for' for the child, in accordance with some of the children's views that the YOS were the 'only one' on their side (Chapter 5).

Yet there were evidently constraints on workers' ability to provide such support. First, across both YOSs there was a perception that other support services were increasingly 'doing less', restricting the YOS's capacity to help, as will be explored in Chapter 7. Second, whilst the practitioners believed that much of the YOS's value lay in supporting children, there was a lack of coherence about how to effectively do so. Although the role was understood to be

concerned with ‘balancing the competing demands between dealing with offending and caring for young people’ (Phoenix, 2009: 123), workers often regarded themselves as orientated towards one of these elements, mirroring Gray’s findings (2013b).²⁴⁹ Many regarded their role as limited to offending behaviour, with children’s welfare needs a matter for other services:

I’ve got a young person in court today... it’s just like, domestic violence at home, child abuse, gender transition, self-harm, suicide, everything in one person... my job is obviously to safeguard young people, and I would ensure that, if social care need to be involved, they would be. But, after all that is done and the people that are involved are involved, I try and focus on YOT work. So, offending and actually what is on the plan, what am I trying to achieve?... I’ve had it in the past, where you just get bogged down, and it’s just like fire- fighting every single time... Obviously...if something’s just happened, for example, and they come here, you’re not then going to talk about the offence, because they’ve got needs immediately there. But, I do, as a rule, just try. If other people are involved as well, I might say, ‘You know, you need to speak to your CAMHS worker about that’.

[City YOS, worker 10]

It is noteworthy that this practitioner, like a number of others, viewed the children’s needs (safeguarding) as a discrete issue from their offending. In this way, it appeared that rather than conflating risk and need (Phoenix, 2009), the children’s offending was to some extent ‘decontextualised and dematerialised’ (Goldson, 1997b, as cited in Goldson, 2000: 258) from their social circumstances. Addressing needs was identified as a means to an end insofar as it allowed them to complete offending behaviour work rather than linked to desistance. In this way the practitioner’s reference to ‘get[ting] bogged down’ by the children’s wider needs is revealing. The suggestion, voiced by a handful of other interviewees, was that this was an unwanted distraction from the *real work* of addressing offending behaviour:

I think there are too many bases covered. I think we’ve lost sight of, “We are offending behaviour,” and we’re more like children’s social care, who do offending behaviour... So I don’t know. I find maybe sometimes we’ve got too much

²⁴⁹ Gray (2013b: 525) found that although her YOS professional interviewees were committed to a welfarist approach, they were divided in their views as to whether they should take an active role in providing welfare support. Some felt that this was necessary because mainstream services would not provide such help whereas others argued that ‘we’re not social services for offenders’.

*information on the young person. We can't deal with everything, so – you know. Let's just deal with what we're supposed to deal with, rather than getting bogged down with everything else.*²⁵⁰

[Shire YOS, worker 18]

There was a sense from both extracts that a focus on offending 'save us the messiness of knowing too much about delinquents, their families, their lives, their opportunities, their backgrounds or their experiences' (Miller, 1991: 237). Such views run counter to the philosophy of 'children first, offenders second', developed by academics Haines and Case (2015), and espoused in Welsh youth justice policy (Welsh Government/ YJB, 2014) and the Taylor Review (2016b).

Other workers talked about children's wider welfare needs and offending as 'different sides of the same coin' (Crossley, 2012: 40). Their view was that the YOS should have a greater focus on addressing children's welfare needs. For them, the configuration of YOS work was the subject of unease, and sometimes frustration insofar as they felt emphasis on offending work was woven into the fabric of YOSs:

I think our PSRs are all kind of offence-based, there is very little room for any kind of welfare concerns and issues, and addressing any of the welfare concerns, because they come hand-in-hand with all the other stuff the young person is going through. So I feel if we could treat young people in a more holistic manner, then I think we may have better results ultimately.

[City YOS, worker 6]

Whilst these practitioner interviewees supported children with their wider needs because it was the 'right thing to do', they perceived this to be in tension with what they were *supposed* to be doing. In City YOS, there was a sense of subverting management expectations from some interviewees:

...they bring something...that happened since you last met with them. So anything that you might have wanted to cover gets thrown out of the window and I'm very

²⁵⁰ The context of this practitioner's concerns was that she perceived there to be increasing amounts of screening and referral forms in relation to children's vulnerabilities, which she felt were overstated – 'we exacerbate something that's not really there' - in light of 'fashionable things that are going on [CSE]'.

happy for that. Because again, they're bringing to me what's going on for their life....that kind of approach might be scrutinised because I've also been told about the [importance of] keeping to your structure and it being a case of, 'Well you allow them their time to talk but you've still got to keep your structure of the worksheets and making sure that you've got through that'[But] there needs to be a level of flexibility.

[City YOS, worker 4]

In both YOSs, some felt that referral orders constrained helping practice (and professional discretion), due to the requirement of agreeing a contract between the panellists and child at the outset, specifying the completion of particular activities. A number of practitioners in both YOSs expressed the view that the circumstances of some children's lives was such that these expectations were immaterial and unrealistic, as illustrated by the below extract:

I personally feel that YOSs don't work particularly well when I have a script...I mean I'll give you an example of a girl who was on a short court order... she should never really have gotten a referral order... it was to do with her and her mum's relationship, so we have spent a lot of time talking about that and the contract is sort of meaningless, and when the panel members, myself and the young person put it together, we knew it was sort of meaningless, but we knew that she had to do – we say the same things – consequential thinking, stop and search...and we come across that a lot really and I think it is just a real shame that we can't work in a more creative way or be left to see what happens in a session.

[City YOS, worker 5]

However, managers in both YOSs highlighted the flexibility to suspend offending behaviour work so as to focus on addressing children's immediate welfare needs. The below comment was typical:

We will write off certain things because of what's happening in that child's life. It has to go through a manager...but if we've done so much, and then there's a couple of reparation hours left, for example, and then something happens in that child's life, then yes we will say, 'Okay'. And there are cases that you will audit where you will see it's just been crisis management throughout the months, and we

could work with that case for another five years. We are never going to sit that child down and talk about offending, because there is just too much – there's too much gone on prior to us, and there is too much still going on.

[Shire YOS, manager 5]

Nevertheless, it was revealing that managers in the two YOSs referenced the need to 'evidence that' and 'go through a manager', indicating the existence of an ongoing audit culture, in which such divergent practice is outwith the norm, as some of the practitioners felt. In this way, it seems that 'a contradiction between welfare and punishment still exists at the heart' of YOS practice (Phoenix, 2009: 114), in which despite acknowledgement of the importance of addressing children's needs, there is a constant pressure to 'reduce practice priorities to the lowest common "offence-tackling' denominator'" (Goldson, 2000: 262).

Third, the practitioners' 'official' explanations of the children's offending did not support a practice focus on their wider needs. Accounts of YOS practice have long noted the tendency to overlook the social and material context of children's offending (Sharpe, 2012; Phoenix, 2009). In this way, case file entries typically framed children's behaviour as a defective or pathological response to such circumstances. A case in point is that of 15-year-old Elijah, who had been convicted of possession with intent to supply class A drugs as a consequence of county lines exploitation. My case file overview details that:

The case officer states that Elijah is not assertive, noting that he says that he felt pressured to take the drugs out of fear that the older male may otherwise become violent towards him. He also reports that Elijah had very little understanding of the consequences of his actions, including that it may affect his mum's application to stay in the UK...his absconding and subsequent offending are linked to the family's numerous accommodation moves.

As can be seen here, while there is acknowledgement of Elijah's adverse social circumstances, his behaviour is ultimately characterised as a 'faulty' response to these (Phoenix, 2009: 114). Accordingly, the children's intervention plans and referral order contracts typically included interventions aimed at addressing their 'distorted thinking' and 'poor decision making'.

Related to this, in both YOSs it was apparent from some of the professionals' accounts – as well as in case files and observation – that overtly challenging children's neutralisations about their offending was regarded as an important element of supervision, as is evident here:

If we have young people who are minimising their involvement, we shouldn't just be taking that as read. We need to be challenging them. We need to be getting them to think differently about what they've done, with a view to not hammering them about it and making them feel guilty, but having young people take responsibility so that they can change their thinking about their behaviour.

[Shire YOS, manager 3]

There was an underlying assumption that encouraging children to take responsibility for their past behaviour (and thus denying their excuses or justifications) is necessary to stop their law-breaking. However, as I set out in the previous chapter, there is evidence that such neutralisations actually help individuals to maintain a positive sense of self (Matza, 1964; Maruna, 2001). Thus, as I have argued, desistance may well be better facilitated by *gentle* challenge that partly allows for children's neutralisations, alongside a focus on nurturing their future life vision, self-determination, and social capital.

Empowerment

Professionals, especially those in City YOS, frequently characterised their work as centred on empowering children.²⁵¹ For some, this comprised supporting children to be 'as self-sufficient as possible...to equip them not to come back'. This appeared to be motivated by two things. First, was a view about the children's individual responsibility for their offending (and thus desistance). Thus, some felt that it was not their role to 'fix everything for them [children]' as 'it's about us trying to give [him] the tools to make those changes himself really'. The implication was that to do otherwise was disempowering: 'I think we can take people's coping skills away from them, because actually they don't have to cope...[they think] "You're going to get me somewhere to live; get me in college; sort out that man down the road who keeps feeling my bum"'. Second, was a belief that children had to be self-

²⁵¹ Just over two-fifths of professionals across the two YOSs (19 out of 46) emphasised the importance of empowerment in their work, but 12 of the 19 were City YOS workers. This amounts to 60 per cent of the City YOS interviewees (12 out of 20).

reliant, given their often minimal support networks as well as the time-limited nature of their YOS orders. As one worker explained:

I think sometimes when they've had parents that don't believe in them and they come here and they think, 'Do you know what, they actually believe in me'. [That] makes a big difference to them...Because I've said to some of them... 'you are responsible for your life, no one does anything for you, no one's going to give you a car and say, "Here you go, there's a BMW, go drive it. You need to do it for yourself"'.

[City YOS, worker 16]

Such accounts resonate with Phoenix and Kelly's (2013) contention that youth justice-involved children ultimately become responsabilised through the absence of support in their lives. Developing this argument, the evidence here suggests that the YOS workers, motivated by a desire to support children, actively reinforced the responsabilisation of those under their supervision. This was in part motivated by recognition 'that there is no one there to help them: that they can only do it for themselves' (Phoenix and Kelly, 2013: 435), but also because they believed they should do it for themselves. While such an approach perhaps appreciates the role of self-determination in desistance (Maruna, 2001), it risks underplaying the importance of working collaboratively with 'offenders' to address their problems (McCulloch, 2005) and practice self-help (Johns, 2018). This may be particularly important with younger supervisees (Rex, 1999; Johns, 2018).

For other practitioners, empowerment meant a focus on self-reflection, future-orientation and narrative change, as the extract below illustrates:

... it's also having a space with young people where they can explore how they are changing and growing and develop their own views...and that there is meaning behind what they're doing...it's really important for young people, our young people to be held in mind and to be regarded as important and significant and that they matter and that they can potentially do whatever they want to do in life, there is another alternative.

[City YOS, worker 5]

Such accounts of supervision fit closely with the concepts of ‘narrative therapy’ (Robinson, 2016: 26; Maruna, 2001: 143) and ‘normal-smithing’ (Lofland, 1969: 212; Runggay, 2004: 416; Farrall et al., 2014: 63) that were discussed in the previous chapter. Notably, in City YOS, where such approaches were particularly evident, these seemed to have developed inadvertently. The practitioners commonly considered this to be consequent to an increase in the complexity of the children’s lives. They explained that the multiplicity of factors underlying the children’s offending coupled with the ‘reality’ that for many ‘it is just about getting through each day’, meant that it was unrealistic and ineffective to focus on offences, and imperative to encourage them ‘to see past tomorrow’. In contrast, the managers were of the opinion that the practitioners’ strengths-focus was due to a lack of preparation for sessions. Thus, this philosophy, though evident, was neither management-initiated nor YOS-wide.

In this respect, a common theme in practitioners’ accounts was that a focus on empowering children in a strengths-focused and future-orientated fashion was not perceived to be a priority of the service. One worker explained that there was insufficient time afforded to the empowerment potential of their role: ‘So it’s an empowering role as well, that’s the ideal. But sometimes takes a long time to happen. And there isn’t enough time to dedicate to achieving that’. Others noted that while offending behaviour work had to be their main focus, they were able to spend time on empowering children once such requirements had been completed, especially if the child was on a longer order. However, it was suggested that this entailed ‘work[ing] slightly different to how we’re meant to possibly’:

...within three months, six months, they should have done everything they need to do, and there’s no more point talking about offending, because they’re not offending, so it’s about ‘what’s the next step for you’ and encouraging them, you know, I’ve done CV stuff with people, I’ve done job searches with them, emailed their parents links to things. Probably shouldn’t be doing it; parents should be doing that, but you know, I think it’s part of the holistic approach and I think looking at their future is really important, as a lot of young people don’t and can’t...

[City YOS, worker 1]

Thus, there was a strong sense that practitioners had to ‘get under the wire’ to do such work, because it was not seen as a matter for the YOS.

Structure

The value of the structure provided by YOS supervision was only talked about by four of the practitioners (three of whom were managers). Yet this chimed with the views of a quarter of young interviewees and is therefore worthwhile highlighting here. The practitioners identified several reasons why this aspect of supervision was important. One believed that the beneficial effect lay in modelling pro-social behaviour in appointments: ‘If we can model non-violent behaviours to them then, hopefully, they’ll take that onboard and listen to that’. Another City YOS manager felt that children’s attendance at appointments signified that ‘they are already making a change’ as well as providing an opportunity for reflection:

I don't really think that you change young people's thinking significantly. I think it's a broader thing. I don't really think that, because they do a six-week programme, they're going to stop using [knives] because of what they see there. It's more about giving them structure. It's about, ‘You have to come, and you have to attend’ ... That sometimes, is what they miss.

[City YOS, manager 2]

The implication here was that supervision offered stability, as suggested by some children in Chapter 5. Likewise, a Shire YOS manager spoke about the value of the structure afforded by supervision because of the leverage it provided to encourage engagement with education (as part of ISS).

It is noteworthy that in contrast a fifth of the practitioners (9 out of 46) described the structure of supervision as ‘alien’, ‘baffling’ and ‘confusing’ to children, particularly for those experiencing it for the first time. As one worker explained:

I do think that we don't consider enough, just the really crazy place that young people are at in adolescence and what we ask of them and that we expect young people with very complex lives to start remembering appointments and start being on time for them and start knowing exactly who their worker is and be able to describe them at reception. [City YOS, worker 5]

Several of the interviewees accordingly saw the ‘whole purpose’ of their role as helping children to ‘navigate’ through the strange world of supervision.

Deterrence

Philosophies of *deterrence* were apparent in both YOSs (5 out of 46; 11 per cent), with other examples apparent during observation. In some examples, such thinking directly shaped the YOSs response to children’s lawbreaking. As a case in point, in a Shire YOS risk review meeting, there was a discussion about the type of secure facility that should be recommended for Luke, who they anticipated would receive a custodial sentence:

They discuss whether they should recommend a Secure Training Centre (STC) or Young Offenders Institute (YOI). STC is the preference amongst those who work directly with him. But another manager says that ‘as someone who’s objective and doesn’t know Luke, it sounds like what he needs is a spell in a YOI, because his offending behaviour is escalating and I don’t think he’s as vulnerable as you’re making out’.

[Shire YOS, field notes, March 2015]

The underlying assumption from the manager was that the adverse environment of a YOI (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2017) would have a greater chance of deterring future offending. In City YOS, some workers referenced deterrence in their PSR meeting discussions about their sentence recommendation to the court: ‘a referral order may not be seen as a deterrent as he’ll see it as a soft touch’; and ‘let’s go with a YOI [if he gets a custodial sentence] since he is resilient and custody would deflate him but not derail him’. A handful of professionals (most of whom were in City YOS) also advocated for the introduction of ‘scared straight’ style programmes, chiming with Taylor’s (2016B) finding that such schemes continue to be used in English youth justice settings. Typical comments included:

I even think having a programme where... they’re able to go to prison and speak to offenders...going to a proper prison for a day and go there to see the reality of where they can end up for years. Speaking to some of the people there, fully supervised obviously. Even being in a proper cell for, like, I don’t know, a few

hours...being there and looking around, it's reality, 'I could spend the rest of my life in here for doing something, or even being with someone that does something and I'm in the wrong place at the wrong time'. I think as the head of service I would put things like that in place.

[City YOS, worker 15]

Yet, meta-analyses of prison visiting programmes, and deterrence-based interventions (even with therapeutic elements) have been found to result in an increased likelihood of offending (WSIPP, 2017; Adler et al., 2016; Koehler et al., 2013; Petrosino et al., 2013; Aos et al., 2006). Support for such approaches was concentrated amongst those with backgrounds in criminal justice (i.e youth justice, probation, policing, both qualified and not), although not exclusively, suggesting that training and professional experience may be an important factor in such beliefs. It should also be noted that deterrence can still be included as a factor in sentencing children, since legislation removing this consideration for under-18s has not been enacted (Sentencing Council, 2017).²⁵²

In several other cases, practitioners suggested that children had been deterred from further offending by the 'shock' of court and detention. As one practitioner told me: 'I think it's a good shock, just going to court for some of the young people is like 'wow I've gone to court for stealing''. In another case, a worker reflected that remand had been one of several factors that had facilitated the desistance of a 17-year-old boy whom he supervised: 'being on remand for a night gave him a bit of a shock. ISS was good for him too, and the support from YOS, but the main factor has been him making the decision to change'. These latter examples are consistent with some of the children's portrayals of supervision and criminal justice interactions as a 'wake-up call' (Chapter 5). The point is not that such experiences act as a deterrent, but rather, as I argued drawing on Farrall et al. (2014: 127), that they have potential to highlight the seriousness of the child's behaviour, which can act as a self-awakening. The above case suggests that a range of factors in the child's life, including their desire to change, will shape the extent to which such experiences can facilitate desistance, in line with

²⁵² This refers to section 142A of the Criminal Justice Act 2003, as amended by the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008, which removed as a purpose of sentencing for under-18s 'the reduction of crime including its reduction by deterrence'. However the Sentencing Council (2017) advises that deterrence should usually only be factored in sentencing serious offences and may be outweighed by considerations of the welfare of the child.

Mouzelis' (2008) and Farrall, Bottoms and Shapland's (2010) elaboration of Giddens (1984) structuration theory.

Punishment

There was evidence that *punishment* was perceived by some as a rationale for supervision, regardless of whether it helped. This is perhaps unsurprising given that 'punishment' was introduced as a purpose of sentencing under-18s in 2008.²⁵³ Yet such thinking runs strongly counter to the academic evidence, as noted above. One worker expressed frustration that the service spent too much time 'ferrying' the children around and *going to* them, rather than the children *coming to* the workers, arguing that 'it's supposed to be a punishment for them'. In City YOS, where such views were more frequently expressed, it was agreed in a PSR meeting that 14-year-old Shekira (who had been a convicted of assaulting staff at her care home from which she regularly absconded, during which she was sexually exploited – see Chapter 4), would be given a curfew as a punishment:

Manager: *Would a curfew be suitable?*

Case Manager: *It could help with her risk of absconding but the offence happened early in the morning so it's not necessary.*

Manager: *But what about as a punishment? It's purely about a punishment isn't it? As a punitive element as it's not going to deter her from future offending.*

[City YOS, field notes, October 2015]

It appeared that 'repressive welfarism' (Phoenix, 2009: 12), which I discussed in Chapter 4 regarding the criminalisation of the children, may have been an additional factor in the decision to recommend a curfew.

²⁵³ This was by means of an amendment made by the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act (CJIA) 2008 to the Criminal Justice Act 2003 (CJA), which added section 142A. The CJA 2003 introduced sentencing aims, which included punishment, for offenders aged above 18. However these sentencing aims were mirrored for those aged under 18 by the CJIA 2008 (except for deterrence). Although section 142A has not yet been enacted, the Sentencing Council (2017: 5) suggests that the original sentencing aims set out in CJA 2003 should be considered to apply to under-18s.

A theory of change?

What the preceding discussion establishes is a somewhat ambiguous picture about what helps. The two common threads in the professionals' narratives were the value of safeguarding children and the supervisory relationship. Yet these two aspects of supervision were also subject to an array of views about how they helped and should be fulfilled. One might expect to see such diversity of opinion given the professionals' common assertion that 'different things will motivate each child', as well as the variety of practice backgrounds represented in the two YOSs.²⁵⁴ Souhami (2007: 63) has argued that YOS work is 'inherently ambiguous' in this way. She notes, quoting Meyerson (1991), that a key characteristic of such heterogenous organisational cultures is that 'members...cannot identify shared solutions, and do not reconcile contradictory beliefs (1991: 131)'.²⁵⁵ Furthermore, it is only in the past 20 years that the purpose of intervention in the lives of children who offend has been explicitly to prevent offending by way of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998; prior to this, the primary concern was with promoting their welfare (Hendrick, 2015; Audit Commission, 1996).²⁵⁶ As Canton (2012) has convincingly argued of the parallel world of probation, the stated 'point' of such work has significant implications for the ideology, ethics and effectiveness of practice.

My interpretation was that the diversity of views was indicative of a fundamental dissonance and incoherence about *how* to help children achieve positive outcomes - that is, the theory of change. In this respect, it was apparent that some practitioners used ambiguity in the overall YOS approach to pursue their own ways of working. This enabled them to resist and even subvert the constraints of daily practice (cf. Muncie, 2015; Sharpe, 2012), and continue doing the 'right thing'. Hart (2017: 4) has argued with respect to child custody in England and Wales that: '...there is no evidence of a coherent theory of change within current policy as to how this [prevention of offending] will be achieved'. She contends that 'if the system is not driven by a clear sense of purpose, we cannot criticise if it becomes driven instead by processes'. However, there is also a question of the relevance of theories of change if

²⁵⁴ These included: probation, youth justice, counselling, psychology and social work. For details of staff demographics, see appendix 2.

²⁵⁵ Yet one might expect this to be less so in current practice given the evidence that the multi-agency identity of YOSs has declined, with secondees from partner organisations and specialist staff often remaining for long periods of time (rather than rotating very few years) and assimilating into the main workforce (Carlile, 2014; Crossley, 2012; Audit Commission, 2004)

²⁵⁶ This shift can also be seen as indicative of the historical tension between reconciling 'welfare' and 'justice' considerations.

practitioners only see children for a very small proportion of their time (as was particularly the case in City YOS), as there is much less chance for such approaches to be reflected in practice. This issue is reflected upon in the next chapter.

Limitations of YOS supervision

Bridging the divide: expectations and needs

A common thread in the above accounts is some workers' perception of a mismatch between practice expectations and what they felt children needed in order to desist. Such narratives accord with Worrall and Mawby's (2014: 349) finding that 'creativity, or departure from the script, that they believe the organisation prohibits' are key means of probation workers achieving satisfaction in their roles. However, a significant minority of practitioner interviewees (11 out of 46; 24 per cent) – and several others during informal conversations – went beyond this, voicing doubts about the *meaningfulness* of fundamental aspects of supervision. Such concerns centred around interventions and procedural work.²⁵⁷

First, within the context that the supervisory relationship was widely regarded as a central value of supervision, some practitioners talked explicitly about the near irrelevance of the statutory content of orders:

I struggle to be able to do what is expected and also to be able to do something meaningful. That's why my sessions are generally about 90 minutes long to get all the fodder out [of] the way and then to actually sit down and talk about...girlfriends and favourite foods and holidays and all the stuff that you talk about to befriend. That's what I find the most meaningful [but] I would say it's not what's valued...it's not what the focus is...it's not the pointer you have to hit.

[City YOS, worker 13]

The strong sense from this practitioner's description of the statutory content as 'fodder' that she had to 'get out the way' is that she, like several others, regarded it as an obstruction to the meaningful work. It is probably no coincidence that those expressing such views tended to be

²⁵⁷ This included intervention plans, referral order agreements and induction packs (work that was completed at the outset of supervision. It differed between the two YOSs but typically included an assessment of the child's learning style, the 'What do you think? Asset (a self-assessment for children) and the child's completion of contracts to confirm that their understood their supervision rights and responsibilities).

from training backgrounds outwith the criminal justice field, such as psychologically-informed disciplines and social work, in which relationship-based working has traditionally been central (Ingram and Smith, 2018). Such views suggest the veracity of practitioner fears that increased levels of assessment and monitoring, following the advent of YOTs, would impede their ability to help children (Souhami, 2007).

However, a number of workers, while viewing such material as ineffectual in itself, saw it as a helpful vehicle for building relationships, which they viewed as the ‘real work’:

I'm not convinced particularly that a lot of the intervention works, the programmes themselves work. But I think they're a good vehicle to develop your relationship and work around.

[Shire YOS, worker 11]

...I almost think the content is irrelevant...I would say that the most important thing again is that relationship and as long as someone gives you some content - i.e. this person has to turn up, and here's some things that they need to do - getting that relationship right, that's what can make for change if change is required.

[City YOS, worker 2]

Such comments accord with the desistance, psychotherapy, social work and youth work literature that the quality of the relationship is central to the process of assisting change; although there are mixed views as to whether the relationship alone can facilitate change (see Chapter 2). The extracts are revealing in two further ways. My interpretation is that the procedural elements of supervision play an essential role as children are less likely to attend appointments, at least initially, unless they feel that there is some apparent purpose (however meaningless in reality); this opens up the opportunity for the relationship to take over as the basis for engagement and positive outcomes. In addition, the implication is that practitioners exercise significant discretion and creativity in *how* they work with children, and find ways to circumvent, while also working within, the constraints of its statutory nature.

A drop in the ocean?

Just over two-fifths of the practitioner interviewees (19 out of 46) talked about the YOS forming ‘a tiny part’ of the lives of the children on supervision. Such limited contact was

seen to make it ‘really, really difficult’ for them to effect significant change. At the heart of such concerns, was the view that adverse influences typically comprised the substance of children’s lives, with their family environment often identified as particularly pernicious:

So, for me, I think that’s a really difficult one to get over, because how do you undo 15 years’ worth of learnt behaviour that is constantly there, at home, 24/7, within an hour’s session, once a week? You’re almost asking the impossible. So, for me, that’s a huge barrier, really.

[Shire YOS, worker 12]

Such views are reminiscent of Lofland’s (1969: 217) description of ‘deviant smiths’ who see little prospect of change in ‘deviants’ because of their ‘deep-lying, difficult to change, deviant personal dynamics’.

Strongly evident in such accounts was the responsabilisation of the children’s families. In this way, as Sharpe (2012: 105) observed of the professional discourse in her study of girls’ offending: ‘there was limited acknowledgement of the social origins of their troubles’. Indeed, the practitioners seldom referenced (8 out of 46) the material deprivation that typically characterised the lives of the children and their families. Amongst those who did, it was a frequent source of discontent and frustration that, as they saw it, they were relatively powerless to provide children with the opportunities they felt would facilitate change.

As well as the influence of children’s social circumstances, practitioners commonly (18 out of 46) highlighted the serendipitous nature of change insofar as children had to be ready to do so. The implication was that YOS work was unlikely to make little difference until that time, particularly with limited contact:

I think we can help and we can encourage them and we can make them see things from another angle, but unless they’ve come to a place where they’re ready to change, they can very much play a lip service to what you’re doing. I mean, we’re a tiny part of their life, an hour a week, you know, maybe two. But that’s it.

[Shire YOS, worker 11]

It was evident that the practitioners conceptualised their role in different ways with respect to readiness to change. Some believed that a key task was ‘you’ve got to encourage them to want to change and give them a reason to change’. Yet others took the view that ‘if the young people aren’t willing to do it, there’s not a lot you can do’:

It got to the point where, as with everything, you realise that the young person is really not at that stage. You just give up at some point, because you have another young person that you have to work with.

[City YOS, Manager 2]

Several practitioners suggested that even when a child was ready to change, sometimes supervision played little role in their ability to realise this. As one manager reflected:

...I don’t always think it’s about us. You might just be one tiny part of that child’s life, and you might just happen to be there when they make that decision that something’s going to change, and that’s it.

[Shire YOS, Manager 1]

This links to the finding that YOS work appeared to have limited meaning in the lives of some children (Chapter 5). Yet as discussed further below, there was a strong sense that it may take many years for the fruits of supervision to come to fruition, in line with the probation literature (Farrall et al., 2014).

In this regard, one practitioner was much more optimistic about the positive effect of their limited time with children, noting the especial value of providing supervisees with the rare opportunity of unrestricted time to talk:

...it’s taken quite a long time to come to that realisation that seeing someone once a week or once every two weeks, you’re going to be the only person in their life doing that, probably for their whole teenage experience and you know, maybe for their whole life. I mean how often do you go to see someone and sit in a room and...they just listen to you witter on about more or less whatever you want for 45 minutes and not get bored, not look at the watch, not change the subject to talk about my

stuff. I still think that that experience that young people have if they come to supervision and vaguely comply; the importance can't be underestimated.

[City YOS, worker 2]

This chimes with the children's emphasis on the helpfulness of talking with their YOS worker (Chapter 5) as well as the potential benefits of the supervisory relationship (explored further in Chapter 8).

Planting a seed

Nearly half (22 out of 46) of the professionals conceptualised the impact of their work as 'sowing the seeds of change', which they often did not expect to bear fruit until months or years later. Such accounts of the impact of supervision were commonly linked to child development, in terms of maturation out of offending:

I think it's sowing that seed. Maybe we don't see it now, but the benefits are going to be reaped later. I think that a significant part of youth offending is about experimenting, in the same way that people experiment with drugs. So a significant number of them grow out of offending, because they mature.

[City YOS, manager 2]

Many practitioners believed that maturity and readiness to change often went hand-in-hand, indexed by other life developments, as outlined earlier. Thus, linked to the above discussion, while practitioners often considered that the effects of supervision might be limited until children were ready to change, they believed that it would be helpful *in time*. Furthermore, such narratives fit with practitioners' views regarding the importance of encouraging children's self-determination as a means of equipping them with the necessary tools for future change. It is noteworthy that the terminology of 'planting a seed' is also used by the probationers in Farrall et al.'s (2014) ten-year follow-up study of the impact of probation, reflecting its increasing value over time.

However, workers highlighted that they rarely knew of the impact of their work, since the outcomes of their supervisees were not tracked beyond the age of 18 ('it's difficult because you might not always see the change in your lifespan'). Such disconnection with the effects

of their work is likely to be exacerbated by high staff turnover (an issue in City YOS) and living outside of the local YOS area, thus removing the possibility of hearing about a child's progress by chance or encountering them in the community. There was a sense that some practitioners struggled with the intangible effect of their work. Such sentiments were expressed by several more interviewees in City YOS, which may have been a symptomatic of the evident low morale (explored in Chapter 7). As one practitioner reflected:

I just feel like this sort of field doesn't allow officers to feel supported or good about the practice... you're meant to feel good about work that you've done but it's very hard to talk about successful young people, as I said, because we can't monitor it because they've gone by the time they do reach the point of success.

[City YOS, worker 12]

In this respect, there was some evidence that 'planting a seed' narratives of supervision were fundamental to practitioners' maintenance of faith in their work and ability to continue practising, as illustrated by the below extract:

So I might not physically see any change in them, but what I would like to think, and what keeps me in the job is that although I might not see a change or they're constantly coming back into the system, five/ten/fifteen years down the line I'd like to think that there are some seeds that have been sown through me, then grow. That's what keeps me in the job otherwise if I just thought, 'Well I'm not seeing any change in this young person at this moment in time' and just sort of held that in, I don't think I'd want to be doing this job.

[City YOS, worker 4]

It is noteworthy that this practitioner, like others, suggests that they avoid reflecting on the effectiveness of YOS practice for fear that it might undermine their faith. This had important implications for how the practitioners measured success, as discussed in the next section. It was apparent that some YOS practitioners told success stories about children with whom they had initially been uncertain of their positive effect, as a means of retaining their faith. Stories like the one below were typical:

...and I believe that a lot of the work that I do with them probably doesn't come to light until they are 21, 22. Some young people I'm in contact with now and they're turning 22, 23 now, they say 'oh, I remember when we done that session' and I'm like 'I didn't think you were even listening' and they're like 'nah, nah, I was always listening'. It just takes them time to mature and understand the messages and work that I was delivering with them.

[City YOS, worker 3]

Such accounts of the impact of supervision seemed to shape practitioners' work with children insofar as they talked about the value of 'chipping away', 'scatter gun' and 'broken record' approaches. Underlying this was the view that if they imparted their message to children enough times or via numerous means, a seed was more likely to be planted and would eventually come to bear.

Small steps

As noted in Chapter 2, since the late 1990s prevention of offending has been the principal aim of the youth justice system (s.37, Crime and Disorder Act 1998). In parallel, reoffending rates have increasingly been considered 'the primary gauge of effectiveness' (Bateman, 2011; see also YJB/MoJ, 2018). It was apparent, however, that the practitioners conceptualised of success in much more holistic terms.

Most often (20 out of 46), the practitioners conceptualised success in terms of the 'distance travelled' by the child during their YOS order. This entailed an understanding of achievement as relative to the child's starting point, as one worker explained:

Getting Justin²⁵⁸ through an order without him being breached is a success because the guy just does not want to do anything at all, so [case manager] and I got him through his last order... we didn't do an awful lot of work but we did get him through. But then we've got the lad I was just referring to who engaged in the first session, the first one I got involved with, he engaged, he learnt, he understood, he showed progress, he was enthusiastic. So that measure would be entirely different to Justin's. [Shire YOS, worker 20]

²⁵⁸ Pseudonym.

Just over a third (16 out of 46) of the practitioners perceived success as the child's completion of their order. As with Justin above, formal compliance was the main concern for some children: 'they're keeping their appointments. That may seem insignificant or minor, but that's something'. However, many interviewees characterised success in this respect as requiring *meaningful engagement*. While some interpreted this as the child having 'take[n] something away...whether they've remembered one session with me or one piece of advice', more frequently practitioners talked about establishing an helping relationship:

The main thing for me is that they come to me and they won't even give you eye contact, they won't talk to you, and if they do, they talk to the ground so you can see the top of their head and by the time they're finished with me, they're laughing and joking with me, they're having a laugh and they're asking for help. That is success to me. It doesn't mean to say that they're not going to offend again; it would be nice if they don't but at least they are asking for help.

[Shire YOS, worker 13]

An equivalent proportion (16 out of 46) of the practitioners conceptualised success in terms of children's well-being. Improvement was the ultimate goal in this respect, as one manager put it: 'what we want as an outcome at the end of our orders is that people's lives are better'. This was typically understood as comprising material outcomes such as engagement in education and stable accommodation, as well as those that were less tangible, such as that 'they're happier' and 'look well'. However, a number of practitioners highlighted that for some children, the key concern was keeping them safe: 'there are young people where the aim might be just to get them to the end of the order without harming themselves'.

For just under a third (14 out of 46) of the practitioners, a successful outcome meant 'obviously not reoffending or reduced reoffending'. Yet the majority (10) of those expressing this view were based in Shire YOS. Of particular note, was the frequency with which practitioners described 'not reoffending' as the 'ultimate' and 'obvious' success, amongst several measures of achievement, in line with Brown's (1998) research on probation.²⁵⁹ The

²⁵⁹ Brown's (1998) research on one-to-one probation supervision found that although staff saw desistance as the overall goal of supervision, they conceptualised success broadly, including in terms of engagement, increases in maturity and the development of a supervisory relationship.

implication was that while the reduction or cessation of offending was the overall aspiration, it was often not a meaningful measure of success in the immediate term, as one manager explained:

At the end of the day, we are in the business of trying to reduce reoffending, so, yes, that's always there as one of the main aims of what we're trying to achieve, but you have to see that in the context of the young person's life, the community, and other things that are going on.

[Shire YOS, manager 1]

Underlying such perspectives was the view that children's offending was often a symptom of the adversity in their lives and thus alleviating such difficulties was a more appropriate goal because: 'If people's lives are better, then the risk of them coming back is going to be less'. In City YOS, as outlined earlier, the extreme adversity of children's lives meant that practitioners often perceived children's well-being rather than their criminality as the main priority, which may explain why reduced reoffending was rarely highlighted as a measure of success there. In addition, as discussed above, many practitioners perceived maturity to be a critical factor in children's movement away from offending. Thus, as one worker emphasised: 'some children are just not ready. And to be judged by those children, is just wrong'. In contrast, notions of success that focused on distance-travelled, well-being and order completion were felt to provide a much more accurate picture of achievement because they better reflected children's daily realities and developmental stage.²⁶⁰

Conceptualising success in this way seemed to play a role in promoting both the children's and practitioners' well-being. In this respect, there was some evidence that practitioners focused on 'small wins' and 'baby steps' as a means of encouraging children's progress:

If the young person then says 'I have offended, but I don't take drugs anymore'. If there is a positive change somewhere along the line I think we still have to, I was going to say be proud of what they have achieved. Still celebrate that little achievement. [City YOS, manager 2]

²⁶⁰ It is worthwhile noting here that historically, the longer-term healthy development of children was the key focus for youth justice practitioners, prior to the focus on reoffending in the 1990s (Haines and Drakeford, 1998).

While practitioners rarely highlighted the importance of such approaches in interview, I observed many supervision sessions during which children were praised for their achievements, including attendance at appointments, completion of reparation, and engagement with school. This resonates with Johns et al.'s (2017: 16) findings that YOS workers 'constru[ed] "success" where failure might otherwise be perceived, such as staying in a training placement for 'two weeks'. They argue that such interpretations of success are evidence of workers 'consistently promot[ing] their [the children's] *positive development*'.

An additional interpretation is that YOS workers *must* see such developments as successes to maintain their dedication to their role, as well as faith in its positive impact. In this respect, when asked about their interpretation of success, several practitioners emphasised that 'hard' measures, such as reoffending rates, were as one worker put it, 'just wrong...demoralising'. Instead, as another practitioner said 'I think trying to silver line anything is always important'. These narratives accord with Worrall and Mawby's (2014: 349-350) findings about the existence of 'probation cultures' that 'enable probation workers to deal with uncertainty...[characteristics] include...a long-sufferance that redefines success and lives with or rationalises failure'. The importance of doing this may be particularly so given that they may not see more significant change or 'big wins' in their 'lifetime' of work with the child. In this sense, it was apparent that 'small wins' were understood by some practitioners as a sign that the seed they had planted was beginning to germinate:

That you are aware... that you have sown that seed. So the life of that young person is not going to be rosy all of a sudden, but at least you've noticed that there was something...like maybe their relationship with a parent; maybe the attendance at school; maybe the fact that they stop associating with that boy; maybe their attitude to you, or the attitude to the YOS. Some change, because at the end of the day, we are looking for change. The evidence of some change in some respect.

[City YOS, manager 2]

Summary

In the preceding discussion I have explored the practitioners' perspectives about how supervision helped and its limitations, including the ways in which they understood and appraised the effects of their work. The opening sections of the chapter revealed an array of

accepted – and sometimes contradictory – wisdoms about how supervision helped, which I argue is indicative of a lack of a coherent philosophy of change. As I showed, there was a perception amongst the practitioners of a disconnect between what they were supposed to do (in line with management and sentence expectations) and what they felt helped children. By extension, their conceptualisation of success tended to centre on what they felt was meaningful, rather than official measures. In this regard, they saw the central task of YOS supervision as ‘planting a seed’ that would ‘develop and grow’ as children matured out of offending. Success, accordingly, was understood principally in terms of ‘baby steps’ that indicated the seed was taking root, as opposed to recidivism. Such notions seemed to shape the way that practitioners worked with children, as well as being imperative to preserving their faith in the positive impact of supervision and thus their capacity to continue practising.

Comparing and contrasting the narratives of YOS clients and workers

Reflecting on Chapters 5 and 6, it is notable that there were significant parallels between children and practitioners perspectives about supervision. A majority of both sets of interviewees spoke about the pivotal role of their relationship in determining the quality of supervision. For most children and practitioners, the benefits of a positive supervisory relationship were limited to compliance, participation and disclosure. However, a minority of children and practitioners highlighted the desistance-promoting potential of relationships, which they attributed to increased self-belief, self-reflection and the commitment to stay out of trouble fostered through such bonds. Many practitioner interviewees conceptualised the value of supervision as increasing over time – ‘sowing the seeds of change’ – which was reflected in several of the children’s accounts. A minority of YOS clients and workers shared the view both that YOS was the only service on children’s ‘side’ and that the structure to children’s lives provided by supervision was a primary benefit. Several children understood the purpose of supervision YOS as a punishment as did some practitioners, although neither group appeared to feel that this was borne out by experience.

However, there were notable areas of divergence too. The majority of children singled out talking with their supervisor as the most helpful supervisory activity, but this was rarely acknowledged in practitioners’ accounts. Instead, practitioners focused on children’s learning styles, particularly in Shire YOS, seemingly often to the neglect of talking and despite research indicating the low or negative effect of such an approach in the education field.

Furthermore, there was some evidence that, ultimately, practitioners' approaches reflected the style of working valorised within the YOS and/or with which they felt most comfortable. In addition, while some children highlighted the value of future-orientated work and this was implicit in many others' accounts, only a small proportion of practitioners acknowledged this and, moreover, it was seen as subversive, outwith typical supervision activity.

Chapter 7: Contextualising the Supervisory Relationship

The previous chapters have established that both the children and the professionals saw a good supervisory relationship as fundamental to supervision. Here I consider the position of the supervisory relationship in practice within the context of the wider youth justice landscape. Of probation supervision it has been argued that while relationship-based working has fallen in and out of favour in the policy arena, at a practice level its centrality – at least notionally – has always endured (Burnett and McNeill, 2005). Yet we know comparatively little about the place of ‘the relationship’ in youth justice supervision.

In recent years, there have been signs that the importance of the supervisory relationship is increasingly being recognised at a national policy level. In his Youth Justice Review, Charlie Taylor emphasised that ‘what is undoubtedly important is the quality of the worker who is involved with the child, and the relationship that they strike up’ (2016b: 4). In the same year, HMI Probation published its thematic inspection of desistance and young people, which again highlighted the value of a ‘trusting, open and collaborative relationship with their YOT worker or other professional’, with children seeing this as ‘the biggest factor in their achievement’ (2016: 4). In addition, a trauma-informed model of working in which the establishment of a trusting supervisory relationship is central (Skuse and Matthew, 2015), termed the enhanced case management (ECM) approach, has been successfully trialled in three YOTs in Wales (Cordis Bright, 2017), with further trials planned (HM Government, 2018).²⁶¹ That said, as Hampson (2018) has noted, the new youth justice assessment

²⁶¹ ECM draws on the Trauma Recovery Model (TRM), which was developed by Skuse and Matthews (2015) for working with children in a secure children’s home. It is grounded in the belief that through optimism and support, desistance is possible for all children who offend. The model itself comprises six layers: the first involves meeting the child’s physiological and safety needs through structure (such as accommodation and establishment of an educational routine); the second stage is focused on building the child’s secure base through containment and fostering strong relationships with one or two workers, with the aim of beginning to act as reparative attachments; once children have successfully completed these two stages and begun to disclose details of trauma, the third stage involves specialist interventions to work through their traumatic experiences (such as abuse, bereavement, and exploitation); when children are emotionally stable and thus cognitively able, they progress to the fourth stage, which comprises cognitive interventions, such as victim empathy and consequential thinking; the fifth stage is focused on future planning, to support the child’s changed self-identity; while the final phase sees the child as growing in autonomy, while the safety net remains available for ongoing support needs. To support implementation of the TRM, the ECM entailed training for YOT workers in trauma, attachment and child development; ongoing support from a clinical psychologist to the YOT case managers; and clinical supervision for staff (Cordis Bright, 2017: 12-13). The Welsh trial reported evidence of reductions in offending and improvements in other positive outcomes (such as educational engagement), although the sample

framework *Assetplus*, despite being informed by desistance thinking, contains no mention of the importance of building trusting relationships.

Despite such developments, there are signs that the centrality of the relationship may be under threat at a practice level. As outlined in Chapter 1, YOSs have seen year-on-year cuts to their budgets, while workloads remain substantial. Many in the youth justice field have voiced concerns about the impact of sustained funding reductions on the quality of YOS work. A consultation about one round of cuts elicited opposition from 76 per cent of respondents, who warned that these would have a ‘highly detrimental impact on frontline services provided by YOT staff’ (YJB, 2015, 4-5). In a ‘stocktake’ of the activities and demands on YOSs, services reported that ‘further funding reductions would mean an increase in caseload per caseworker (moving them closer to adult probation service ratios)’ (Deloitte, 2015: 5).²⁶² Clinks outlined evidence, collected through a series of youth justice consultation events, of the impact of such developments on the relationship:²⁶³

Event participants thought the high level of churn in youth justice-related professions (for example officers in youth custody, Youth Offending Team (YOT) workers and social workers) due to low pay, poor training, high caseloads and excessive bureaucracy, meant that staff were often inexperienced and could not develop long-term relationships with the young people they worked with. Recent budget cuts to YOTs, combined with the requirements of government policy and Youth Justice Board guidance, were also believed to have resulted in workers now spending too much time on risk assessments and other paperwork, leaving them with limited time to spend directly with young people and restricting their flexibility to work with families or in community environments (Frazer, 2016).

Yet the above mentioned stocktake reported that there was ‘little relationship’ between the level of YJB funding to YOTs and performance against the three key youth justice outcomes (reductions in first time entrants, custody rates and reoffending rates), accordingly suggesting that it could be reduced (Deloitte, 2015: 6). It also found that staffing levels had a ‘limited

was very small (21 children) and there was no control group.

²⁶² This comprised a survey of 130 [85 per cent of] YOSs, financial and ‘other’ data collection, as well as discussions with over 600 practitioners across 20 YOSs.

²⁶³ Clinks is an alliance of voluntary and community sector organisations working with offenders in England and Wales, recognised as an umbrella organisation by MoJ.

impact' on performance (2015: 6). Notably, however, the report indicated that reductions in funding could jeopardise YOTs' holistic working, such as facilitating children's participation in ETE.

I begin by exploring the professionals' views that in recent years they had seen a rise in the vulnerability of their caseloads, the increasing dominance of 'paperwork' and the erosion of wider welfare services and the YOS team. I then move on to considering the practical and emotional implications of such pressures for them, their work and the children under their supervision.

Relationships: putting theory into practice

Despite the apparent importance of the supervisory relationship, in both YOSs competing demands on YOS workers' time were seen to be compromising the quality of work with children and the development of such relationships. Across both YOSs, there was a perception that workloads had increased in recent years, despite a fall in the size of caseloads. There were understood to be several factors in this apparent development.

Complex caseloads?

In both YOSs, the nature of caseloads was widely perceived to be more 'complex'. Such cases were felt to be more work and time-intensive ('they are like a Pandora's box'). The below description was typical:

...there isn't your bog standard referral order the same as you would have got previously...generally you've always got a referral order that has either got lots and lots of vulnerability concerns or they could be quite risky, you've not got the straight forward ones. I've forgotten what a straight forward one looks like!

[Shire YOS, worker 17]

These cases were said to involve a greater amount of administrative tasks and activities, such as assessments, making referrals to other services, and meetings. As one practitioner explained: 'It's never ending, it's literally like fighting fire with fire. If you can imagine a stove with four pots bubbling'. In this way, YOS workers described spending much of their time 'fire-fighting' in response to the often fast-paced and serious nature of change with such cases.

Many interviewees understood this apparent development to be a consequence of increased diversion activity, whereby minor misdemeanours (variously described as ‘lower risk’, ‘straightforward’ and ‘fairly easy’) are more likely to be dealt with via out-of-court measures, leaving behind a greater concentration of children whose offending and problems are more intractable. However, as discussed in Chapter 4, national data shows that children subject to community sentences have a much more limited offending history than previously, and thus are less likely to reoffend.

Nevertheless, it may be that the needs of the current cohort are greater than before. Just over a quarter of the professional interviewees (12 out of 46) expressed the view that the profile of children’s needs had changed. In particular, they reported seeing many more cases of child neglect, children going missing from home, the placement of children in out-of-area care, child sexual exploitation, and mental ill-health. Several interviewees felt that not only were their cases ‘complex in different ways from how it used to be’, but also more complex in terms of the scale of their needs. This chimes with the views of Gray’s (2013b) YOS practitioner interviewees that children’s problems were getting worse.

There were seen to be different factors at play in the perceived changing profile of need. The City YOS service manager believed that it was symptomatic of societal changes:

So I think in society there are some shifts: use of social media, which is putting more pressure on young people to do certain things, I think that’s part of it. I think the reduction of prevention, early intervention services, youth services, has had an impact on these young people, so you know, there are not as many places for young people to go...There’s a cost associated with lots of things. Parents are being required to do more to earn money, so I think there’s less parental supervision, and that’s part of the reason why we’re seeing this as well. Our exclusion rates in [area] are really high, so we’ve seen, I think for this academic year it was something like 50 young people excluded in the first term.

[City YOS, manager 4]

A number of others attributed the high levels of vulnerability to the erosion of welfare and youth services (‘I think young people are not being supported...families are not being

supported'), while some highlighted improvements in identification of need ('I think we're better at identifying things...which makes the cases more and more complicated'). One practitioner implied that diversion activity delayed the provision of early support to children noting that 'they're coming with so much sort of need and the gravity of their offending is so much worse because there's been a long build up'. The key point is that regardless of the reasons, it was the experience of some practitioners that a much greater proportion of their caseloads had multiple and severe needs than previously, which had implications for practice as I discuss later.

However, this was not a universal perception. A handful of the professionals (5 out of 46), including several managers, across the two YOSs did not believe the nature of caseloads had changed. Indeed, two of the professional interviewees asserted that 'if anything...there may even be a few less of those complex, serious ones' and that 'over the years we've had a lot less serious cases that have come our way'. It is revealing that these interviewees understood the complexity and seriousness of cases as synonymous. It was noteworthy too that three of the four operational managers in City YOS dismissed the notion that caseloads had become more complex, with two implying that practitioners were using this as a pretext for difficulties with workload management.

The paperwork burden

In both services, case managers expressed frustration that they were, as they saw it, increasingly desk-based case coordinators, with limited face-to-face time with children, evidence of the audit culture associated with new managerialism (Gelsthorpe, 2013; Farrow et al., 2007). This issue presented differently in the two YOSs due to the contrasting composition of the staff teams.

In Shire YOS, children were allocated a qualified case manager (who was the responsible officer) and a support worker (who conducted the majority of supervisory meetings). Thus, on one level there was an assumption that the case manager role was weighted towards paperwork. As one manager put it: '[if] you don't like doing the paperwork, then don't be a YOT officer. Be a support worker if you prefer the one-to-ones, and the interventions and all that'. Yet, disappointment that their role 'was a lot less than I ever imagined face-to-face' was a common theme in the narratives of case managers. In practice, they typically saw most of their supervisees once a month. Although there was some variation, depending on the

inclination of the manager ('[I see young people] more than some of the other case managers'); workload ('I had a month last month where I was just that busy I haven't seen any kids'); the availability of the support worker ('I had a support worker off for a number of months so I was doing a lot of face-to-face myself, which was nice'); and the nature of the cases (for example, if children had multiple contacts per week, they tended to see both their support worker and case manager). Nevertheless, as one case manager explained:

I feel like there has been a big shift, in that I'm spending a lot more time on the computer...doing the assessments, coordinating the case, so I think I feel a bit disappointed by the way things have shifted and evolved, because I've not got as much of that one-to-one with young people and quite a lot of the time the one-to-one comes in when they've not come to appointments and I have to come in and send them back to court or look at ways why they're not accessing appointments.

[Shire YOS, worker 17]

As is suggested in this extract, and was articulated by numerous other interviewees, increasing levels of 'paperwork' were perceived to underlie the trend towards less time with their young supervisees.

In contrast, case managers in City YOS both coordinated the case and undertook supervision meetings with their young supervisees. The tension was stark between these two aspects of their role, with the below comment typical:

...it's so much paperwork. There are days you can come into this office and it feels like a factory just typing, that's all you can hear. I can do a day just typing up notes... Yesterday one of the best comments I ever heard was one of the YOS officers she said, 'This boy is starting to get in the way of my work'. Somebody went. 'Surely the kids are the work', it was like, 'Not anymore'. Everyone just burst out laughing because that is exactly how it feels.

[City YOS, worker 13]

It was apparent that many practitioners felt it impossible to 'get the balance right'. Workers who focused on seeing children, usually for an hour or more, spoke of being 'so far behind on my paperwork now because I like to see my young people'. One worker told me that the

only means of doing both was to complete reports in her own time in the evenings and weekends, noting that ‘there’s no other way unless you do a 50 to 60-hour week’. Others prioritised the paperwork, and accordingly reported only seeing children sometimes for ‘15 minutes tops’ or organising for the duty officer to see them on their behalf. Thus, the practitioners typically reported spending between 15 – 30 per cent of their time seeing children. An additional factor was that City YOS was expecting to be inspected imminently by HMI Probation, which resulted in, as one manager described ‘a mad rush...to dot all your Is and cross all the Ts’; in other words, to catch-up with paperwork. In practice this meant that the only option for some practitioners was to cut short their appointments or arrange for their supervisees to be seen by the duty officers.

Two City YOS interviewees, while acknowledging the existence of such paperwork tensions, argued that it was manageable if one was organised and took the ‘pragmatic’ approach of ‘do it good enough quickly’. However, both reflected that this was a strategy that had come with experience, as the below extract illustrates:

At the beginning I think I just felt like, ‘Oh I have to record everything, because everything might be significant’. I think the more I’ve been doing my job the more I’ve been able to sift what’s important and what isn’t.

[City YOS, worker 14]

Less experienced or confident colleagues may therefore lean towards increased recording, particularly in a context of complex caseloads and, as some described it, significant risk-aversion, as discussed later.

Whilst the perception was that there had ‘always been a tension between paperwork and making enough time for young people’, the common view across both YOSs was that the amount of ‘paperwork’ had grown in recent years. Some staff put this down, in part, to the natural evolution of YOS work: ‘when YOSs started, there was just Asset but now there is RMP [Risk Management Plan], VMP [Vulnerability Management Plan] etc’. Practitioners variously commented that ‘the more I’ve been doing this job the more admin there has become’; and ‘[the paperwork] it’s just actually got more and more and more since I’ve been here, say over the past three years’. Yet several of the professionals did not subscribe to this view. One Shire YOS manager argued that the issue did not lie in the level of paperwork but

that 'people are always going to want more time face to face with young people, it will never be enough'. Others contrasted their current levels of paperwork with previously unmanageable expectations at the height of managerialism:

I think as a YOT it went overboard at one point, the amount of reviews and updating, and then that has been clawed back a lot, so it has changed, it has gone down, but they are so complex the documents now, that I think you still feel they are dominant priority.

[Shire YOS, worker 3]

Yet it is noteworthy that this interviewee's perception was that paperwork still remained the 'dominant priority'. Armitage et al. (2016) found similar evidence of the paramountcy of paperwork, to the detriment of face-to-face time with children, in their study of youth justice policy implementation in two YOTs.

The greater proportion of vulnerable cases were seen to be a key factor in the higher levels of 'paperwork'. As one practitioner put it: 'if you're dealing with more complex cases then there's going to be more to do'. A case of this kind typically involved: liaising with 'multiple agencies'; making referrals to other agencies; completing screening forms to identify 'emerging' vulnerabilities (such as child sexual exploitation); attending multi-agency meetings about the child; advocating on their behalf to access support from other services; and having to update 'your documents...constantly, if there is one little thing that happens'.

Related to this, there was some evidence that local 'paperwork' had increased in parallel and in response to this trend, so that children's needs were more likely to be identified and subject to greater recording requirements, as illustrated by the below extracts:

...If you had a caseload of 15 [five years ago] and you were doing ROSHs [Risk of Serious Harm Assessments] on three of them, the same caseload of 15 that you have now, you'd be doing ROSHs on 13 of them. So, that's where they're going to see the increase of paperwork. I think it definitely has increased...Because, we have developed a greater understanding of risk of harm. That's, I think, the main thing.

[City YOS, manager 3]

...there's a lot more processes we've got to do before we get to the same position, so from A to B, you've got to do 12 steps rather than six now, so things like that hinder. Although I can see a method to the madness as we need to make sure that our decisions are defensible decisions, but there is a lot more steps sometimes, which they are necessary, but they weren't necessary a couple of years back....I think the processes have had to change due to the change in the complexity of the cases. For example, when I started as a case manager, CSE was unheard of really, now it's in the forefront of everything.

[Shire YOS, worker 17]

Such developments suggested a shift in the way the practitioners conceptualised and responded to children's vulnerabilities, which may be contributing to the pattern of increased need, as touched upon earlier. In this way, as is implicit in the above extract, it was apparent from the professionals' narratives that the vulnerable nature of caseloads was often understood as having intensified the need for 'thoroughness' and to 'try[ing] to get everything so right for the young person'. Thus while they resented the high levels of paperwork, they also believed it to be fundamentally important to 'make[ing] sure you've covered every single aspect of that case', as otherwise 'it puts the service at risk, it puts that worker at risk, and it puts the child at risk' (see also Armitage et al., 2016). In other words, this was *defensible decision-making* in action, part-and-parcel of the risk culture (Kemshall, 1998).

In this regard, it was evident that the political context of high-profile child protection cases was an important factor in the imperative for 'defensible decision-making' and according emphasis on increased case recording:

... in the whole area where you work with children, you can make a decision that's wrong and something dreadful happens to that child; because [of that] there's a climate of fear, of justifiable decision making, of making sure that we do all this [recording].

[Shire YOS, manager 5]

There is more [paperwork] and that's from...a few cases now...that have hit the headlines, Rotherham was one of them, the Baby P case that was the case that

changed a lot for everybody because...things weren't put in place and agencies weren't communicating with each other and things like that, so there is a lot more focus on that and that actually takes away my time from dealing with the young people, which is a problem.

[City YOS, worker 3]

However, the crucial point seemed to be the way in which such national developments were interpreted and applied by local senior management. Inspection was a factor here; with both YOSs expecting one during the fieldwork period. In Shire YOS, senior management had developed quality audit standards, which all case managers were expected to use to review their cases. Practitioners appeared to accept this on the basis that it would help 'maintain a high standard for inspection'. Yet, in City YOS, many interviewees were critical of the perceived excessive management preoccupation with assessment and recording ahead of inspection. This was a typical comment:

I think the new intervention plans that have come in here have literally doubled our workload, because previously we had risk management plans and vulnerability management plans, but they were only for young people that met those thresholds, but now essentially we're doing that for everybody and I'll give you an example, I've got a three-month referral order, first offence for threatening to slap someone, but I've got to do all that stuff....two panels, a panel report, ASSET, intervention plan, and I meet her fortnightly. Anyway she's so low risk it is just ridiculous.

[City YOS, worker 1]

In contrast, only two Shire YOS practitioners made similar such comments. My interpretation was that the emphasis on paperwork in City YOS was borne out of the severe adversity in the children's lives, in which serious youth violence was often a core feature.

The political context was seen to have created an unfavourable environment for YOSs in other ways too. Charlie Taylor's major review of youth justice, which began during fieldwork, signalled its intention to recommend a significant departure from current YOS arrangements, as detailed in Chapter 1 (Taylor, 2016a, 2016b). This development along with the part-privatisation of probation services (HMI Probation, 2017a) and cuts to budgets were

perceived as threats to the future of YOSs, which were understood by some professionals to have increased bureaucracy still further:

I think that the way things are going...this particular section of youth justice is likely to be privatised at some point in the same way as the probation service. So I think the emphasis has been on justifying our existence, so by doing that you spend more time inputting data, which then can be transmitted as evidence-based work. And I think it is important to evidence your work but I feel much more time is being spent on the computer and a lot less time is used to do real good quality work with young people.²⁶⁴

[City YOS, worker 6]

The above accounts of increased local bureaucracy in response to external pressures strongly accords with Armitage et al.'s (2016) contention that, the combination of reduced central prescription and reporting requirements, as well as increased local accountability, is resulting in YOT managers playing an ever more critical role in shaping frontline experiences of managerialism.

Budgetary constraints

In both the YOSs there was a strong sentiment that budget cuts – both to the YOS and welfare services – meant that ‘the organisation [is] not necessarily offer[ing] the same service as what it was five years ago’. The depleted financial environment was perceived to have an inflationary effect to the YOS workload in three main ways.

First, both services were subject to ongoing cuts to the staff team, characterised by roles not being refilled. In both YOSs, this was seen to have resulted in increased workloads. In City YOS, support officers said that their remit had significantly expanded from a focus on working with children on out-of-court disposals, to taking on referral orders and developing and delivering groupwork programmes (which were said to have been previously commissioned out). Some considered themselves to be under-qualified for this work, noting that training – although promised – had not yet been provided; and felt ‘thinly stretched’ to the extent that ‘we won’t be able to do anything well’. It was noteworthy too that the case

²⁶⁴ It is noteworthy that this practitioner refers to ‘evidence-based work’ in the context of recording supervision data, rather than practice being informed by the academic evidence.

managers here were also required to undertake regularly role of the duty officer (whereby they saw children on others' behalf for the day) and court officer. In addition, as shall be seen later, the YOS was beset by high staff turnover throughout much of the fieldwork period, which compounded the workload pressures on remaining staff.

In Shire YOS, the senior manager told me that though they had so far been able to avoid redundancies, further funding cuts would make this unavoidable. While the practitioners rarely spoke of this, one described the possibility as 'anxiety provoking'. Several workers expressed concern at the erosion of their multi-agency character, pointing to the absence of in-house specialists. They felt that this made it more difficult to access advice and support:

...we've not got the full professional agencies that we should have, so under the Crime and Disorder Act we should have... somebody representing health, we should have the police, there's loads of things that we're missing... [it's not] as helpful as having somebody within the team who you can speak to and get their advice on whether there needs to be a referral or not... it's got to have an impact on us both really because the longer it takes for me to do the referral, the longer it takes for them to access the support that they need.

[Shire YOS, worker 10]

There was uncertainty too whether the soon-to-leave substance misuse worker would be replaced.²⁶⁵ He feared that children would be less likely to engage with external support, resulting in the closure of their cases, thus hindering their ability to access support when they were ready:

...the difference that I had with working with young people is that I've got the chance to roll with resistance, if someone misses three or four appointments I'm having to chase them, or have ad hoc appointments with them. I can still build that relationship up and when they're at a point where they're ready, be able to get hold of them and make that difference.... But I think if their voluntary [external] services, a lot of our young people will say 'I don't need any help, I don't want it' ...so they won't attend...they'll be closed [the case]. [Shire YOS, worker 8]

²⁶⁵ Although the position was later temporarily filled.

Second, there was consensus in both YOSs that thresholds for accessing partner services (such as children's and family services, and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services [CAMHS]) had increased as a result of budget cuts. This was considered to have impeded their ability to help children effectively with their needs, as well as adding to their own workloads because of the consequent pressure to 'plug the gaps' (Phoenix, 2009: 125):

I feel sometimes that because there have been cuts in other services such as social care, that sometimes you're picking up the pieces and...[we're] not doing what their job is, well I suppose sometimes we are really, sometimes we identify things which should have been picked up by other services or agencies but because of their thresholds, the criteria have increased, quite often we're left to pick up the pieces. So it's sort of like 'YOT are involved and they're a statutory service so they'll sort it out' but they don't realise that we're only time-limited and we're not experts in everything to do with welfare and... the services out there are swapping and changing so much due to the cuts that it's harder to signpost young people and families, because...something that might have been there two months ago, it was only fixed-term, so it has finished now. So it is a lot harder.

[Shire YOS, worker 14]

They tell me that they are now having to do more on cases because there are not the other services available to refer them to. One worker gives the examples that children's social care often say their thresholds are too high to accept a YOS referral (e.g. for going missing from home a lot) whereas they would have done previously. They have always felt like they have to play the social worker role in part but feel this more keenly at present.

[City YOS, fieldnotes, September 2015]

It is noteworthy that teachers and prison governors have expressed similar feelings that they are the 'modern social services' (The Secret Teacher, 2015; see also Howard League for Prison Reform, 2017). But, as highlighted in the first extract, the volatile landscape of local support provision was seen to have made it harder and more time-consuming to access help for children. In Shire YOS, some practitioners felt that working across several local authority areas compounded this issue further: 'it's difficult because then you're working across three

authorities and signposting... It takes a bit more thinking and a bit more time to do stuff'. Some practitioners subsequently felt that it was important to do more advocacy or 'battling' on children's behalf to ensure they received the support to which they were entitled. But given the energy required, such work may be less likely to happen at times of high workload, stress and demoralisation.

Third, practitioners across both YOSs pointed to the general adverse impact of budget cuts on the operation of supervision. Shire YOS had seen the closure of all YOS bases for seeing children (although there continued to be two staff team offices), so that all appointments happened in the community, typically in youth centres and sometimes children's homes. While one might expect this to be beneficial for children's engagement, the practitioners often took the view that this was somewhat detrimental to the service the YOS offered. One practitioner believed that, while it was right that appointments took place in the community, the absence of YOS bases deprived children of a safe place to come if they needed: 'I just think, removing the location actually prevents young people from asking for that support, and perhaps [they] wouldn't know where to go afterwards'. The support workers reported that the arrangement squeezed their time both for paperwork (which comprised case diary entries²⁶⁶ and referral order reports) and meeting with children, because a significant proportion of their day was spent travelling to appointments as a result of the large area encompassed by service:

I think in the way that this YOS is structured in terms of travelling that makes a lot more difficult for me, just kind of like spending a lot of time on the road than actually meeting the young people and doing stuff, so that for me has been a massive challenge in terms of just distance.

[Shire YOS, worker 9]

My experience was that the duration of supervision appointments was not significantly affected by this, typically lasting for 30-60 minutes. Yet there was evidence that this impacted on the morale of staff who felt they were constantly on the move.

Practitioners in both services also reported that the lack of resources had severely circumscribed the activities that could be offered within ISS programmes and groupwork:

²⁶⁶ The case diary was a log of activities completed with and on behalf of children. This typically included

[Worker A] said that the standing joke is that they have to put in 'family time' on ISS timetables since there are no resources to fill young people's time. Although the Case Managers see family time as a good thing, and they can try to provide activities to support this, it is difficult to monitor whether it actually happens. [Worker B] says this is a result of cuts to funding by Govt.

[City YOS, fieldnotes, January 2016]

You know, there's no money available to do anything. Everything I do, I do free. I try to be very inventive and get free things. I mean I've just got kids through a first aid course, eight of them last year in the summer, because it was free. I'm looking at doing that again for the girls' group.

[Shire YOS, worker 13]

In addition to statutory work, budget constraints impeded the YOS's ability to support children with realising their aspirations, such as with funds for essential college equipment.²⁶⁷ When envisioning their idea of the best possible YOS, a number of the professionals said that 'if funding wasn't an obstacle' they would do positive activities with their young supervisees, such as going to the gym or fishing, to 'show them that there are more positive things in life to engage in rather than going out on the streets and smoking weed or whatever they're doing'. All of this seemed to represent a belief in the importance of broadening children's horizons (Drake et al., 2014), yet they felt powerless to do so. This was not just a symptom of the bleak financial environment; such aspirations were not seen to be a realistic option within the current conceptualisation of youth justice as dichotomised into care and control:

AW: So it's about imagining a different life for themselves?

Shire YOS, worker 10: Yeah, but at the same time I suppose back into reality, we can't just be looked at as youth work friendly, we've got to still have that boundary of 'yeah we are criminal justice as well', so it is a difficult one to balance.

write-ups of supervision sessions and details of liaison with partner agencies.

²⁶⁷ This was reported to be a particular problem by Shire YOS practitioners. One expressed frustration at her inability to help children with paying for 'kit' needed for college courses, such as overalls (said to be £60) and catering utensils (reportedly as much as £300). Two workers said that they had been informed by senior management that they could not be paid for driving a group of girls with whom they worked to a concert in which the girls were performing (as a result of YOS work); they did it anyway.

The implications for one-to-one supervision

In both YOSs, there was evidence that practitioners' emotional and physical capacity to do their work was adversely affected by the above pressures. This was particularly stark in City YOS, although as shall be seen, there were both similarities and differences between the two YOSs.

Practical implications

The professionals' concerns centred on their limited *time* to work with and on behalf of children. In this way, as Shapland et al. (2014: 148) have observed of probation, 'staff thought time was a prerequisite of quality work, and that lack of time was a bar to quality work'. This has been a long-standing issue in the youth justice arena. Indeed, criticism of the small proportion of youth justice workers' time spent seeing children (about one-third) in the Audit Commission report *Misspent Youth* (1996: 27) formed a key rationale for the introduction of YOTs; 'the main problem YOTs were introduced to remedy' (Pitts, 2001: 3). So what did the time pressures mean for the practitioners and children here?

City YOS

Beginning with City YOS, it was apparent from the professionals' narratives that the lack of time was seen as severely hampering their ability to help children:

What I do feel that YOS work with young people achieves? Not what I would like it to achieve. Not enough, not enough of the positives, not enough of the engagement because there isn't enough time to do it.

[City YOS, manager 1]

I think it's ineffective, I don't think it's ever going to work....I think you're not going to see the sort of effects that you'd want to have...the reality is, if 80 per cent of your time is spent in front of the computer then you're not giving very much to the 15 or 16 people on your caseload that you're working with.

[City YOS, worker 7]

A key issue was that some of the time, as one practitioner said: 'everyone is so busy that supervision doesn't really happen, it's just five minutes squeezed into see a young person'. It should be noted here that a handful of practitioners actively resisted the above pressures:

I wouldn't give a young person a disservice in terms of if I'm meeting with them for an appointment, I wouldn't cut it down...I'd still want to give that young person 100 per cent service myself regardless.

[City YOS, worker 4]

This resonates somewhat with accounts of youth justice practitioners as 'active human agents...who engage in a complex process of resistance, subversion and revision' (Gray, 2013b: 524). That said, this was not the norm.

Practitioners often considered such limited contact to be 'detrimental' to children because it denied them a 'proper session', negating a core purpose of their order, while some others said that shorter meetings were better for children's limited attention spans. As one interviewee explained, some children interpreted minimal engagement as a lack of care, although others were grateful for the brevity:

I've had young people where, when I saw somebody on duty the other week, and that was just going to be literally a five-minute just to check that they're okay, and that's pretty much it. He was like, 'Oh, is that it? Can I not stay longer?' [so I said] 'I mean, you can stay longer'. So, I think sometimes, especially if they maybe feel rejected elsewhere, like at home or whatever, and they see the YOT as maybe a bit of a safe haven, but then you just see them, and be like, 'Okay, cool. Off you go, then'. It's, kind of, a bit of a let-down for them. But, often you'll get young people that can't wait to get out of here.

[City YOS, worker 10]

Links can be seen here with the children's perceptions (Chapter 5). Although some of the children said that they preferred shorter sessions, many emphasised the importance of doing something meaningful.

Furthermore, children were ‘regularly’ not seen by their supervisor *at all*, particularly during very busy periods, and instead met with a duty supervisor or other professionals.²⁶⁸ For example, 16-year-old Tyrone’s case file showed that he was seen by ‘duty’ six times during the first three months of his order, including his first appointment.²⁶⁹ As noted in Chapter 3, this made observation of supervision here particularly difficult. Going further, there was some evidence that children were sometimes not being seen by *anyone*. One manager told me that ‘sixty to seventy per cent’ of the YOS’s cases were not being seen in line with national standards.²⁷⁰ Though she did not link this with workload levels, it seemed likely that this was a contributing factor to the problems described here:

What I see is that young people are not being seen. Young people are regularly seen by duty, because the officer is not in: he's off sick, he's on leave, he's on training, or whatever. Rather than rearranging those appointments with the young person, so that you see them and you deliver a meaningful intervention, they're just like, 'Whatever'. Or young people are just not seen... Because, say, for instance, in a contract, they have to do – I don't know – their [X] programme and their [X] programme. So the officer doesn't do anything, because they're going to have that intervention. But the intervention is delayed, because there is a waiting list. So in the meantime, there's just like... nothing.

[City YOS, manager 2]

Such findings bear some resemblance to the recent Justice Select Committee (2018) report on Transforming Rehabilitation, which found that supervision of probationers was taking place by telephone and text only. The above comments tallied with several of the children’s experiences, and mine too. I experienced officers forgetting about appointments, and my case file analysis suggested that some children had not been seen for several weeks despite requiring weekly supervision.²⁷¹ The above manager felt that the lack of meaningful, and in

²⁶⁸ As discussed in Chapter 3, ironically this meant that while most of the practitioners were initially wary of involvement in my research (and helping me to ‘recruit’ young interviewees), many became keen participants when they realised my interviews with children could count as contact time.

²⁶⁹ It should be noted that Tyrone was on an intensive supervision and surveillance order, involving contact three times per week, which perhaps increased the likelihood that duty contacts would be needed.

²⁷⁰ National standards specify that ‘a contact is a planned, meaningful face-to-face meeting that takes place between the child or young person, the YOT case manager, another member of the YOT, a member of another agency or a volunteer approved to work with the young person in respect of the supervision of his or her court order’ (YJB, 2013: 29).

²⁷¹ Although it was unclear whether this was an accurate reflection of meetings or a symptom of the difficulties

some cases any, consistent contact with children was felt to be at ‘the core of why we have the high rates of reoffending’. This resonates with the evidence from the adult and youth justice fields concerning the importance of supervisor continuity and consistency to positive outcomes (see Chapter 2). From an attachment perspective, such fractured experiences of supervision may be additionally problematic insofar as they may serve to reinforce children’s experiences of inconsistent relationships with adults.

Yet it was noteworthy that managers, in an apparent attempt to assuage the burden on practitioners, actively encouraged practitioners to spend the minimum necessary time with children. Most obviously, managers advised team members to ‘off-load’ their supervisees to other activities or to see them for shorter periods of time:

*You are suggested to use other appointments with professionals as contact time...
All to consider where young people can be seen via UPW [unpaid work],
reparation or group work.*

[City YOS, management email to team]

It has to be squeezed because there’s so much paperwork to do. So, I have to be saying to them, ‘It’s really a shame, but you might not be able to spend an hour with little John, because you’ve got to go and write up your Asset’.

[City YOS, manager 3]

In this way, there was a sense that, as one practitioner explained, that the needs of the service were being openly prioritised above helping children:

It’s always about paperwork and it’s always about a tick list rather than it being about the actual young person. Which when they do come back you think, ‘God, have I failed that young person, I could have done a little bit more’. But then you can’t, because I was even told by the manager, ‘It’s either them or you. The more you see them the more you’re behind, the less you see them’. I thought this is not really what I wanted to do.

[City YOS, worker 15]

in keeping on top of paperwork.

Such accounts speak to Garland's (2001: 189) critique of managerialist tendencies to prioritise 'outputs over outcomes' and quash practitioner discretion. Also relevant here is the finding from the emotional labour literature that feelings of 'ethical disjuncture' (Fenton, 2012: 941) can be provoked when one's values and actions conflict within a context of helping work (Westaby et al., 2016). In this regard, one practitioner gave an example where she had been dissuaded from increasing a child's risk assessment as a consequence of time constraints:

I had this boy and I just thought 'There's something off about him, I'm quite concerned'. Then you go into the risk assessment and it says, 'He's standard', so you see him once a week. I was like, 'Yes, but I have him once a week'. [Manager says] 'You haven't got time to see him anymore'. It's like your professional judgement, your flexibility just gets squashed. Your assessments are defined by the offence, not the child.

[City YOS, worker 13]

The implication seemed to be not that the YOS was being actively negligent in its public protection duties, but rather that there was a potential to overlook such 'cusp' cases due to pressures to see children for the minimum contact level justifiable. Although this was the only practitioner raising such concerns – and generally the YOS was perceived to be more rather than less-averse in its approach – it was notable that during a particularly busy period the senior management sent a team email directing 'All to see where assets can be reviewed and a reduction in contact levels can be applied. The same can be applied to the risk of harm assessment'. While one can see the rationale for such a suggestion – particularly since some practitioners spoke about being behind in their paperwork, which likely included assessments – it is also suggestive of the pressures the above practitioner described.

Despite the bleak picture painted here, supervision continued in some form. So what did all of this mean for its content and practice? Most often, practitioners believed that they were less able to help children if they only saw them for short periods of time. A common theme was that 'issues are raised but you don't always have the time to kind of deal with them':

Even I was saying this morning, I came for my home visit and I believe that this young person has gone through some sort of trauma. Throughout his childhood he's seen the whole family offending. I know that through supervision I could hopefully get deep into what is going on for him but I don't even have the time...I'm not saying I'm not going to work with him because obviously I'm going to work with him to prevent him from further offending, however to get deep down and dirty to see what's going on you need time.

[City YOS, worker 8]

The effect on practitioners' abilities to emotionally engage with their young supervisees is implicit in this account, a matter I return to in the next section.

A second theme was the sense of disorder in the way practitioners approached supervision. Interviewees expressed concern that their high and complex workload risked them 'overlooking' important aspects of a case and 'reacting to events rather than feeling more in control'. This was partly because the reactive nature of the role often meant that 'suddenly there is a whole new emergency...and you've got to drop everything', which resulted in tasks being forgotten:

I think you overlook things, you might forget to call someone back or a social worker needs to be emailed back. When you are constantly going through your emails going 'what have I missed? When's the next appointment? What do they have to do?'

[City YOS, worker 1]

Some workers reported that their attentions tended to be focused on their most 'complex' cases, which could lead to problems with 'lower risk' cases going unnoticed.

Practitioners also felt significantly hampered in their ability to plan supervision sessions ('I don't have the time or the headspace to actually think about what do with them and deliver this'). As illustrated below, this induced an approach wherein the 'process supplies the content' of supervision:

...if someone were to say 'well what have you done with this person since they started nine months ago?' I think on plenty of occasions it's true to say that I haven't done anything except get them to complete a court order, and I don't necessarily think that's a bad thing, but it's that's kind of, I guess, process approach that comes to the fore when you're busy, because if you're less busy you can plan out the content of your sessions much more and you make time and have the thinking time to plan about doing things in between sessions, like phoning young people up to see how they're getting on or coming to the conclusion that you think that their school needs to do something for them so making enough phone calls to get school to recognise that or, you know, going to a school physically to meet people, and I think in terms of influencing outcomes, that kind of work is often really important and there's just less time for that when we're busy.

[City YOS, worker 2]²⁷²

As he details, the workload pressures were also understood to bring about 'a passive mode [of working] where...you're doing less advocacy on their behalf'.

In this way, advocacy was said to be 'the first thing that gets cut', despite being regarded as fundamental to achieving good outcomes for children. Such work not only enhanced children's social capital, but was seen by practitioners as a key means of showing children that they cared, which was a pre-requisite for fostering meaningful relationships:

I suppose my vision would have been to spend 60 per cent of my time with young people. That means I could have done hand-holding and taking them to certain things and get them more involved in getting their lives to where they want to be. So that's in terms of training, education, work, all of those things...because that makes it effective, it also shows young people that you are actively engaged and you actually care about what's going on, rather than just trying to glean information to write the next report that's required.

[City YOS, worker 7]

²⁷² It is worth noting that, as outlined in the previous chapter, this interviewee felt that the processes could be used as a vehicle for relationship-building, which he saw as a central value of supervision.

As this worker reflected, his lack of time capacity to advocate and 'go the extra mile' for children was having a detrimental effect on relationship-development and, subsequently, engagement:

... I haven't made the phone calls at the weekend or haven't taken them to job interviews. It's not that I don't want to, it's the time as well. I think that is maybe where the relationships or the engagement hasn't been as strong; I'm not putting in the extra mile. A lot of the young people have been through systems before, and you just end up being the same as everyone else. But once you do that extra mile then they're like 'ok, someone's really putting the effort in'.

[City YOS, worker 3]

Shire YOS

Turning to Shire YOS, the effects of increasing workloads were felt less keenly, largely because children were still being supervised by support workers.²⁷³ Whilst case managers typically expressed 'disappointment' at their orientation away from face-to-face work with children, they rarely linked this to the quality of supervision. Yet, it was apparent that there were implications.

There was some evidence that the increasingly desk-based nature of the case management role was impeding the development of their supervisory relationship with children. It was notable that only three of the eight case managers made proactive and explicit reference to the role of supervisory relationship, suggesting that, for many, this was not a key feature of their work. A number of the children spoke in negative or indifferent terms about their case manager. Adam, for example, told me that his case manager was 'alright' but 'I can't see that we've got a bond because I rarely see him'. Tina felt that her case manager was 'patronizing, snooty' saying that she'd asked for a different worker because 'I still can't deal with her'. Although this hadn't happened, she told me 'I don't see her'. Jake was even more damning in his assessment of his case manager:

...he just don't understand me...he's just too professional, I mean obviously you've got to be professional but you can still have a laugh, whereas [support worker]

²⁷³ As noted in Chapter 3, support workers were typically unqualified staff and did not have case responsibility for children.

does things with cards, [case manager] is just fucking boring and writes things up and that.

[Jake, aged 16]

He went on to say that it was most important to him that his worker be non-judgmental, caring, respectful, trustworthy and relaxed. Yet he did not feel his case manager possessed any of these qualities. This was to some extent expected and even manoeuvred, because the case manager role was considered to be the ‘bad cop’ in contrast to the ‘good cop’ role played by the support worker; an approach that was said to ‘work[s] really well’.

Furthermore, one case manager said that it was beneficial to be one-step removed from the case it protected against ‘bias’, with the implication being that becoming close to a child was unprofessional. Such views resonate with evidence that professional discourses are encouraging dispassionate relationships with young people (Harris, 2017).

Yet, one case manager believed that this development was having a negative effect both on children’s experiences of supervision and the quality of the ‘service’ that the YOS provided. She was clear that the relationship was central to the effectiveness of supervision, but felt that she did not have this with the children on her caseload and that the support workers lacked commitment to build them:

To take advice on board, you have to like somebody or at least respect their views and that’s why the relationship is so key because if you’re trying to change behaviour, you need that... that relationship is key and I’ve not got it with the kids that I’m working with. I don’t know whether the support staff have got it but I don’t feel the support staff care whether they’ve got it, and if I feel that, what do the young people feel? And I know there’s issues with location and how some staff don’t want to come over that bridge, well if I know that somebody is coming to see me and just wants to get over the bridge before 3 o’clock, as a young person and I know their issue is just getting home, I’m not going to even bother to open up to them.

[Shire YOS, worker 5]

While many of the support workers with whom I spent time demonstrated incredible dedication and enthusiasm for their work, her view chimed with comments made by others of the existence of a ‘few duds in the team and workers’ own reflections that they felt ‘stale’ and ‘would jack it all in tomorrow’ if they could afford to do so.

The above case manager suggested too that lack of worker continuity (as there were examples where case managers and support workers took turns to see children) risked undermining children’s trust in individual workers and, by implication, the legitimacy of the YOS:

They need to see that they can trust you... that you’ll do what they ask and that you listen to them. And you can only get that because if you see them and they ask you to do something, you’ve got to go back that following week to show that you’ve done it. If someone else goes out, they don’t think you’re doing it, and that’s where we’re at, at the moment somebody else is going out and then somebody else is going out.

Related to this, the case manager believed that this lack of continuity weakened the coordination of supervision, which adversely affected children’s engagement:

I think when it was just you and that case stopped with you, and you were the case manager and did the intervention and you did the reparation and you did everything, when you do reparation with young people you really build relationships with them... to the point where I never had issues with breach... Whereas I feel at the moment, that because our team is not working tightly, you’ve got kids playing staff off against each other, kids learning the loopholes, so ‘if that person’s coming I don’t need to show up because they won’t do anything about it’, and you’ve got a lack of information transfer from what’s going on in those sessions to the person who is actually assessing it... from someone who knew all their kids and now struggles to put faces to the names and I don’t see how that is beneficial.

While there was some evidence that support workers differed in their responses to children’s lack of attendance, there appeared to be a range of factors in children’s non-compliance –

which was a common source of frustration for support workers – discussion of which is beyond the remit of this thesis.

The case manager's account also suggests that the everyday supervision of her caseload is a somewhat 'hidden' activity, insofar as she feels not only removed from its delivery but unaware of its content. This becomes more important if those engaging with children are seen to lack the commitment, or expertise (as discussed later) to execute the intervention plan as envisaged. Related to this, some case managers perceived that their understanding of children and their needs was adversely affected by their often infrequent contact:

...It makes it harder than if you were seeing them on a regular basis to do all the assessments then, because you've not got that daily or weekly interaction with them, so you can't get their full perspective. I mean obviously you listen to your support worker and say 'this is what's happening' but it's a bit different than seeing it for yourself.

[Shire YOS, worker 10]

This evidently had the potential to shape the content and direction of supervision. One practitioner also felt that case managers risked losing their expertise in face-to-face work with children, particularly with regards to the delivery of interventions:

He says the potential consequence of case managers spending less time out in the field is losing their expertise, for example that they don't know what interventions to do for a particular issue.

[Shire YOS, field notes, February 2016]

While one could argue that the aptitude for working with children is never lost, it is conceivable that a sustained period of limited face-to-face contact with children might lead to a loss of confidence, as well as reduced ability to spot 'new' vulnerabilities (such as county lines exploitation) and deliver particular interventions. This raises questions regarding the 'de-professionalisation' (Pitts, 2001: 8) of case managers.

In this regard, the relationship between support workers and case managers, and the role of the former in determining the content of supervision is of particular significance. It was

evident that support workers differed in how they understood their role and responsibilities, which depended on their experience and confidence, as well as the approach of the case manager. Thus, while some looked to the case manager for direction about the content of work with children (which was sometimes difficult to access due to the busyness of case managers), others essentially determined the nature of work (in line with the asset assessment and intervention plan). In this regard, one can see the continued currency of Pitts's (2001: 8) prediction that the trend towards increasing use of unqualified workers risked leading to the de-professionalisation of the YOS workforce:

...a new division of labour in which non-professionals 'deliver' the 'programmes' and the dwindling number of professional workers become, essentially administrative, 'case managers'. This produces a cheaper, more flexible and far more manageable workforce.

The unqualified workers with whom I spent time were evidently very skilled at engaging with children. Yet, there was some resonance with Pitts' contention that non-professional workers 'tended towards a culture of acquiescence' (Bateman, 2011: 126) in which the 'potential for disagreement with, or deviation from, prescribed method or procedures is minimised' (Pitts, 2001: 8). This clearly becomes more problematic if the case managers who oversee their work become de-professionalised too.

Emotional implications

Practitioners in both YOSs talked about feeling 'stressed', 'exhausted', 'struggling to cope' and 'demoralised' as a result of the above pressures. This was palpable in City YOS. Here 55 per cent of professionals (11 out of 20) spoke about their work in such terms, compared to 19 percent (5 out of 26) in Shire YOS. As one of the City YOS managers explained: 'we live in a perpetual state of anxiety'. As shall be seen, it was difficult to disentangle the emotional from the practical implications. The physical effects of the above pressures often manifested in emotional ways, which in turn affected the physical ability of practitioners to do their work.

The intensity and unpredictability of the caseload, combined with the enormity of the subsequent workload was a source of, at times, overwhelming stress:

...you're dealing with a broader range of complexities on a higher-level...so you might have a majority caseload that's complex, whereas before there'd just been a small portion, so that takes its toll. And then you're dealing with multiple agencies as well. It does increase the pressure and the stress in terms of how you're then managing that. And everywhere is just sort of risk averse now, so there's so much focus on risk and about managing risk and making sure that you've met this standard and that standard...you just feel even more under pressure to be meeting deadlines which might not be possible if you've got a majority complex caseload in terms of actually making sure you've covered every single aspect of that case. So that's what makes it more difficult...and that young person might be bringing a different issue to you, sometimes daily, and you've got to then work in crisis. So you might have your plan for the day but that gets thrown out of the window because there's a crisis with one of your 15 complex cases, so that's part of the issue as well.

[City YOS, worker 4]

The nature of the work meant that 'the pressure is just constant', as one practitioner explained, 'so you just feel like you're sinking more than being able to manage'. There are clear links here with National Probation Service professionals' accounts of working with primarily high-risk individuals as emotionally 'relentless', resulting in significant anxiety (Phillips et al., 2016: 186).

Returning to the issue of case advocacy, there was evidence that some practitioners in the two YOSs felt the weight of sometimes being the 'only one' there for a child and yet feeling powerless to address their wider needs. This resulted in frustration, stress and demoralisation.

...obviously children's services, they can't touch that, it doesn't meet the threshold. [The council] says they can't work with them, they're not engaging, school's saying they're not coming in... There's nothing you can do. So it's definitely more stressful because it feels like you're the only one that's doing anything with them because they have to come here. So you're the only one that's really seeing a young person, so [you] should be the only one to be able to do a certain element of work with them, but you can't. [City YOS, worker 12]

...for certain agencies the chances of them taking that young person is going to be zero. It's like, 'Where do you go with it?' ...I struggle [with that]. I get a bit frustrated because you can't, single handily, sort everything out but you want to.

[Shire YOS, worker 15]

One practitioner cited this as a key factor in her intention to leave. In addition, workers emphasised that it was not only the practical demands of their role but its, at times, gruelling content. As one practitioner put it 'I think people forget we're not listening to nice things all the time'. Thus workers asserted that 'you need to be able to tolerate the bad things that they have been through'. Related to this, several practitioners said that they were seeing 'a lot of disengagement...a lot more of that' which could be 'soul destroying' to work with. In this way, while the challenging nature of the work was seen as 'a healthy thing, so I wouldn't sort of turn away from that', *resilience* was seen to be imperative to cope with its demands.

Yet, it was evident that the resilience of practitioners was significantly depleted. The support from the staff team was highlighted as a key source of strength, as has also been found in probation (Phillips et al., 2016; Knight et al., 2016). As a case in point, 'dark humour' between staff members (for example, about the uncomfortable train journey of a supervisee who had anally concealed a drugs package 'the size of bar of soap') was seen as a means of managing the strains of their work:

...you would be privy to conversations in the office which often aren't particularly nice around young people and their families, and sometimes you do need to laugh at your day and laugh at the situation or the phone call you've just had, it sort of helps in just dispersing some of the anxiety and stress.

[City YOS, worker 5]

Parallels can be seen here with police 'canteen culture' (Waddington, 1999) (but without the commonly experienced racism and sexism) as well as the use of 'gallows humour' by prison officers to neutralise emotions (Crawley, 2011).

Yet peer support was seen to falter when everyone was in need of it. As one Shire YOS worker explained: 'quite a lot of the time you can pick each other up, but when everyone's

running on flat, it's really difficult to do that'. In City YOS, while several workers highlighted the 'amazing' support of their colleagues, there was a sense from others that the team was less cohesive due to the high turnover of staff ('we were more like a team, whereas now it's definitely separate'). Here quarterly group clinical supervision had been recently introduced. Although welcomed by the team, this was said to be unsatisfactory because it was neither independent nor confidential (as it was delivered by the in-house mental health team). In addition, there was 'frustration' that 'nothing ever comes of it'; one worker characterised it as a 'set-up' as 'it's like we acknowledge that you guys feel really crap but tough, get down to business'. Mindfulness sessions were also offered here but, ironically, some practitioners felt so busy that they did not attend because doing so would 'stress me out'. Furthermore, it was evident that although workers received one-to-one supervision from their managers, this was viewed as inadequate due to its focus on the management of risk within their caseload, rather than encouraging reflexivity. National Probation Service workers have made similar observations (Phillips et al., 2016).

Many talked about doing longer hours to keep on top of their work (although some firmly kept to their hours). As a case in point, one Shire YOS case manager reported that he had '52 days toil to take' because of working overtime. Some workers felt unable to recoup this or take the leave they needed because of the quantity of work they would be required to catch-up on, or hand over to colleagues ('I've had to work overtime in order to take leave'; 'I'm unable to take TOIL because we're so busy'). In City YOS, one practitioner whose young supervisee had been tragically murdered by another child, described feeling guilty for taking time off:

It affected me quite badly actually. The day that it happened I took the afternoon off but then I felt bad for taking the afternoon off, I felt like I was going to be behind on work, it's like a catch 22. [So] I took the next day off and then came back.

[City YOS, worker 3]

However, because of the nature of their work, it appeared crucially important to have a 'work life balance' by creating boundaries between one's professional and family life:

[Worker] made point that it was really important to him to get everything wrapped up before he left for the day as taking work home with you can't happen as it plays on your mind too much. It seems that because their roles involve a lot of responsibility, it needs to be contained. There's a sense that work needs to stay at work.

[Shire YOS, field notes, April 2015]

It is notable that young people have been found to interpret such boundaries as evidence of workers engaging with them only as 'professionals' (Harris, 2017: 521). Nevertheless, while practitioners tried to leave the practical work at the office (although several practitioners talked about 'logging back on' at home), from a mental and emotional perspective 'taking the work home' was often unavoidable. As one City YOS worker explained:

You know the impact of this work it's horrendous, it's horrendous but there's no time to breathe, so you take it home. You take it to friends, have that glass of wine in the pub, while you're tucking your kids in at night, what you've read about the stab wounds is still there. It just festers. It doesn't go anywhere. It doesn't go anywhere and that's the thing. It's [that] staff aren't cared for.

[City YOS, worker 13]

There is evidence of similar 'spillover' into workers' personal lives in probation and prison work (Westaby et al., 2016; Crawley, 2002). This increased the likelihood of emotional exhaustion, which manifested in a number of ways. As was seen above, practitioners' physical lack of time impeded their ability to plan and effectively coordinate supervision. Yet it was apparent that their decreased emotional well-being was a factor in such difficulties too:

If you asked me at the beginning of April [2-3 months previously] then yeah, because I had a bit of a meltdown, but now after a holiday, like my line manager signed a recent PSR for me and she said 'I can tell you've had your break because your levels are back up there', so it shows in your work as well....And I think it does show in the service young people get and also the quality of assessments and you can't afford to miss anything really.

[Shire YOS, worker 17]

So I've got one young person now, who the murder that happened, he was actually there when it happened, it was his best friend so when he comes in, he pretty much transfers all of his emotions about it to me, and then I'm drained throughout the whole day and I can't really focus after that at all.

[City YOS, worker 3]

In City YOS, one manager described a sense of near paralysis: 'I think the anxiety impacts on people. We can become a bit frozen in terms of that anxiety'. Such accounts of YOS practice resonate with the conclusion of Phillips et al.'s (2016: 189) study of the National Probation Service that: 'a workforce that suffers from high levels of stress, and that is not supported sufficiently, is unlikely to be able to deliver the high-quality work that is required of them'.

The emotional beleaguerment of some practitioners did not only impact on the administration of their work, but also their ability to engage with their young supervisees. This was overt in City YOS and seen in several ways. One manager believed that practitioners' stressed emotional state was less conducive to working with children who presented with challenging or disengaged behaviour, which she suggested was detrimental to the effectiveness of supervision:

...if a worker thinks, 'Blimey, this is like pulling teeth. This young person is not responding and I have got two reports to do on my desk'. They will be like, 'It's fine, if you don't want to do this session we can stop it and I will see you the next time'. Nothing is achieved is it? If the worker knows perhaps they have only got one PSR to do and it is almost finished they are going to approach that meeting with the young person with a calmer and more positive attitude.

[City YOS, manager 1]

A number of practitioners reflected that they felt less able to provide children with the active listening and effective support they required:

I find it quite easy to sit down and talk to a young person. But to actually be able to listen and offer support, that takes a lot.

[City YOS, worker 5]

I'm very guilty, there have been times when I had a young person say to me, and this was terrible, this was when I was super stressed, he said to me, 'Can I tell you something?' I suspected he was going to just swear to a crime, I shut him down immediately. I said, 'Just to let you know I'm doing your PSR, anything you tell me is going to go in this report and a judge will see it and determine sentencing based on it'. He went, 'Okay'. Shut it down, didn't want to know, didn't want to hold it. I wasn't prepared to. That's horrific but I was aware of doing it. I was very aware of doing it. I didn't want to know. I cannot be told something, I have to action it. I haven't got the time or the energy to do it. Don't tell me.

[City YOS, worker 13]

One worker reported that, following the murder of a child on his caseload, he had temporarily been reluctant to develop strong bonds with supervisees due to the emotional trauma he had experienced:

I haven't put in over the last two months as much effort as I was feeling, particularly in the first few days, that I don't want to get to know people as well as what I have done before because some of them you get to see them as like your little brother sometimes and I don't really want to feel that way because it is quite hurtful. If I can just work with them as a case now, and try to protect myself, but then I realised that that's not helpful to the young person and that's not really the person that I am, I am trying to pretend.

[City YOS, worker 3]

In this way, there sometimes seemed to be a tension between the 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983) of YOS work that enabled practitioners to function in their roles (which involved suppression and retreat) and the 'emotional literacy' (Knight, 2014) that was required to support children effectively.²⁷⁴ In light of this, I wondered whether the dominance of paperwork was, at least, partly rooted in its position as the least emotionally demanding and most easily containable aspect of their role, which may have been further

²⁷⁴ Hochschild (1983: 7) put forward the term 'emotional labour' to refer to the way in which 'labor [as an air attendant in his work] requires one to induce or suppress a feeling in order to sustain the countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others'. The concept of emotional literacy is related to emotional intelligence and involves self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social competence (Knight,

encouraged by the reality that this was the only element of practice that was scrutinised. Links can be drawn here with the previous chapter's argument that some practitioners seemed to focus on offending behaviour because of the difficulty in responding to the 'messiness' of the children's lives.

Such emotional strain translated into the demoralisation and even 'burnout' of practitioners, which has more often been reported as a problem in children's social work (Schraer, 2015; Collins et al., 2009, 2010). There was some evidence of this in Shire YOS. One practitioner reflected that she had 'really thought about leaving' due to her high levels of stress and pointed to another colleague who had recently done so ('he must have been really hating it to decide to leave without anything to go to'). However, this was deeply evident in City YOS. Here levels of sickness were particularly high:

The amount of people that are sick, the sick leave in this place is comical. It's burn out...As I said 16 hour days are not unusual here and you're still playing catch up...there's that fear that if anything happens and I get this wrong I will get the blame. Let's be fair, you probably will.

[City YOS, worker 13]

Most striking was the rate at which staff left the service, often at short notice. This included new workers, some of whom left as quickly as they joined. This meant that the workloads of other staff rose and some children changed worker several times during their order. It was not uncommon to arrive on a Monday morning to open an email announcing that several staff (agency workers) were not returning. It was apparent that the surprise I felt at this was shared by the staff team:

She said that there had been a lot of change recently too 'I've been away for two weeks and I come back and look (she gestures at the empty office). I ask whether anyone knew [worker] was leaving, which she said they didn't. She tells me that it's never been like this before and that it was 'frightening' because you wonder what is going to happen next. I ask why she thinks it's like this. She says it's the workload – people can't cope. [City YOS, field notes, September 2015]

It was not only the workload pressures that resulted in staff leaving but the lack of emotional satisfaction that they derived from a role in which the focus was, as they saw it, increasingly dominated by the paperwork:

I think for me it has probably made me reconsider my position in the YOS, you know do I want to be a data inputter or do I want to be someone who is effective in giving young people opportunities to change their lives? So that's where I am at the moment.

[City YOS, worker 6]

Related to this, was the emotional strain of the role that resulted from their perceived 'impotence' (Phillips, 2014: 133) to address the difficulties in children's lives:

...I don't see myself staying here. But I do love working with young people, I do. There's something about them that I feel passionate and connected to, the desire to want to make them know that there's difference. Especially coming from a lifestyle where you've seen certain things and knowing that there is something on the other end that's different to where you're heading. It's just the frustration of battling with everything else that's in their life that makes it hard for me to want to stay in it.

[City YOS, worker 12]

Or to emotionally invest in the way that they wanted to or felt children needed:

I dunno, it still impacts me now [the death of my supervisee], I'm still worried about other young people now and I have said if it happens again I will quit, another young person on my caseload that dies, I don't think I'd be able to cope and carry on being as effective with young people.

[City YOS, worker 3]

The findings presented here are redolent of Menzies-Lyth's (1960) thesis that difficulties coping with anxiety in professional life (nursing, in her case study) trigger psychic defence mechanisms, which become part of the organisational culture, and in turn prompt further anxiety. Such mechanisms include the evolution of professional discourses that encourage depersonalisation of service users, psychological detachment and repression of feelings as well as the ritualisation or standardisation of tasks. This resonates with many of the above

practitioners' comments about their withdrawal from the emotional aspects of supervision, including the relationship, as well as their invoking of dark humour and seeming retreat to the paperwork elements of supervision. Parallels can also be seen with Menzies-Lyth's (1960) argument that although nursing is a stressful role, it is the social defence mechanisms that arise around practice that are the key explanation for the high levels of anxiety experienced. Importantly, she views such mechanisms as inhibiting individuals' ability to confront, understand, and manage anxiety, as well as depriving them of opportunities to exercise true concern and compassion, which leads to further feelings of helplessness, distress, and lack of self-worth.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to consider the position of the supervisory relationship in practice. In the first section, I examined the current practice context in the two YOSs, focusing on professionals' perceptions that there: were a greater concentration of children with multiple needs on court orders, requiring more intensive support; was increasing local management emphasis on 'paperwork' owing to the nature of the caseload and perceived political imperative for defensible decision-making; as well as financial constraints, leading to higher workloads. The second section explored the practical implications of these developments in the two YOSs. In City YOS, the practitioners reported that their face-to-face time, and thus the relationship developed with children was severely circumscribed, which was openly encouraged by management in favour of 'paperwork'; evidence of modern managerialism at work. In Shire YOS, children continued to be seen regularly, but by unqualified workers rather than their case managers who lamented that they were increasingly becoming desk-based administrators, prompting questions about the 'deprofessionalisation' of practice (Pitts, 2001: 8).

The final section considered the ensuing emotional turmoil that many of the professionals experienced, particularly in City YOS. The 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983) of such work seemed to result in the development of defence mechanisms (Menzies-Lyth, 1960), such as emotional withdrawal from supervisory interactions. The insights from Menzies-Lyth (1960) suggest that even were action taken to address the problems outlined in the first section of this chapter, the above practical and emotional challenges would be likely to persist unless therapeutic training and support (such as confidential clinical supervision) were to be put in place to remedy existing defence mechanisms. Echoing this, the growing

literature on emotions-work in criminal justice settings indicates that there needs to be much greater recognition of the emotionally demanding nature of practice, and subsequent consideration of the implications for training, staff support, recruitment and retention (Westaby et al., 2016; Phillips et al., 2016; Knight et al., 2016; Crawley, 2011). These themes are developed further in the next chapter, which considers the nature of helping supervisory relationships.

Chapter 8: Defining the Supervisory Relationship

This chapter aims to begin unravelling the many unanswered questions regarding the nature and role of the supervisory relationship, referred to by Drake et al. (2014:26) as the ‘significant lacunae in our understanding of the minutiae of the practitioner – young person relationship’. This first section of the chapter examines the nature and role of the relationships in the two YOSs. What kinds of relationships were in evidence? Did supervisory relationships help? The discussion raises the critical question of what it meant to have a ‘helping supervisory relationship’. Answering this question is the subject of the second section of the chapter. Here I focus on the issues of human *boundaries* and *reciprocity*, which characterised *therapeutic* relationships. I propose that these sorts of relationships harbour the greatest helping potential. I consider the ways in which *boundaries* were differently conceptualised by practitioners and the subsequent effect on their supervisory relationships. I then move on to look at the key aspects of *reciprocity* within this context, including mutual regard, caring and communication. Throughout this chapter, I draw primarily on the practitioners’ views and observational data as this material provided the richest insights into the nature of supervisory relationships.

The nature of relationships

A broad range of relationships were evident in the two YOSs. These loosely fell into five types. It should be noted that this typology is based on practitioner and children’s accounts of current and historical YOS relationships, as well as my own observation. It is therefore possible only to give a sense of the relative prevalence of the different types of relationship, rather than specify the frequency with which they appeared in the two YOSs.

Hostile and/or disengaged

At one ‘extreme’, were said to be relations characterised by deep *hostility* and *detachment*. These were ‘unusual’ insofar as only about a quarter of practitioner interviewees spoke about such cases and, even then, had experienced ‘very few’ or ‘only one’ during their careers. Unsurprisingly, given the difficulties with access, I came across no interactions like this during observation and no such experiences were shared with me by the young interviewees.

Thus, relative to the other types of relationship seen, these appeared to be the rarest. This was one such case:

So, for me and the support worker, we were the worst workers he'd ever had and he wouldn't speak to us. But I still tried. I did say, because he wouldn't come to appointments, 'Well tell him to come down, we'll just play pool this week and we'll take it from there.' But he wouldn't do it. [So] He went to prison. He was an out-of-area one and he committed quite a serious offence and got custody. I was in the process of breaching him as well, because he just refused to engage...[and] I won't tolerate them being aggressive with me.

[Shire YOS, worker 11]

There was a palpable sense of both frustration and despair amongst some of the interviewees at their powerlessness 'to break those barriers down':

For the worker, it is the dread of going into that and having to really work hard, you know it's not even working, it's that ploughing through it and you just keep going and going, and you get to the point sometimes where you've just run out of stuff to say and do, and [you think] 'how do I get through this one?'

[Shire YOS, worker 3]

There was a tacit view in the above narratives that such challenging relationships were devoid of helping effect, at least in the immediate term. As well as breach, another common outcome of such interactions was the re-allocation of the child to another worker ('there comes a point at which you have to think about changing to another worker if they don't seem to be having much effect'). Yet others, like the worker in the above extract, seemed to feel that this was 'just like giving up isn't it? I don't want to do that...[I] just keep trying different things...and you know maybe one day something will just click'. In this way, persistence was seen to be central to relationship building.

Constructively challenging

Other ‘difficult’ relationships were considered to carry helping potential.²⁷⁵ Such relationships were referenced by nearly half of the practitioners (21 out of 46) and appeared to be comparatively commonplace in their experiences. This type of relationship was also evident in several session observations. By practitioner accounts, interactions of this ‘prickly’ and ‘defensive’ nature were much more likely at the outset of supervision. Yet, perseverance in response to hostile or uncommunicative behaviour provided valuable opportunities to foster trust and the relationship:

They've learnt that if they display that type of behaviour it will make that professional back off...or it means that no one is able then to get through to them or understand them or get them or challenge them, because they've already put that barrier up; they've got that attitude...and for me if I'm presented with that, I'd challenge it very subtly...perhaps go back to something that they said last time in terms of them having an attitude...or a certain way they were, and just slowly unpick that...even if it's a case of they're not giving anything back to me...[or] they might give me attitude back...that's sort of boundary setting as well and it's working towards building that relationship and building trust as well.

[City YOS, worker 4]

Another worker explained that working with conflict could help children with future relationship development:

But in terms of someone that is really aggressive towards you and a challenging relationship, I think it can still be important because then it makes them maybe build a better relationship with someone else and see how they can handle a relationship that they don't particularly like [with you] and be able to build from that and move on from that and work with it.

[City YOS, worker 9]

Such relational dynamics could be understood through the psychoanalytic lens of ‘containment’, whereby the YOS worker is experienced as someone ‘able, consistently, to

²⁷⁵ This may also be reflective of a deeply engrained practice approach of ‘construing success where failure might otherwise be perceived’ (Johns et al, 2017: 16), which was applied not only to the small steps children made towards offence-free lives, as detailed in Chapter 6, but also to the supervisory relationship.

“hold” and “detoxify”...bad feelings’ the child possesses about him or herself (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007: 135). An additional interpretation relates to Gadd’s use of the concepts of identification and recognition, as defined by Benjamin (1990), to shed light on the potential for psychic change and desistance within aggressor-aggressed relations. As discussed in Chapter 2, he notes that when those that ‘offenders’ deem as ‘other’ are able to endure and overcome their negative projections, the foundations for mutual recognition and change are laid. In this way, practitioners, through withstanding such hostility rather than responding in the way children expect (such as defensively or punitively), may be able to establish themselves as ‘sovereign others’, who can confer meaningful recognition. Notably, many of the examples of such relationships were also regarded as those that, over time, had become the most therapeutic, highlighting the dynamic nature of these bonds.

Superficial

Other relationships were exemplified by their lack of either connectedness or dissent. These were described as ‘ticking the box’ and a ‘bit more business-like’:

I think some relationships can start out being quite superficial, and stay superficial throughout the whole order, and this is it. They come, they want to do the order. They’ll listen to what you say. Whether they take it on board or not, you’re never really going to know, and then off they go and they do their own thing, and that’s all they want from you, is, ‘Get me through this order’, write up a decent report at the end, and that’s it. I think there are those kinds of relationships where they don’t want any more from you. They want to keep you at arm’s length. You’re only in my life for several months, and then you’re gone.

[Shire YOS, worker 12]

This speaks strongly to Robinson and McNeill’s (2008) notion of formal compliance, whereby an individual attends appointments but does not engage with its content in a meaningful way. As noted in the above quote, superficial relationships were typically seen to remain so for the duration of the order. Just over a fifth of practitioner interviewees (11 out of 46) made reference to such relationships and indicated that they were a relatively frequent occurrence. They attributed their procedural nature to a variety of factors, including the short duration of the order, children’s lack of want or need for a meaningful relationship, absence of mutual liking, and the practitioner’s lack of commitment to the role and relationship-

building. This might suggest that formal compliance is not only a way to conceptualise some YOS clients' engagement, but practitioners too. Such superficial relationships were also evident in practice observation and reflected in several of the children's accounts of their worker as a 'nice guy' but for whom supervision appeared to have little meaning, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Dispassionate

Moving along the continuum, there was evidence of relationships that were beneficial, insofar as they seemed to engender trust, disclosure and compliance, and yet somehow lacked authenticity and transformative potential. These sorts of relationships were apparent in the majority of practitioners' accounts (29 out of 46; 63 per cent). They also comprised the bulk of supervisory interactions I observed, although this is likely to be a selection effect. Fifteen-year-old Jaylen reflected that he had got on well with his worker, noting that otherwise 'I wouldn't have shown up to my appointments, wouldn't have spoken to her politely, wouldn't have spoken to her about my life or trusted her'. It was therefore notable that he said that this was the one aspect of his order that he would change, implying that she was unable fully to understand his 'lived experiences' (Eadie and Canton, 2002: 22):

AW: Is there anything you would change about your order?

Jaylen: If I was working with someone that could relate to the situation I was in, I would feel more comfortable saying things and talking in a certain way... We got on well, I didn't mind working with her and would work with her again, it's not like I didn't like her, I just didn't know much about her, if she'd been through the same situation. Whereas if I had someone who had been through the situation, they could give advice, something that they could give to me that she couldn't.

Jaylen suggests that it is problematic for him that their relationship lacks reciprocity inasmuch as he has spoken to her about his life but knows very little of hers. This points to the importance of self-disclosure (Harris, 2017), as explored further below. His perception that his worker could not relate to his situation indicates that he does not see her as truly empathetic, which was evidently important to him. It was noteworthy that the fieldnotes²⁷⁶ taken in Jaylen's supervision session chimed with his own assessment of their interactions: 'My impression is that there is not a strong bond but he listens to her and seems to take on

board what she says'. Indeed, supervisory interactions frequently had this quality. This seemed to be *good enough* for many children, but some like Jaylen seemed to want more.

Practitioners rarely made an explicit distinction between these sorts of interactions, and those that were stronger bonds. My interpretation was that this was because the relationship was primarily understood as a basis for engagement, rather than as having transformative potential, as noted in Chapter 6. Therefore a relationship was understood as *helping* so long as it facilitated the former. Yet there appeared to be tacit acknowledgement that there were degrees of helpfulness in the way they described their interactions with children. As one worker explained when probed about the role of the supervisory relationship in practice: 'I think it's key...because if you've not got a good relationship with somebody or you've not got that mutual respect, it's not really going to be meaningful, I don't think'. Her distinction between 'a good relationship' and 'mutual respect' is revealing, implying that there are different types of helping interactions between children and workers. This was affirmed by practitioners when I began to ask for their views on my preliminary observations that there were good and better supervisory relationships towards the end of the research:

...at anytime on a caseload I've got 17 kids, with some that I like more than others...there's definitely some cases that you relate to a lot more than others...there are definite strong ones and others that just come and go.

[Shire YOS, worker 5]

This practitioner went on to say that she 'probably' inadvertently went 'the extra mile' for children with whom she had stronger a bond. The key point, however, is that these sorts of interactions, while aiding meaningful engagement and disclosure, seemed to lack the depth and meaning of relationships that are typically associated with generating supervisees' commitment and self-belief in their ability to desist (Harris, 2017; Johns et al., 2017; Drake et al., 2014; Lewis, 2014; De Boer and Coady, 2007). The professional discourse about *appropriate* supervisory relationships appeared to be an important influence in this regard, as discussed later.

²⁷⁶ Which were taken some weeks before the interview with Jaylen.

Therapeutic

These relationships were characterised by their ‘meaningful’, ‘invested’ and ‘connected’ nature; their *authenticity* and *reciprocity*. Just under half of the practitioner interviewees (22 out of 46) related experiences of such relationships, usually no more than one or ‘a few’ during their careers, suggesting that they were a relatively infrequent phenomenon. However, three of the 26 children spoke about their YOS workers in such terms.²⁷⁷ Such relationships were perceived to help children through providing consistency, unique emotional support, a sense of security, as well as fostering trust, self-belief and self-reflection. This strongly suggests that such relationships acted as something of a *secure base*. However, the links between these relationships and desistance were less clear. It was apparent that the transformative potential of therapeutic relationships was seldom realised during the ‘lifetime’ of supervisory interactions, as was apparent from some of the children’s accounts (see Chapter 5). Practitioners typically did not consider such ‘success stories’ as routine, recalling a handful of cases from their career or, in some cases, none. The notion that this work was a ‘long-term pitch’ and primarily concerned with ‘planting a seed’ was part of the explanation for this.

Thus, there was a sense that the potential effects of therapeutic relationships (as well as of YOS work more generally), were unlikely to be realised until later in life. In this regard, some practitioners understood such therapeutic relationships as laying the foundations for future change. As a case in point, 16-year-old Luke had been on and off YOS orders since the age of 12, having committed 58 recorded offences. He had worked with the same case manager during his five years of YOS involvement; continuity and consistency that he evidently valued (‘the only one who has always been my YOT worker has been [X]. It would have done my head in if I’d had to change...[X] is the best’). There was a discernible bond between the two of them. Although he struggled to articulate explicitly the meaning of their relationship to him, its significance was evident insofar as his reflections on supervision centred on it and the minutiae of their interactions (‘[supervision] it’s alright, I’ve got to

²⁷⁷ It was notable that only one of the children’s workers appeared to recognise this, which adds to the evidence below that practitioners are sometimes not aware of the meaning of the relationship to their clients. However, this observation should be interpreted cautiously since practitioners were not asked for their views on particular relationships. Moreover, even if I had adopted this line of inquiry, the dynamic nature of relationships and frequent postponement of interviews with practitioners and children, would have resulted in difficulties in capturing meaningful data on participants’ perspectives about the relationship at a particular point in time.

know people like [X]. She says that she can still remember when she first met me, she said I was the smallest and youngest kid she'd seen').

Likewise, his case manager reflected that 'for Luke, the relationship was important' noting that 'he'd ring me for a bit of a chat' when he was in custody; and when he had attempted suicide while on remand, he had not disclosed this to anyone until her saw her several weeks later. Yet the relationship was evidently important to her too. On one impromptu encounter during fieldwork, she was visibly upset and frustrated following a meeting with children's social care due to their failure to provide Luke with the necessary support ('social care are treating him as an adult'), reflecting the depth of her emotional investment in his welfare. Despite the strength of their relationship, Luke continued to offend, which his worker attributed to the wider adversity in his life and his readiness to change. Yet crucially, she believed that the relationship had transformative *potential*:

I think with the best will in the world, there are just going to be young people who are not ready to change, and you can't force that upon them. But that's my hope for Luke, actually, that although he's not been ready to change, I've still not gone away, and I think that's an important message as well. 'I don't see you as a failure, because I'm still here. I'm still going to help you.' I think that's really, really important. I've still got that glimmer of hope that, Do you know what? One day, he'll be ready, and one day, he'll accept all this support and help and everything.

[Shire YOS, worker 12]

Related to this, there was evidence that practitioners were sometimes unaware of the significance of their relationship to a particular child until much later ('one of her last texts to me was "thanks for sticking by me. I wouldn't be where I am today without you"...[but] she was really hard to work with and I never felt like I got anywhere').

A consistent theme was that relationships that facilitated such 'transformative reflexivity' were fostered over a long period of time, usually of at least a year, through frequent interactions (Ilan, 2010: 32). This chimes with the growing evidence of the importance of long-term contact (Johns et al., 2017; Drake et al., 2014; Ilan, 2010). The below account of a therapeutic relationship from the Shire YOS substance misuse worker describes such a gradual process of change:

X went from being someone who was very very anxious, very very frightened, very very low self-esteem, little confidence, a bit of a loner, who enjoyed drugs because it was his escape, got using legal highs which isolated him even more, lost so much weight that he nearly killed himself and never believed that he could do it because when he tried to stop using he'd get so anxious, that he'd panic and start getting stressed and start kicking off or robbing or doing whatever he could to get that money. But over a long period of time he engaged, believed in what I was saying and trusted, and we built that relationship to the point where I was able to get through to him, and he became drug free and stopped using the legal highs, has put loads of weight on, is engaging really well.

[Shire YOS, worker 8]

However, the worker went on to say that this child had ‘started slipping a little bit again’, returning to cannabis use. He attributed this partly to the fact that he was soon to leave the YOS, which was ‘probably seen as rejection to some extent’. In this way, such therapeutic relationships were sometimes considered to be counterproductive insofar as they encouraged attachment to a particular worker that could not continue (because the order was time-limited or due to staffing changes), thus potentially reinforcing insecure attachment experiences. One practitioner believed that several of his young supervisees had ‘reoffend[ed] to get another order, just so they can be involved with the YOS for a bit longer’. This echoes Drake et al.’s (2014: 31) findings regarding the ‘danger[s] of reliance’ that can result from such relationships and raises questions about the place of such relationships in the time-limited supervisory context.

More often staff interviewees observed that the transformative potential of such relationships was impeded by the wider social problems that the children faced (‘I had a great relationship with him...but he had a very chaotic unstable background...[so] didn’t achieve an awful lot’). Such observations speak to the notion that positive relationships alone ‘will not be enough to bring about change’ (McNeil et al., 2005: 39), which is strongly evident across the literature (Bonta et al., 2008; Ipsos MORI, 2010; Prior and Mason, 2008).

The changing nature of supervisory relationships

Before concluding this section, it is important to acknowledge the dynamic nature of the supervisory relationship. There was ample evidence that relationships often moved back and forth along the continuum described above, dependent on time, supervisory decisions (such as breach), practitioner approaches, and the realities of children's wider lives. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was not uncommon for helping relationships to have been conflictual, uncomfortable or subdued at their outset:

I don't think I've ever formed a bad relationship. I think they've been bad at the beginning. Then, because I've worked here for so long, it's turned out alright in the end. They've got the impression that, 'She's not going anywhere.' So we've got on eventually.

[City YOS, worker 14]

This points to the importance of *time* in building relationships. In another example, a practitioner who had fostered a therapeutic relationship with a child such that they continued to speak weekly about his positive progress several years later, had experienced a difficult start, which had temporarily worsened following breach action:

At first he was very quiet and he wouldn't talk to me. Two times I had to breach him and send him back to court and he hated me for that, but now he's really appreciated that he went through that process.

[City YOS, worker 3]

Thus, it often seemed that supervisory relations worsened before they improved. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the often rocky beginning to relationships and subsequent tempering, might be seen as an example of the YOT worker containing and gradually modifying the child's psychological distress (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007). This case, and the others like it, also resonate with Johns et al.'s (2017) findings that children respond positively to tight boundaries when they are perceived as legitimate and combined with consistent care and support.

Relationships were observed to be highly changeable and unpredictable too, characterised by many 'ups and downs':

I felt like I was getting somewhere with that lad, and he started off really horrendously and we built it up and we was doing well and he was even speaking highly of me to other professionals, he went to an assessment at CAMHS and the practitioner emailed me and said that he really feels like he's learning a lot from you and the sessions are going well and he's less angry now because of the stuff that you're doing together and then next minute he's saying 'these don't work, these sessions make me angry, there's no point in me going because when I come back I'm more angry from talking about everything'.

[Shire YOS, worker 10]

Through an attachment lens, such turbulence may be seen as symptomatic of a preoccupied style, whereby the child shifts between seeking closeness and withdrawal.

Defining helping relationships

The above discussion underlines the difficulty inherent in defining helping supervisory relationships. Some of the most challenging relationships could be seen as beneficial not only in terms of facilitating engagement, but also in developing children's capacity to cope constructively with difficult interactions. On the other hand, some of the seemingly therapeutic relationships were understood as potentially counterproductive insofar as they encouraged dependence and therefore perhaps hampered children's ability to move on with their lives.

Notwithstanding the broad and nuanced conceptualisation of helping relationships, I argue that *therapeutic* relationships should be considered as having the greatest *helping potential*, even though this seemed to be infrequently realised during the course of supervision. Here I focus in particular on the themes of human boundaries and reciprocity in such relationships, due their critical importance in promoting self-development, as discussed in Chapter 2. These were key to understanding the essence of therapeutic relationships, and are of particular interest since these areas are somewhat under-researched in this context. As such, while such relationships also centred on rapport, trust, respect and honesty – characteristics that have been the subject of much previous exposition (Prior and Mason, 2010; Ipsos MORI, 2010; Dowden and Andrews, 2004; Barry, 2000) – I spend little time discussing these here.

Human boundaries?

The importance of *boundaries* was a dominant theme in practitioners' reflections on relationships with children:

...we have to be clear about our role: we are not friends. We are friendly, but we are not friends. Because when we become friends, it's very difficult, then, to put on the hat of enforcement. And young people don't need friends; they have friends. They need boundaries.

[City YOS, manager 2]

Thus, as with Phillips' (2014: 126) study of probation supervisory interactions, 'boundaries featured to such an extent that they might be considered a defining characteristic of the relationship'. While often practitioners simply referred to 'the relationship' or a 'good relationship', many explicitly termed it a 'working' or 'professional' relationship (particularly case managers and managers), which spoke to the significance of boundaries and of practitioners' dual role as enforcers and supporters. This chimes with Phillip's (2014) finding regarding the resonance of the notion of the professional relationship with probation officers. Others considered that the very language of *relationships* was misplaced in the YOS setting and instead talked in terms of *mutual respect*:

... You're not making friends with young people, that's not our role at all. So, I think people can get a bit skewed when you say 'relationship' as to what we actually mean. We don't mean that. We mean, maybe, just a mutual respect for each other...be firm but fair, and set out the boundaries initially...so by doing that, you can then gain their trust and respect back, and then that's your relationship. So, I don't think it's necessarily a likeable thing. You might not like each other, but you can work together.

[Shire YOS, worker 12]

Such terminology suggested a somewhat detached form of interaction.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ Yet it was noteworthy that this worker had a particularly strong bond with a particular child on supervision (Luke). There was evidence that others in the YOS and partner services, by her own account, perceived her as 'too soft on him and as condoning his behaviour'. As such, my impression was that some of the language of relationships was reflective of concern with being seen to have the right sorts of interactions to have with children, rather than necessarily of practice 'realities'.

This raises the crucial question of what it meant to have effective boundaries and, by extension, professional relationships. On one level, there was a common understanding of boundaries. This typically included laying down ‘the ground rules’ and ‘setting out your stall’ at the outset of the supervisory process, both in relation to their responsibilities as YOS workers and their expectations of the child’s engagement and conduct in meetings:

... ‘these are the boundaries, if you cross them, I’m going to have to do this, this and this; if you don’t, we’re going to get on great. We’re going to get through this order; and if you carry on the way that you’re going, I’m going to see that your order is getting finished early and revoked’, and I will do that.

[Shire YOS, worker 13]

Such boundaries were felt to be an important basis for beginning to build and sustain the trust and respect that was understood to characterise helping relationships. Practitioners often highlighted such initial boundary setting as playing a key role in the maintenance of relationships in light of breach action or disclosure of sensitive information to partner services. There was strong consensus too amongst practitioner interviewees that ‘children respond well to boundaries’, reflecting the findings of Johns et al. (2017:14).

But in other respects, the notion of appropriate boundaries was highly contested. This was particularly so in relation to the nature of the relationship and additional forms of contact with children. For a small number of practitioners, a helping relationship was one entailing a ‘human connection that transcend[ed] the supervisory role’ (Johns et al., 2017: 5). The way in which some practitioners referred to their young supervisees seemed particularly significant in this respect. These included: ‘my boy’, ‘my young person’, and ‘my favourite’. Such terms of endearment were not limited to discussions about children but also sometimes used in supervisory interactions, particularly by several of the female practitioners who used language including ‘love’ and ‘lovely’. When asked to describe a helping relationship, these practitioners tended to cast themselves in familial roles: ‘I think I’m like a father figure’, ‘it helps that I am motherly’, ‘they call me aunty [X]’, and as a ‘proud momma’ when children did well. Some talked about treating their supervisees ‘as you would treat your own children’. It was notable that some children described their relationship with their YOS worker as ‘like a friendship’ or ‘like the same as with a [good] teacher’. The connectedness of such

interactions was eminently discernible during supervision observations, as illustrated in the below fieldnote extract:

Reflections on relationship between Jackson and his case manager: There is a really good rapport between the two of them. There is lots of eye contact, smiling and gentle teasing by [case manager] for his behaviour rather than admonishing him – she uses humour and friendliness to communicate her dissatisfaction with him for missing his appointment. However she is also serious at times, for example when she demonstrates concern for his safety. The relationship is akin to that between big sister and younger brother.

[City YOS, field notes, July 2015]

Viewed psychoanalytically, such cases may be examples of children seeking surrogate parental figures with whom they can identify, given the troubled home lives (and lack of stable carers) many experienced (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007). While practitioners seemed to have deliberately positioned themselves in this way, there was little reflexiveness demonstrated about what this might mean for the intersubjective and unconscious dynamics within their relationships. Instead, the practitioners' framing (and shaping) of such relationships in familial terms seemed to allow them to have a *human* but 'boundaried' connection with children that was consistent with the accepted wisdom that the supervisory relationship was 'friendly, but not a friendship'.

In practice, the human connectedness of such relationships meant going the 'extra mile' and 'above and beyond' for children, typically comprising additional forms of contact. The practitioner quoted in the extract below, saw this added work as part-and-parcel of effective YOS supervision; this included phone calls to them at weekends, as well as sending inspirational books and 'letters of positive messages' to those in custody. In the two cases he describes below, such contact had continued after the children's supervision had ended several years previously, which he believed to have played a fundamental role in their positive outcomes:

AW: With the young people you've worked with or are working with now, are there that you've got a really good relationship with that has had a particularly beneficial effect?

City YOS, worker 3: *Yeah, there's been a few. So there's one now and I stopped working with him in 2013 because he turned 18 and I had to transfer him to probation. He's finished his order there but he's doing great; he's been going to uni, he's started up a business, he aims to build interventions for young people, he wants it to be like Kids Company to do that type of thing. And he says he puts that down to me, so he updates me weekly on what he's doing. I've got another one who's opened a fashion label and he's said if it wasn't for this YOS he wouldn't have gone down that route and would still be offending. So those are the two that I can think of now, there probably are a few others, but those are the others that I speak to weekly and I haven't stopped speaking to them. I think that's important as well, I think maybe if I stopped speaking to them, they may not have gone down that route. I continue to remind them how well they've done.*

This was understood as providing 'evidence of concern for them as people' (Rex, 1999: 375), as noted by 16-year-old Jake (who was supervised by a different practitioner) below:

AW: *So you said that having a worker that cares about you is important. Do you feel that [YOS worker] cares about you?*

Jake: *Yeah, because he tells me when I've got YOT and he makes it fun and obviously I've got his number and that, so it's not just a like 9-5 thing, it's not like he does it and then goes home and gets paid and that to type shit up.*

Such care and concern was seen to engender motivation to 'stay on track', as the above worker went on to reflect:

A lot of the young people have been through systems before, and you just end up being the same as everyone else. But once you do that extra mile then they're like 'ok, someone's really putting the effort in'. I think some of them probably feel bad if they don't change or don't engage with certain things. But like I said at the beginning with the paperwork, it's quite hard to do that now.

[City YOS, worker 3]

Psychoanalytically, one could see this as another example of containment, in which the worker's especial care and interest in the child, helps to detoxify the bad feelings about

themselves and modify their personality as they emulate the aspects of the worker's personality that they admire (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007).

As can be seen in the above extracts, such boundary stretching was considered to be an important means of distinguishing oneself as a genuinely interested practitioner with whom a therapeutic relationship could be built, as suggested in the social work and youth work literature (Seal and Harris, 2016; De Boer and Coady, 2007; Ribner and Knei-Paz, 2002). Notably, this provides a different perspective on the role and nature of boundaries in developing (helping) supervisory relationships to that seen in probation studies, in which practitioners have tended to view loosened boundaries as collusive or ineffective (Lewis, 2016; Phillips, 2014). I reflect further on the potential significance of this later in the chapter. Yet, the opportunity to develop such human boundaries was viewed as under threat by the wider operational environment, as discussed in the previous chapter, as well as being out of kilter with the professional discourse, of which more later.

Closely related to the importance of additional and/or ongoing contact, was the notion that it is 'the little things that matter'. This included activities such as taking their supervisee food shopping when they first moved into independent accommodation or sending a text message of luck for their college or job interview. As one practitioner put it:

*If there is anything to celebrate in that child's life send a text, 'Happy birthday.'
Send a text, 'Congratulations' if they become a parent. All those little things do
help to keep the rapport.*

[Shire YOS, worker 7]

In other examples, practitioners talked about making small concessions ('I'd make sure that I'd not give them appointments on their birthday'; 'a lift back [home]...on a cold, windy day'); retaining 'little' facts about their day-to-life ('remembering the names of their dogs. That made all the difference with one of mine'), and buying small gifts out of their 'own pocket', usually to mark events, such as the arrival of a new baby but sometimes seemingly just to show that they cared. The offering of food and refreshments often seemed to be an important part of therapeutic relationships. On one occasion, a practitioner had organised a party for a child to commemorate their 18th birthday:

...one of our lads was 18 so we organised an 18th birthday party in one of the sessions in the summer, and we got a cake and had a bit of party and we got balloons and things, and you know it was nice because we all signed a card, it made him feel good for that day and he was quite a hard lad as well but he sort of melted a bit when we'd all done something for him. It's the little things that matter.

[Shire YOS, worker 13]

But more typical were small acts, such as the worker offering to make the child a cup of tea, or get them a glass of water. This not only demonstrated care and respect for the children involved but also had a levelling effect on the power dynamics inherent in the supervisor – child relationship, in line with the social work literature (Alexander and Charles, 2009; Ribner and Knei-Paz, 2002). Sometimes such interactions took place in cafes or over a game of pool, with informal meeting spaces considered to encourage the development of a helping relationship.

Yet to others, such activities exemplified ‘unboundaried’ and, by extension, unprofessional working. Returning to the language of relationships, these practitioners also recognised that their interactions had familial qualities, but this was something with which they felt uncomfortable and explicitly rejected:

...building a rapport and a relationship does work. I think, unfortunately, it's almost as if you do actually become like a father figure, which I don't like. I really don't like that, because I'm not their father. But it's almost like you become a father figure, because you're basically talking to them with respect...you've got to make sure that they understand that there's still authority. I tell them, 'Look, at the end of the day, even though we may have a little laugh and a little joke, you've got to understand that: 'I am still a YOS officer. If you tell me certain things, I can't keep it to myself, especially if you're in danger, or somebody else is in danger. You've got to understand you have got to turn up to these appointments. I can't just keep letting you off.'

[City YOS, worker 16]

As is evident here, this worker seemed to feel that children relating to him in this way was at odds with the enforcement aspect of his role and something that he found difficult to manage. These difficulties were more common amongst the least experienced practitioners (see also Phoenix, 2009). However, such views were perpetuated by some managers who suggested that close relationships were imbued with the risk of blurred judgement and biased decision-making, and thus could impede effective YOS work. As one manager put it, ‘when we become friends, it’s very difficult, then, to put on the hat of enforcement’. From a psychosocial perspective, such narratives are evidence of the psychic defences unconsciously invoked by staff in the face of anxiety, which lead to entrenched organisational cultures that encourage depersonalisation, detachment and repression of emotions (Menzies-Lyth, 1960). This chimes firmly with Harris’s (2017: 517) account of ‘the dominance of professional discourses that valorise dispassionate, bounded engagement’, arguing that such approaches ‘stymie, rather than enable’.

Several managers across the two YOSs expressed the view that practitioners confused *good* relationships with those that were *right* (Liebling and Price, 2001; Liebling and Crewe, 2014) insofar as they were friendly but lacked boundaries, which was seen to preclude effective work:

...sometimes YOT workers make the mistake that if a young person likes them everything is cool. Sometimes those are the workers who are not setting boundaries and they are not being very professional either.

[City YOS, manager 1]

But it was apparent that staff placed particular emphasis on the importance of boundaries and some were even overly vigilant against the development of familiar relationships. As such, additional contact was seen to be inappropriate (‘too friendly’) and unwanted (‘I don’t really want people contacting me’):

...there is a good relationship but also clear boundaries there, he knows what my role is and he knows that I’m not going to sort of, like I wouldn’t have a missed call on my mobile or a text message over the weekend because he knows that I don’t work weekends.

[Shire YOS, worker 17]

[If] it's over friendly and there are no boundaries then that's not helpful and that's not productive, it shouldn't be that a young person is calling you at midnight because they're in crisis on the street, if you're relationship has got to that point, that's not a healthy relationship that you're working with.

[City YOS, worker 9]

These comments noticeably contrast with young people's accounts of helping relationships in Johns et al.'s (2017: 15) youth justice study as those where 'we could phone them in the middle of the night and they would chat to us'. Practitioner concerns about additional contact were not only borne out of difficulties balancing the care and control aspects of their roles, but also fear that relationships of this kind were ultimately counterproductive because they encouraged dependence, as noted above. It is notable that such risks were recognised by the practitioners in Johns et al.'s (2017) study, but rather than precluding therapeutic supervisory relationships, they focused on fostering children's independence by working to (re)build their social capital with family and the community.

At the heart of both narratives was the practitioners' unquestioning assumption that their approach was the *only* way of working. In this sense, their notion of appropriate boundaries and, in turn, relationships were each reified. Yet several professionals were marked in their reflectiveness on this issue. They explicitly acknowledged explicitly that being both *professional* and *human* in one's approach is not mutually exclusive, as the extract below illustrates:

We should always be the professional, but you have to adjust how you are or adjust that professional role to be able to engage effectively with a young person. What I mean by that is say to the young person, 'Obviously you know I am your YOT officer and anything you say to me if it is going to cause harm to somebody else [etc.]' You give them all of those things. Also it doesn't mean that you can't be sympathetic and empathetic, it doesn't mean that you can't give some of yourself as well.

[City YOS, manager 1]

Indeed, as the wider evidence suggests, it is through such therapeutic relationships that practitioners can constructively challenge children about their behaviour in a way that is perceived as legitimate and accordingly engender positive change (Johns et al., 2017; Seal and Harris, 2016; Lewis, 2014; Drake et al., 2014; Hills, 1999).

It was noteworthy in this respect that those who were most comfortable and perhaps best able to walk this line were often the more experienced practitioners.²⁷⁹ For example, the substance misuse worker in Shire YOS reflected that he had initially considered it unprofessional to share the fact of his own drugs misuse with his young clients, but this was beginning to change with experience:

AW: Do you bring into your work at all that you've had experience with it yourself?

Shire YOS, worker 8: Initially I never did, because I felt that it was my own personal and professional boundaries but then I suppose over the last year or so, I have probably on a handful of occasions said 'I've had some life experience of it, that's why I'm doing the type of work that I am', but I won't go into the whys and wherefores, because I think that's kind of crossing the line.

The importance of self-disclosure in therapeutic relationships is discussed further below. Another practitioner, who had 16 years' experience of working with children with challenging behaviour, acknowledged that a previous young supervisee's terming of their interactions as a *friendship* would have been regarded unhealthy by some colleagues. Yet she was tacitly at ease with this:

I was really moved, I had a young person in the middle of a meeting who said, 'I like working with [worker 13],' this was a while ago. I was like, 'Why is that?' [she said] 'Oh she's like a friend.' Now I know that some people would have taken issue with that, almost like that's very unboundaried.

[City YOS, worker 13]

²⁷⁹ In this respect, I refer to practitioners with experience of working in the YOS and related fields. For example, some of the practitioners had only worked in the YOS for a matter of months but had extended experience as prison officers, social workers in children's social care and education.

However there were indications that this was not just a matter of experience, but also training. As one newly qualified social worker put it ‘I do blur the boundaries sometimes, but it’s the only way I can work’.

Reciprocity

Mutuality

The existence of a mutual connection between child and practitioner appeared to be a defining feature of therapeutic relationships. This was exemplified by both participants enjoying seeing one another and, thus to some extent, looking forward to each meeting. As can be seen in the extract below, after highlighting trust and boundaries, the practitioner goes on to delineate this aspect as a critical ingredient of therapeutic relationships:

AW: What would you say are the key features of those very positive relationships you’ve described?

City YOS, worker 1: Trust, they’ve got to be able to trust you so they can tell you anything; again, you need to make the point as well that ‘if you tell me something that is going to put you in harm, I’m going to report that’, so making boundaries still, but they definitely need to trust you. They need to, they probably look forward to coming in sometimes, because you’re the only person that they can kind of speak to about certain things; they can’t speak to their parents, the school is not that involved or they’re not at school, but that’s happened a few times, where they don’t like the whole YOT process but...they actually look forward to coming, and they’re like ‘ah great’, like Ernest does, he really likes coming to see me.

Attesting to this, Ernest, one of his young supervisees whom I interviewed, expressed dismay to him when, as was the norm in City YOS, their one-to-one supervision sessions were paused while he attended the six-week internal groupwork programme:

[groupwork] it’s not going to help or change me. I would rather come and see you than go to that, because talking to you is good, you give advice and I know I can talk to you about anything.²⁸⁰ [City YOS, fieldwork notes, May 2015]

²⁸⁰ It should be noted that some children said that they preferred one-to-one supervision because it was significantly shorter in duration compared to groupwork (ranging from 15-60 minutes versus two hours). Although this may have been a factor in Ernest’s desire to continue with one-to-one supervision, his glowing

Indeed, although Ernest later was reduced to fortnightly supervisory contacts, he continued to come in to see his YOS worker every week, which was remarked upon as ‘very rare’. Also revealing is this practitioner’s observation that it was children without other trusted adults who particularly valued such interactions. This strengthens the limited evidence that children lacking in such support are more likely to need (and perhaps want) close supervisory relationships (see also Gray, 2013a; Ipsos MORI, 2010; Trevithick, 2003). This might suggest that such relationships will be particularly important in the contemporary youth justice context given the significant, and potentially increased, proportion of children with backgrounds characterised by severe adversity.

Although most often the practitioners identified that, in such relationships, it was the children that ‘like coming and seeing you’, it was apparent they enjoyed such interactions too, as some made explicit:

Um, what was it like, I think you know when you get on with someone so well that you're looking forward to seeing them the next meeting... as soon as you've got that sort of connection with someone that you can really engage well with and you know that they're taking things on board, and you know that they're taking positive steps. Yeah it's brilliant...that young person, it will probably stick in his head for the rest of his life, just as he will with me, because you know what they've achieved, and what they would have been if they'd not done.

[Shire YOS, worker 8]

As is tacit in this practitioner’s reflections, such interactions seemed to be mutually ‘meaningful’. Not only were they observed as having a helping effect on the children, but practitioners described these relationships as involving the ‘kids that I will never forget’, one ‘thinks fondly of’, that ‘you’re getting something from’ and ‘keep[s] you going’. Links can be seen here with the importance of mutual ‘aliveness’ in connection and influence that is seen as characteristic of the mutual growth-enhancing relationships discussed in Chapter 2. More generally, practitioners’ enthusiasm – or not – for meetings with individual supervisees

assessment of his supervisory relationship in interview, as detailed in Chapter 5, combined with his practitioner’s remarks suggested that he genuinely enjoyed their meetings.

was considered by some to be an important factor in the development of therapeutic relationships.

The mutual aspect of meaningfulness is crucial, since it was evident that on occasion children developed attachments to workers that were not reciprocated, as this interviewee candidly described:

But there are some kids who seem to really bond with you but then you might think 'oh, I hate that child', like one brought me a box of chocolates and I found her really irritating but she brought me a box of chocolates and got really like, over-attached to me, like 'why can't you be my social worker, why can't you do this' and in many ways I felt like I let her down because her order ended and I had to pull away and think she needed somebody there long term. Because sometimes you are going to be the first adult that they have a strong relationship with.²⁸¹

[Shire YOS, worker 5]

Her reference to feelings of 'hate' and 'irritation' towards the child may be indicative of counter-transference processes at play, as well as the 'defence mechanisms' (Menzies-Lyth, 1960) that practitioners invoke to deal with children's behaviour. Such adverse emotional reactions to children was sometimes seen by practitioners as a difficult aspect of the YOS worker role, despite their best efforts to 'to try and understand and work with [them] without coming over as that we don't like them'. This suggests the importance of supervision for practitioners, to aid awareness, insights into, and tolerance of such feelings, both to support their emotional well-being and the supervisory relationship.

Mutual caring

This brings us to the importance of the 'mutual caring' aspect of helping relationship, which is implicit in the above discussion. This was premised on the notion of being 'someone that cared...no matter what', which was explicitly acknowledged by a handful of workers as 'unconditional positive regard' (Rogers, 1957):

²⁸¹ This child's behaviour could be considered as characteristic of a preoccupied attachment-style whereby the individual becomes intensely engaged with their worker.

AW: So the relationships that you think are really positive, what are their features?

City YOS, worker 2: I think Carl Rodgers had it when he was laying out his person-centred counselling approach, genuineness, unconditional positive regard, showing an interest and listening. I can honestly say I have liked every single young person I've ever worked with in a genuine way...I do like to think that's communicated, that I am interested and I want to hear about you, and I want to know why you're doing what you're doing, I find you fascinating, I'm really interested. And I do think that's true, I don't have to put that on. I think that's key really.

The limited references to such approaches appeared to relate to the diverse training background of professionals (in this case, counselling) meaning that there was much variation in the theories deployed in practice. The importance of being 'non-judgemental' was strongly supported by the children's narratives, with 40 per cent (10 out of 25)²⁸² reporting that this was one of the most important qualities²⁸³ in a YOS worker. As Miles (aged 16) said:

I wouldn't come to my meetings, cos if someone looks down on you like you're some scum, why should you work with them? When they just treat you just like you're like little criminal and all you do is get into crime?

As the above worker indicates, showing that one cared also necessitated genuine interest and listening. Seventeen-year-old Scott put it like this: 'if they don't listen to you, then they don't really care much'.²⁸⁴

As significant was evidence that such genuine interest and listening was reciprocated by children. As a case in point, Luke's supervisor reflected that he remembered little things that she had shared with him about herself:

²⁸² I was only able to ask 25 of the 26 children about the views on their ideal worker attributes, as my interview with Luke in custody was cut short.

²⁸³ Children were asked to pick from a selection of flashcards the five worker attributes that they most valued, and then rank them in order of importance.

²⁸⁴ Notably, only 20 per cent (5 out of 25) of the children highlighted the importance of having a worker that listened to them; however this is perhaps because this was often associated with being easy to talk to, a highly valued attribute, as discussed later. Even fewer (3 out of 25) said that they wanted a worker who was interested in them or cared about them (2 out of 25), although several other children's accounts of supervision implied this was important to them.

He remembered something that I'd told him years ago, that I'd completely forgotten that I'd told him. Because he was into the music and the DJing and things, the first time that we met after about ten months, one of the first things he said to me was, 'Does your boyfriend still have those decks, and still do the DJing stuff?' I mean, he doesn't DJ, he just has decks at home that he plays about on. I'd completely forgotten that I'd told Luke that. Obviously, nothing personal or confidential. It was about making me more human, I suppose...that kind of thing can't happen unless you've got that relationship with somebody, unless you've spent some time investing in that relationship as well.

[Shire YOS, worker 12]

Personal self-disclosure is well-recognised as a feature of the therapeutic alliance in psychological settings (Bourgon and Gutierrez, 2013). There were examples too of children seemingly having such 'unconditional positive regard' for their supervisors:

My young person who is in custody at the moment, when I told him I was leaving he was a bit upset. So we were talking about it. I said, 'But I've breached you five times in the last four years.' He was like, 'Yes, but [YOS worker] you had to do that, because otherwise you wouldn't have been doing your job properly'.

[City YOS, worker 14]

Another common theme was of children caring what their workers thought to the extent that they wanted to actively show that they had done well. There were examples of this happening during the process of supervision:

I think where they're talking to you, where they're engaging, where there's eye contact, where they want to tell you things, they want to ask you things...where they look interested, whether they want to tell you about their achievements. For me, that's a good relationship.

[Shire YOS, worker 9]

More often, practitioners reported that children got back in touch after finishing supervision to apprise them of their achievements:

I've also had young people that have come back here or sent me emails or one young person sent me a picture of them winning an award and those are the different types of benefits, because it is like, I am then the proud mother and it feels important for them to tell me.

[City YOS, worker 5]

Seen through Benjamin's (1990: 15) work, such activities could be interpreted as evidence of *mutual recognition* at play, wherein the worker is recognised as a significant other who can confer meaningful recognition on the child, within the context of mutual influence and affective mutuality, in turn aiding psychological development.

Links can be seen here with the importance of *additional contact*, discussed above. Seemingly, this was not only limited to practitioners keeping in touch with their supervisees, but also vice versa. More generally, the above remarks resonate with Lewis's (2014: 170) findings that probationers' understanding of the 'mutual caring' aspect of a positive supervisory relationship meant that they did not want to let their workers down and cared about what they thought. Such personal investment in the supervisory relationship is indicative of its potential to engender commitment to change (Rex, 1999).

Mutual communication and disclosure

A closely related theme, was that helping relationships tended to be dialogic in nature, both in terms of communication and disclosure. When I asked practitioners to describe what such a relationship looked like, these were typical responses:

Hopefully you'd see a two-way exchange of information, thoughts, conversation. You know, interactive, relaxed. Even if I was having to sort of lay down some truths, you know, they should still be not tense.

[Shire YOS, worker 11]

...a very open relationship...I think they're quite comfortable to come in and talk. Some of them don't like talking much but I think over time I think we do build an element of trust that they can feel open to talk about anything.

[City YOS, worker 12]

What distinguished several practitioners' comments was their recognition of the value of allowing silence too:

The session between Molly and her worker is punctuated by silence... Worker tells me in the car afterwards that she was taught on her motivational interviewing training that silence is fine, as it is not good for the practitioner to do all of the talking when young people are responding very little.

[Shire YOS, field notes, October 2015]

He said that Ernest was good in sessions because he fills the silence and that's how good counselling should be.

[City YOS, field notes, May 2015]

Yet it was evident from practitioners' reflections on my own interactions with children that 'talking to you is a sign that he's accepting you'. It was this acceptance that opened up the opportunities for constructive challenge.

For just over half of the children (13 out of 25), it was of particular importance to them that their worker was someone that they could 'proper talk to' and 'can talk about anything with'. While Daniel attributed this solely to natural disposition ('you either are or you aren't [easy to talk to], it just depends on two peoples' personalities'), other children gauged the extent to which their worker was 'easy to talk to' on the basis of particular qualities, including 'friendly', 'is someone who listens', 'calm' and 'you don't need to worry about how they react' (non-judgemental).

In therapeutic relationships, it was evident that this was a 'two-way process' inasmuch as they could talk to their worker, and their worker could talk openly and honestly to them in a way they perceived as *legitimate* (Johns et al., 2017). As 17-year-old Tina reflected:

She'll tell you straight...So say I'm in the wrong and I don't know I'm in the wrong she'll tell me...I like her because I can speak to her about anything and she'll just listen and be honest back.

[Tina, aged 17]

In this way, as one practitioner reflected, therapeutic relationships were those in which she developed a deep understanding of the child, which in turn ‘trigger[ed] introspection and the building of reflective self-awareness’ (Harris, 2017: 519):

I’ve worked with a girl who was experiencing domestic violence from her partner, many years ago, and at one point she was pregnant with him, had a miscarriage, and the whole time that I worked with her over six months was really about emotionally working out as well as practically working out how to separate from him. I don’t mean separate as in finish with him, but if we’re talking in terms of attachment to be able to detach from him. And I remember not doing very much at all on her contract because it seemed pointless because he was key in offending; it was just very important to keep a focus on her and how she survived that relationship and moved on and she was able to do that. I do think very fondly of her, even now...I’ve just had a lot of young people I’ve worked with that I actually think, what was meaningful was that I got to know you and you got to know you.

[City YOS, worker 5]

Therapeutic relationships seemed to be characterised by the child’s sharing of ‘the reality of their lived experiences’ (Eadie and Canton, 2002: 22) *together with* the workers reciprocity in this respect. As such, the professional interviewees, particularly in Shire YOS, spoke about the importance of ‘give[ing] a little bit of yourself’. More commonly this was described as a deliberate means of fostering a ‘connection’ with a child and engendering openness. For 15-year-old Jaylen, worker self-disclosure was a matter of honesty, which facilitated trust:

Honest: Not afraid to be personal and talk about themselves as well, if they’ve done something bad as well, so I know I can trust them. If you’re honest there is more trust there.

[Jaylen, aged 15]

As discussed in Chapter 2, Harris (2017: 519) argues that self-disclosure not only aids the development of professional relationships, but has the potential to initiate desistance through ‘the building of reflexive self-awareness’. He explains that practitioner self-disclosure provides evidence of their ‘own fallibility’, which can ‘begin to shift the asymmetry’ of the

master-subject dialectic so that the young person can begin to see the worker as a ‘like subject’, in turn helping them to redefine their own identity. There was some evidence of such processes at play in supervision practice, as illustrated below:

I think, sometimes, they think that you’re sat there as a professional, that your life is perfect. Sometimes they don’t realise that I’ve maybe had difficulties in my life that have made me the person I am now and I’ve pushed myself. Sometimes, if it’s appropriate, I think it’s wise to be able to give a little bit.

[Shire YOS, SW7]

Yet, while workers seemed tacitly to recognise that the sharing of their personal experiences of succeeding against the odds could help children to do the same, they were seemingly unconscious of *how* this process might work. This is indicative, as Harris (2017: 530) has argued, of the ‘need [for] training and supervision that incorporates a sensibility to the intersubjective and unconscious dynamics within relationships’.

Summary

Through tracing the contours of supervisory relationships, this chapter has moved us a step closer to addressing the gaps in our understanding of such interactions. The first section revealed the nuanced, intricate and dynamic nature of supervisory relationships, which I illustrated in a broad continuum. The practitioners in the study almost always understood their relationships as having a helping effect, however insignificant and distant this might be, reflecting their conceptualisation of success as ‘small steps’, as discussed in Chapter 6. Yet it seemed that *therapeutic* relationships possessed *greater* potential to facilitate desistance than others.

In the second section of the chapter I argued that professional boundaries premised on authenticity and reciprocity, should be understood as the defining features of *therapeutic* relationships. This notably fits closely with definitions of the helping or therapeutic relationship within the social work, youth work and psychotherapy literatures, rather than with the working alliance model of goal, tasks and bond, that is most commonly drawn upon in adult probation studies. This might suggest that if the supervisory relationship is to carry helping or transformative potential *for children*, it is particularly important that practitioners are felt to care personally about them, providing a containing environment in which mutual

recognition can occur. This would further indicate the need for an ‘adapted desistance’ approach to children, which recognises their different relational needs. However, it is difficult to know whether the significance of such relationships demonstrated here is reflective of the distinct needs of children due to their formational stage of development and dependence on others. Or perhaps merely more possible in the youth justice practice arena, as compared to supervision with adults, in which ‘the personal dimensions of probation work, [are] obscured or suppressed by punitive and instrumental priorities’ (Canton, 2012: 578). The social work literature reviewed in Chapter 2 certainly suggests that such authentic, reciprocal relationships *are* possible with adults in other contexts. Further research would be helpful to better understand the differences and similarities between children’s and adults relational needs in the involuntary supervision context.

However, there was evidence that such relationships were discouraged by professional discourses that value overly boundaried and detached interactions. Thus it seemed that the development of therapeutic relationships were not only being constrained by the practical and emotional pressures on practitioners, as argued in the previous chapter, but also the way in which helping relationships were conceptualised within the professional discourse. Moreover, often practitioners seemed unconscious or uncertain of *how* the supervisory relationship might help to facilitate desistance, thus potentially missing opportunities to help effect children’s realisation of positive outcomes. This suggests the need for training that helps practitioners to better understand how they can work through the relationship to optimise the prospects for desistance.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

I have sought to shine a light on everyday one-to-one youth justice supervision and the supervisory relationships that develop - or not - within its sphere. I have done so through a multi-perspective ethnographic study, involving over 700 hours of observation, interviews with 72 children and professionals, and analysis of 26 children's case files. The study is the first to examine the 'underbelly' of everyday youth justice supervision in England. As a largely hidden area of practice, conducted behind closed doors and raising 'messy' questions of human nature, one-to-one supervision and the supervisory relationship have not been readily amenable to empirical research (particularly that which involves observational methods; although notable exceptions include Raynor et al., 2014 and Trotter, 2013). The opportunity to research supervision has thus generated a number of significant and unique findings. Below, I revisit the key themes which have emerged, before considering their wider implications for theory, policy and practice.

Key findings

Beginning with a profile of the children on supervision, I found that the majority of children in my sample faced severe and multiple adversity in their day-to-day environment. This included trouble at home and school, exploitation in numerous guises, entanglement in street violence (especially in City YOS), and highly transient existences; with their offending inextricably connected to the adverse environmental setting. Furthermore, such adversity shaped children's engagement with supervision, the dynamics of supervisory relationships and restricted the YOSs ability to help. There was widespread consensus amongst practitioners that children within the system are *more vulnerable* than in years past (although it was unclear whether this reflected a genuine shift in the needs profile of the cohort or changes in needs assessment tools and practices).

Moving on to children's perspectives on their offences, sanctions and lives, I found that most children 'neutralised' their problematic behaviour and expressed conventional hopes for their future, suggesting positive core self-narratives that harbour potential for desistance. However, Chapter 6 showed that an ethos of responsabilisation in the two YOSs potentially risked undermining desistance by understanding such neutralisation as evidence of behaviour minimisation, to be challenged, rather than a window of opportunity to be cultivated.

Furthermore, practitioners felt constrained in their ability to facilitate children's future visions by the imperative to do 'offending behaviour' work. Children had mixed views as to whether or not their conviction was fair, but were almost unified in their acceptance that the YOS order was just 'something you have to do'. Drawing on theoretical work on legitimacy, I argue that this amounts to 'dull compulsion' (Carrabine, 2004; Bottoms and Tankebe, 2012), insofar as children seemed to accept the order on the basis of their powerlessness to do otherwise, rather than its legitimacy.

The question of what supervision *meant* to the children and whether or not they perceived it as helpful were a key focus of Chapter 5. While some viewed 'doing YOS' solely as an *obligation*; several largely understood it as a *punishment*; for others the YOS was the only entity *on their side*; whereas a number of children regarded YOS as *another chance*. For those to whom the YOS meant something positive, this seemed to be premised on their perception of the YOS as truly legitimate (as distinct from how they perceived their YOS order), facilitated by a good relationship with their YOS worker.

Turning now to the children's perspectives on the utility of supervision, I found that the majority of children in my sample perceived it as somewhat helpful, although many struggled to describe precisely how it had helped. Nevertheless, two-fifths of the sample simultaneously believed that it had little done to facilitate positive change in their lives, attributing this to wider personal and social processes. Children valued supervisory activity that involved talking with practitioners most; this was appreciated as a gateway to practical support as well as an opportunity to speak with a trusted adult about life issues (which was often unavailable at home or school). However, it was notable that some practitioners seemed uncomfortable with an approach that relied on talking (Chapter 6). It should be noted that the children's positivity may reflect selection effects insofar as those interviewed were likely to be amongst the compliant, and were mostly recruited for this research through their supervisors, with whom a good relationship may have been instrumental to their decision to participate.

I found that practitioners perceived a wide array of supervisory elements to be helpful, but often felt constrained by the national and local infrastructure in their ability to work meaningfully with children. A broad range of philosophies for working with children was in evidence, including the continued credence given to 'deterrence-based' rationales and 'scared

straight' style programmes, despite much contradictory evidence. Particular value was attached to safeguarding children and the supervisory relationship, but there were differing views about how these aspects of supervision helped and should be approached. Taken together, these findings suggest a fundamental dissonance in beliefs about how YOS supervision can help children. Practitioners tended to see the purpose of their work as simply 'planting a seed'; in part a reflection of children's developmental stage and multiple needs, often seen as significant encumbrances to change. In turn, this shaped practitioners' conceptualisation of success, and thus the supervisory focus was seen as 'small steps', rather than measurement of success revolving around whether or not children ceased offending.

Children and practitioners similarly regarded the supervisory relationship as central to supervision. However, Chapter 7 showed that, in practice, the relationship was constrained by resource pressures, locally-induced managerialism, and high-levels of caseload vulnerability. This limited professionals' capacity both for face-to-face contact with children and advocacy on their behalf. In addition, the working environment placed considerable psychological and emotional pressures on staff, with disillusionment, emotional withdrawal from supervisory interactions and 'burn-out' evident, particularly in City YOS. In terms of the *nature* of supervisory relationships, a broad continuum was evident in practice, comprising those that were *hostile/disengaged*, *constructively challenging*, *superficial*, *dispassionate* and *therapeutic*. Almost all relationships were viewed as beneficial by *some means* (except the 'disengaged' category). Chapter 8 accordingly sought to define what it meant to have a truly helping supervisory relationship. In this regard, *therapeutic* relationships were observed to have the greatest helping or transformative potential. Looking at the children's and professionals' perspectives through the lens of attachment theory and psychosocial theory (Gadd and Jefferson, 2007), I conclude that such relationships are characterised by two things. These are: the *human nature of their boundaries*, insofar as they necessitate professional engagement that goes beyond the supervisory role, and *reciprocity*, premised on a mutual attachment of care and communication, which provides containment, confers recognition and fosters positive self-realisation.

It was evident that a wide range of factors were impeding the development of such relationships. These included professional discourses about 'correct' (dispassionate) supervisory relationships and boundaries, inadequate professional training and support, local level centralism and the system's configuration. Moreover, even when the best relationships

are formed, the time-limited nature of supervision risks undermining any positive potential. There was evidence that this sometimes creates a perverse incentive for children to reoffend so as to continue the relationship or else depends on the practitioner going ‘the extra mile’ to sustain contact with the child (which some viewed as unprofessional practice). In this way, the research provides empirical support for claims that:

The current practice context in England and Wales...militates against the development of trusting, creative, and empowering relationships. This is not to say that positive relationships cannot or do not form within the current practice context, but that the environment is not conducive to such relationships (Byrne and Case, 2016:75).

There is need to be cautious in drawing conclusions on the basis of research in two out of 151 YOSs (HMI Probation, 2017a). But as traditional YOSs of contrasting performance, location and demographics, we can reasonably expect that other YOSs may have similar experiences.

The research contributes to our knowledge in four main ways. First, it significantly adds to our understanding of the *backgrounds and characteristics of children under supervision*. Related to this, it provides a rare research insight into the implications of children’s adverse circumstances for their supervisory experiences, indicating that this extends far beyond the interconnections with their offending behaviour, shaping their capacity to engage meaningfully with supervision and seemingly constraining the YOSs ability to help. The significant vulnerability of the children subject to supervision raises important questions both about whether the youth justice system is currently best configured and equipped to address their needs, and the appropriateness of a criminal justice response.

Second, the findings add to the literature on the narratives of adolescents who offend (see *Beyond Youth Custody*, 2017a; Rajah et al., 2014; Jamieson et al., 1999). My research suggests a more optimistic conceptualisation of ‘offending’ children’s self-identities than recent, widely-publicised, models for effective youth justice practice (*Beyond Youth Custody*, 2017a). Going further, the study raises pertinent questions about the relevance to children of the desistance-related concept of identity change, given that the offending of many seemed to have a fleeting, uncommitted quality. Although there are evident limitations to this finding since I did not track the children’s reoffending. Nevertheless, more research

into the narratives of children who offend would be beneficial to deepen understanding of how desistance thinking might apply differently to under-18s.

Third, as the first study to look explicitly at which aspects of *everyday* youth justice supervision are perceived to *help*, from both children's and practitioners' perspectives, it represents an important step towards addressing the gap in our understanding of such interactions. My findings that children *most valued* talking with their supervisor contrasts with previous youth justice research findings that under-18s find talking approaches unhelpful (Phoenix and Kelly, 2013; Sharpe, 2012). This adds to evidence (in relation to young adults) that people do perceive talking with their supervisor as beneficial when such interactions meet their emotional and practical needs (Shapland and Bottoms, 2012; Barry, 2007; McCulloch, 2005). The finding that practitioners understand their work as 'planting a seed', from which the fruits are not expected until many years later, bears remarkable resemblance to clients' retrospective narratives of probation (Farrall et al., 2014). Research into the long-term effects of *youth justice* supervision would be a fruitful area of inquiry to understand if such views are shared by clients. Nevertheless, taken together, these findings suggest that the effects of supervision are slow to emerge; this has important implications for how we conceptualise and measure the outcomes of such work.

Fourth, my work on supervisory relationships helps to fill the gap in our knowledge about the operation and effect of such interactions in youth justice. This study is the first to provide in-depth insights into the position and nature of supervisory relationships in youth justice in England. Moreover, in uniquely drawing on direct practice observation and practitioner perspectives, as well as children's views, the findings provide a qualitatively different perspective to the existing body of literature on *helping supervisory relationships* in criminal justice, which have tended to capture only professional *or* client views. My conceptualisation of helping relationships as *authentic* and *reciprocal*, develops and deepens existing understanding of such interactions, which has largely focused on practitioner characteristics that encourage relationships and rarely explored the dynamics, including the emotional dimensions, of such interactions (although for exceptions on probation see Ansbro, 2019; Lewis, 2016). It is noteworthy too that the definition of helping relationships proposed here fits closely with psychoanalytic and attachment-informed theoretical models found in the social work, youth work and psychotherapy fields. In contrast, it did not correspond with the pan-theoretical working alliance model of goals, task and bond, which is typically employed

in studies of the relationship in criminal justice supervision (for an exception, see Ansbro, 2019; Skeem et al., 2007). This perhaps further underlines the distinctness of youth justice from (adult) criminal justice, and the need for a child-focused, adapted approach to desistance. Although comparative research would be beneficial to better understand differences (and similarities) in helping relationships between child and adult involuntary supervision contexts. Finally, my findings about the ‘emotional labour’ (Hochschild, 1983) of youth justice work are a first foray into this field, complementing the emerging scholarship on emotions work in probation supervision. A better understanding of this dimension of supervision practice is crucial if practitioners are to be provided with the necessary emotional support to engage in the sorts of helping relationships indicated here. I now consider what the research may mean for theory, policy and practice.

Implications for theory, policy and practice

Theory

The findings raise questions about the application of desistance thinking to children. On the one hand, the children’s views on what helps them to move away from offending concurs with much of the desistance literature, including the importance of family support and a meaningful relationship with their supervisor. In addition, the role of agency strongly featured in some of the children’s accounts about their movement away from offending. However, the notion of narrative change seemed less relevant to the children, many of whom had little, if any, criminal history and almost appeared to have stumbled into the youth justice system. Furthermore, there was evidence that most of the children had conventional future aspirations, but lacked confidence in their ability to realise them, perhaps reflecting their relative powerlessness by virtue of their young age. Taken together, this might suggest that the focus of work with children who offend should be less on ‘shifting their identity’ and more about nurturing existing positive narratives and visions so that they can grow and ‘become’ who they are. This entails emphasising strengths and potential, responding sensitively and skilfully to ‘neutralisation’, and facilitating good future lives. As important, the findings here indicate that for children to discover and realise their self-identity and potential, they require supervisory relationships premised on human boundaries and deeply reciprocal bonds. There is tentative evidence that these sorts of relationships are distinct from those shown to support adult desistance, although this needs to be further researched.

Nonetheless, there is much here to suggest that the application of the concept of desistance needs to be adapted in its use with children.

Policy

There are several implications for policy. There are several steps that could be taken at a national level to embed genuine relationship-based working, as well as ‘adapted’ desistance. As noted in Chapter 2, mention and explanation of the ‘effective working relationship’ is scarce, while the emphasis on risk remains a recurrent thread throughout the YOS inspection framework, Youth Justice National Standards, and YOS case management guidance. To encourage genuine relationship-based practice the inspectorate needs to better represent its importance in YOS inspection standards. Recognition of the importance of ‘effective working relationships’ must not be confined to the implementation and delivery of court orders (and out-of-court disposals), but recognised as central to all elements of frontline work (i.e. assessment, planning and review). The inspectorate should also make clear the need for a relationship-centred organisational culture, via means of reflective case supervision, training and support of staff emotional well-being. In this regard, it is notable that HMI Probation is proposing²⁸⁵ to add a new inspection standard on staff engagement, including regarding whether ‘appropriate attention [is] paid to staff safety and well-being, and building staff resilience’ (2020:14). However, this does not go far enough in ensuring a supportive relational culture. In addition, the inspectorate should clarify its understanding of desistance with regards to under-18s, moving beyond the narrow interpretation as strengths-focused and relationship-based. It would also be useful to provide greater specificity about the nature of such work in YOS inspection reports to provide clearer insights about how desistance thinking is being applied.

In this regard, it is notable that for any youth justice professional wanting to understand more about ‘effective working relationships’ or ‘desistance’, the YJB has little to offer.²⁸⁶

Historically, the YJB developed documents on ‘Key Elements of Effective Practice’ (known colloquially as KEEPs), informed by in-depth literature reviews, although the YJB no longer seems to provide these. Nevertheless the KEEP for engaging children has made much

²⁸⁵ As part of a wider consultation on the YOS inspection framework.

²⁸⁶ In its ‘effective practice library’ it has just two webpages of links to various practice approaches, one of which pertains to Children First; meanwhile, the four ‘Knowledge and Evidence’ webpages provide links to general youth justice research studies and briefings (see here: <https://yjresourcehub.uk/component/k2/itemlist/category/6-evidence-briefing-summaries.html?start=28>).

reference to the centrality of relationship-based working, albeit with the predominant purpose of effective engagement, rather than desistance-promotion. In light of the evidence presented here regarding inadequate understanding of desistance concepts and the desistance-promoting potential of supervisory relationships, the YJB should consider reintroducing KEEP documents. In particular, it would be helpful to develop new KEEPs on *relationship-based working* and *desistance*. The former should expand on the one-page relationship-based practice framework for youth justice discussed in Chapter 2, drawing on attachment and psychoanalytic theories and the literature concerning the importance of human boundaries. The latter KEEP should outline *desistance* thinking, including *how* it might apply differently to children, and be developed collaboratively with HMI Probation to ensure a shared understanding. Desistance researchers have, out of principle, actively resisted attempts to prescribe practice guidance on the basis of their work, viewing ‘research not as dictating practice but as a resource for practice’ (Weaver and McNeill, 2010: 56). However, the danger is that despite the popularisation of desistance thinking within the youth justice discourse, opportunities are being lost to translate this into practice because it is not well understood on the ground. At the very least, attempts should be made in youth justice to provide the necessary resources to inform their practice, if not the guidance to aid them in doing so.

Finally, policy makers need also to reconsider the current measures of supervisory ‘effectiveness’ (that is, principally the rate of one-year reconviction, alongside the frequency and seriousness of any further offending), which alone are not meaningful indicators of ‘success’. They overlook the severe adversity of children’s lives, such that, for some, just engaging in a supervision appointment is an achievement, as well as the evidence that desistance is a ‘zig-zag’ process, with children taking time to grow out of offending. Moreover, local level recording expectations disregard the relational content of supervision, instead seeking assurances that risks have been attended to and necessary interventions completed. While such information is necessary, it neglects the element of practice that practitioners and children often regard as most meaningful and effective, as I show in Chapter 8. This raises the question of how official measures of success might be enhanced to better capture the effects and nature of YOS work. In particular, greater value should be attached to ethical supervisory practice, in which *authentic relationships*, doing what *helps* and *non-stigmatising* approaches are paramount.

Practice

As is apparent throughout this thesis, the realities of everyday supervision are much more than an artefact of central policy, but are significantly shaped by the practitioners and managers on the ground. For this reason, it would be a mistake to suggest that change can only come from the centre. Training is key in this respect. The observation and interview data point to the relevance of desistance, attachment and psychoanalytic theory in understanding the mechanisms through which the supervisory relationship can facilitate positive outcomes. However, these concepts appear to be insufficiently acknowledged, understood and mobilised by practitioners. As a case in point, relationships tended to be understood principally as a tool for engagement, and much less frequently as a foundation for change. Related to this, the findings suggest that youth justice workers are not being adequately emotionally supported to do such work, with reflective independent case supervision absent from YOS practice in each area. Yet a secure sense of self is critical to a worker's ability to effectively contain children's distress, manage their own often intense feelings, practice reflexively and remain emotionally present in relationships. In this way, opportunities are being lost to work effectively *through* the relationship to support children's positive outcomes. More troublingly, the current practice context may be causing further harm, by compromising practitioner psychological and emotional well-being and denying children experiences of the secure relationships that are fundamental to their development.

This suggests that at a national level, youth justice professional qualifications should be firmly grounded in 'adapted' desistance, attachment and psychoanalytic concepts. More importantly, given that such qualifications are not universal in youth justice (and, arguably, nor should they be),²⁸⁷ local youth justice services should ensure that professionals receive regular training in these areas, as well as confidential clinical supervision. The enhanced case management model, first trialled in Wales and now being further piloted in additional locations in the UK, features some of these aspects (such as clinical supervision and attachment-informed working). Yet, thus far it has been viewed predominantly as a model for working with prolific 'offenders' in youth justice; my research indicates that it may have much more mainstream application.

²⁸⁷ I would argue that the 'professionalisation' of youth justice is a positive development in principle, particularly if it encourages engagement with a wide evidence range of evidence and genuine critical reflection. However, it could be argued that a key strength of youth justice is its multi-disciplinary nature, which may be lost if all YOT workers, regardless of their background (such as social worker, psychology) as assimilated into

Youth justice transformation?

In conjunction with the above reforms, *fundamental change* to youth justice is required to address the shortcomings of current responses to children in trouble. My findings indicate that the current youth justice architecture often frustrates attempts to help children free themselves from offending. The predominance of ‘addressing offending behaviour’ was seen to subvert and exclude activities that empower, are sensitive and responsive to wider difficulties, facilitate meaningful dialogue with children and foster helping relationships. The development and maintenance of therapeutic relationships, premised on a human boundaries and reciprocity, were undermined both by practice cultures that valorised control and risk management, and the architecture of supervision, as noted above.

Insights into the severe adversity prevalent in children’s backgrounds, its inextricable connection with their behaviour, and the significant implications for their experience of supervision indicates that approaching children principally through a justice lens will undermine attempts to engage them and support desistance. Furthermore, the findings here corroborate the assessment of Charlie Taylor’s review on YOSs: that despite their best efforts, the configuration and funding of YOSs, often militates against children receiving the multi-agency, flexible support they require. This raises fundamental questions about the rationales for youth justice intervention given that YOTs were established, in large part, to act as a conduit for wider support. In this regard, there seemed to be no coherent rationale for youth justice supervision, with a bricolage of perspectives evident, including to manage children efficiently (to the neglect of encouraging positive outcomes), to improve well-being, and to punish and deter future offending. Youth justice intervention will surely struggle to help children if there is no unifying view as to its purpose (and mechanisms for change).

The recent shift towards a Child First (or Positive Youth Justice) approach in youth justice may help to address such shortcomings. Its emphasis on prioritising children’s best interests, promoting positive behaviours and outcomes through partnership, diversion away from the system where possible, non-stigmatising support, meaningful engagement and legitimacy, and authentic relationship-based practice resonates closely with my findings. Furthermore, it represents a much-needed overarching philosophy and rationale for youth justice.

Nonetheless, there are doubts about the extent to which Child First approaches can penetrate

‘youth justice professionals’.

the deep-rooted attachment to risk that is evident here. Related to this, my findings suggest the need to go beyond the Child First paradigm in two significant respects. First, as noted in Chapter 2, the architects of the approach maintain their commitment to the youth justice aim of preventing offending, arguing that the current problems with the agenda are symptomatic only of the risk paradigm (Haines and Case, 2015: 37). Yet, this research suggests that the overarching focus on preventing offending is intimately associated with a risk and offence focus and fundamentally contributes to the problematic moral character of supervision. Moreover, it is often not regarded by practitioners as a meaningful supervisory objective. It should be replaced with a new aim that more accurately captures the holistic, ethical responses that children require to desist.

Second, the Child First approach expressly provides parameters for practice, rather than prescription, in recognition (rightly so) of the differing localised contexts (Haines and Case, 2015: 31). However, the evidence presented here suggests that policy makers and practitioners need fundamentally to re-think the current model of delivering services if youth justice supervision is to be truly effective. Charlie Taylor's proposals provide a starting point for debate. Looking to current adaptations of the YOT model, he imagines a system in which services for children who offend are integrated within mainstream youth support or children's services. They would be entitled to the same spectrum of provision. One can conceive that such a model of delivery might also be more conducive to long-term supportive relationships, perhaps with a generic youth service worker that can attend to all the child's needs and engage children in additional voluntary, non-stigmatising support.

Yet, as I conclude this thesis I am left wondering whether genuine ethical, child-first and relationship-based approaches are possible within a criminal justice context. Can it ever be just to criminalise children (often punishing them with a lifelong criminal record) for behaviour that is inextricably linked with their own experiences of victimisation and exploitation (even allowing for agency)? Can the implementation of the above reforms, together with the necessary training and support for professionals, bring about a system in which *therapeutic* relationships, envisaged as reciprocal, authentically-bounded bonds of deep trust, are the norm rather than the exception? Or will the dichotomy of care and control, as well as the time-limited, transient nature of youth justice always preclude the sorts of genuine, empathetic bonds that are best placed to help? If so, might children's offending be better responded to outside of the youth justice domain. The need to re-think responses to

children's offending for such reasons is an age-old concern, as illustrated in Chapter 2. But arguably the question is more pressing given the growing consensus, supported by this study, that an increased proportion of children within the system are significantly vulnerable. Conceptualisation of a non-penal system that is holistic, child-focused, legitimate, ethical and non-stigmatising via unconstrained supervisory support must be further considered.

Appendix 1: The children's characteristics

YOT	Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	Order	Offence	Details of adversity
Shire	Sheldon	16	Mixed	12-month YRO	Assault by beating	Taken into care due to behaviour; missing from home.
Shire	Miles	16	White	12-month YRO	Assault by beating	Abuse by family; neglect, sexual abuse; family involvement in criminal justice system.
Shire	Luke	16	White	18-month YRO	Burglary	Suspected criminal exploitation by older males; multiple care placements; missing from home.
Shire	Josh	16	White	9-month RO	Assault by beating (x2) & assault occasioning bodily harm	Parental separation; moved between family members.
Shire	Chris	17	White	12-month RO	Criminal damage & x2 assault police officer	Experience of early years trauma prior to adoption (including domestic violence, parental substance abuse and loss).
Shire	Andrew	14	White	12-month RO	Violent disorder	Parental separation; moved between family members.
Shire	Dylan	17	White	12-month intensive RO	Malicious wounding, assault by beating and assault occasioning actual bodily harm	Allegations of neglect; recent family bereavement; parental separation.
Shire	Adam	15	White	12-month YRO	Assault occasioning grievous bodily harm	Family neglect; household mental illness; limited contact with father; parental separation; missing from home.
Shire	Tina	17	White	12-month YRO with ISS	Common assault, public order,	Suspected victim of child sexual exploitation; experience of familial sexual abuse and neglect;

					criminal damage	missing from home.
Shire	Ryan	16	White	12-month RO	s4 public order offence (threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour)	Suicidal ideation; parental separation; limited contact with father; experience of multiple recent bereavement within the family.
Shire	Daniel	17	White	6-month DTO (licence)	Dwelling burglary	Estranged from father; taken into care in early adolescence; missing from home.
Shire	Declan	18	White	12-month YRO	Possession with intent to supply (PWITS) (Class A & B); possession offensive weapon	Witnesses domestic violence in family home; neglect; experience of bereavement.
Shire	Jake	16	White	8-month RO	Assault by beating & criminal damage	Experience of early years trauma prior to adoption; separation of adopted parents; on voluntary care order due to behaviour; missing from home.
Shire	Ben	17	White	12 month YRO	Criminal damage	Multiple exclusions from family home due to behaviour.
Shire	James	16	White	12-month YRO with ISS (band 2)	Possession & assault occasioning actual bodily harm (x4)	None recorded.
City	Kordel	17	Black	3-month RO	Possession of offensive weapon	None recorded.
City	Jaylen	15	Black	3-month RO	Possession of offensive weapon	Witnessed domestic violence in family home; parental separation.
City	Elijah	15	Black	8-month RO	Possession (Class A)	Victim of stabbing; suspected county lines

						involvement; estranged from father; home overcrowded, numerous accommodation moves; missing from home.
City	Ernest	17	Black	12-month YRO	PWITS (Class A)	Coercion into holding illegal drugs; parental separation; housing instability (recent eviction).
City	Scott	17	White	9-month RO	Possession of offensive weapon	Bullied, including physical and verbal assault; parental separation.
City	Tyrone	16	Black	12-month YRO with ISS band 2	Possession of bladed article public place	Threats from other children; familial involvement in criminal justice system; estranged from father; history of serious parental illness; caring role for younger sibling; housing instability (risk of eviction); experience of bereavement.
City	Lennox	15	Black	9-month RO	Assault occasioning actual bodily harm	Experience of multiple homicides of friends and relatives; parental separation.
City	Malik	16	Mixed	12-month YRO with ISS	PWITS (x2) (Class A)	Intimidated into holding illegal drugs; brother died; father left; concerns that family could be evicted due to his behaviour.
City	Raheem	18	Black	10-month DTO (licence)	Breach of YRO (received for PWITS x2)	Family history of homelessness; father absent; mother history of illness; sibling involvement in criminal justice system; referenced going missing in interview but not recorded in casefile
City	Caleb	15	Black	2-year YRO	PWITS (Class A)	Serious threats to life; county lines; parental separation; mother absent; lives at home alone; missing from home.

City	Kieran	13	White	6-month RO	Taking a vehicle without consent	Parental separation; estrangement from father
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Appendix 2: Professional demographic information

YOS	Interview name	Gender	Ethnicity	Qualified or not	Professional background	Length of time in YOS	Length of time in YOSs
City	worker 1	M	W	Qualified	Counselling	2 years	unspecified
City	worker 2	M	W	Non-relevant degree qualified & YJEPC	Youth justice/ counselling	10 years or more	10 years or more
City	worker 3	M	B	Qualified	Youth work	5 years	5 years
City	worker 4	F	B	Degree qualified	Social work	4 years	10 years or more
City	worker 5	F	W	Degree qualified	Education/ psychotherapy	9 years	10 years or more
City	worker 6	M	B	social work qualified	Probation	9 years	10 years or more
City	worker 7	F	W	Degree qualified	Looked after children	Less than 6 months	Less than 6 months
City	worker 8	F	B	Qualified & PCEP	Youth work	6 years	10 years or more
City	worker 9	F	W	Degree qualified	Youth justice	Less than 6 months	3 years
City	worker 10	F	W	Degree qualified	Psychology	Less than 6 months	3 years
City	worker 11	F	W	Qualified	Probation	Less than 6 months	10 years or more
City	worker 12	F	M	Qualified incl. PCEP	Youth justice	5 years	10 years or more
City	worker 13	F	B	Degree qualified	Psychology/ probation	less than 6 months	unspecified
City	worker 14	F	W	Qualified	Probation	10 years	10 years or more

						or more	
City	worker 15	F	A	Unqualified	Youth justice practice	2-3 years	2-3years
City	worker 16	M	M	Unqualified	Voluntary sector practice	1-2 years	1-2 years
City	manager 1	F	B	social work qualified	Youth justice	1-2 years	10 years or more
City	manager 2	F	W	Qualified	Probation	6-12 months	6 years
City	manager 3	F	B	Social work qualified	Probation	2 years	7 years
City	manager 4	F	W	Qualified	Management	7 years	7 years
Shire	worker 1	M	W	Qualified	Youth services	5 years	5 years
Shire	worker 2	F	W	Non-relevant degree qualified	Youth justice	10 years or more	10 years or more
Shire	Worker 3	F	W	Qualified & PCEP	Criminal justice practice	10 years or more	10 years or more
Shire	worker 4	F	W	Degree qualified	Education	8 years	8 years
Shire	worker 5	F	W	Degree qualified	Psychology	9 years	9 years
Shire	worker 6	F	W	Qualified	Youth work	3 years	10 years or more
Shire	worker 7	F	W	Degree qualified	Social work	1-2 years	1-2 years
Shire	worker 8	M	W	Qualified	Substance misuse	8 years	7-10 years
Shire	worker 9	F	B	Unqualified. YJEP	Education	3 years	10 years or more
Shire	worker 10	F	W	Degree qualified & PCEP	Criminal justice	6 years	6 years
Shire	worker 11	M	W	Degree qualified	Social work	Less than 6	10 years or more

						months	
Shire	worker 12	F	W	Degree qualified	Social work	5 years	5 years
Shire	worker 13	F	W	Unqualified	Youth and children's services	7-10 years	Unspecified
Shire	worker 14	M	W	Qualified	Voluntary sector practice	10 years or more	10 years or more
Shire	worker 15	F	W	Unqualified	Non-relevant career background	10 years or more	10 years or more
Shire	worker 16	M	W	Unqualified	Education	2 years	2 years
Shire	worker 17	F	W	Degree qualified & PCEP	Psychology	8 years	8 years
Shire	worker 18	F	W	Unqualified	Adult social care	8 years	8 years
Shire	worker 19	F	W	Qualified - Foundation Degree in YJ	Statutory criminal justice practice	6-12 months	Not specified
Shire	worker 20	M	W	Unqualified	Statutory criminal justice practice	2 years	2 years
Shire	worker 21	F	W	Unknown	Education	Less than a year	Less than a year
Shire	manager 1	M	W	Qualified	Probation	7 years	7 years
Shire	manager 2	M	W	Qualified	Probation	10 years or more	10 years or more
Shire	manager 3	M	W	Degree qualified	Social work	10 years or more	10 years or more
Shire	manager 4	F	W	Degree qualified	Youth justice	10 years or more	10 years or more

						more	
Shire	manager 5	F	W	Degree qualified	Probation	8 years	10 years or more

Appendix 3: Observation details

One-to-one supervision was the main focus of observation in both YOSs, however a variety of supervisory activities and professional meetings were observed to provide context:

City YOS (55 days' observation):

- Reparation - x 2 evenings
- Youth court sittings - x 1 day
- Practitioner meetings - x 3
- Referral order panel - x 3 meetings
- Risk management meetings - x 3
- Pre-Sentence Report meetings x 9
- Multi-agency out-of-court disposal meeting - x 1
- Resettlement meeting - x 1
- Group work supervision - x 4

Shire YOS (59 days' observation):

- Reparation x 1 day
- Youth court sitting - x 1 day
- Crown Court hearing - x 1
- Practitioner meetings - x 2
- Referral order panels - x 3 evenings of meetings
- Risk review meetings - x 2
- YOS Away Day - x 1
- Intervention group meeting x 1 (to brainstorm and share ideas for new interventions)
- Girls' group practitioner meeting x 1 (quarterly meeting to discuss and oversee the development of tailored supervision for YOS-involved girls)
- Girls' group - x 2 (girls' only group work session)
- Music group - x 3 (this was funded by the YOS, focusing on rap and DJ mixing on decks.²⁸⁸)
- Cookery group - x 2 (this was a free community resource, which some of the children attended as part of their ISS programme)

Appendix 4: Experiences of adversity – contextual information

Abuse and neglect

A study with a random sample of 2,275 UK children aged 11 to 17 found that 18.6 per cent had experienced severe maltreatment (that is, severe physical and emotional abuse by any adult, severe neglect by parents or guardians and contact sexual abuse by any adult or peer) (Radford et al., 2011: 7-8). In total, 13.4 per cent of the children had been severely maltreated by a parent or guardian (with neglect most common), and 23.7 per cent had witnessed domestic violence (2011:41-48).

Homelessness

There are no official national statistics on the scale of accommodation difficulties amongst under-18s. However, Centrepoin’s Youth Homelessness Databank made successful freedom of information requests on this issue to 90 per cent of local authorities in England, finding that 84,000 young people (aged 16-24) approached their council for help in 2017/18 as they were homeless or at risk of becoming so (Centrepoin, 2018: 8). A recent UK-wide survey of 2,011 16-25-year-olds found that 26 per cent had slept rough or in unsafe places, while 20 per cent had sofa surfed during the last year (Clarke et al., 2015: 3-11).

Bereavement

Within the UK general adolescent population, the parental bereavement rate has been found to be between 4 - 5 per cent (Parsons, 2011: 3; Harrison and Harrington, 2001: 161), death of sibling (5 per cent) is equally low, while bereavement of friends (11 per cent) and grandparents (66 per cent) is higher (Harrison and Harrington, 2001: 161).

Exclusion

National statistics highlight the disproportionate educational disadvantage experienced by the young sample. In 2015/16, of the national school population, 0.8 per cent were permanently excluded, 4.29 per cent were subject to a fixed-term exclusion (Department for Education, 2017a) and the absence rate was 4.6 per cent (Department for Education, 2017b).

²⁸⁸ Much of the rap-work entailed working with children to develop lyrics about their lives.

Child sexual exploitation (CSE)

CSE is often described as ‘hidden from view’ and ‘unseen’, with its true extent unknown (Berelowitz et al., 2012: 53; Cockbain and Brayley, 2012; CEOP, 2011: 36-37).²⁸⁹ Several recent studies have tried to address this. The Office of the Children’s Commissioner (OOC) in England collected evidence of 2,409 confirmed victims of CSE in either gangs or groups in 21 areas in England over the 14-month period to October 2011 (Berelowitz et al., 2012: 53-62),²⁹⁰ and the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) identified 2083 victims of ‘localised grooming’ child sexual exploitation²⁹¹ in the UK over a three-year period (CEOP, 2011: 37-43). However, these figures significantly under-represent the problems, as further evidenced by a dataset developed by the OOC on children who showed signs of CSE over a one-year period between April 2010 and March 2011, which identified at least 16,500 children at risk of CSE across England (Berelowitz et al., 2012: 53).

County lines

According to the National Crime Agency (NCA, 2017: 8-14), there is recorded county lines activity in 88 per cent of police force areas, encompassing ‘at least’ 720 lines across England and Wales, with 65 per cent of forces reporting children’s involvement.

Weapons-related crime

The national picture is one of a 16 per cent rise in police recorded crime involving bladed/sharp articles in the year ending March 2018, the fourth consecutive annual increase, which is thought to be reflective of improvements in recording as well as a genuine rise in such offences. Over the same period, there was a 28 per cent increase in recorded offences of possession of bladed/pointed weapons, likely driven by increased police targeting of such activity (ONS, 2018: 37-42) and perhaps higher prevalence of ‘carrying’ for protection in the face of rising weapons offending.

²⁸⁹ There are several reasons for this. Areas differ significantly in their proactiveness in gathering local intelligence about CSE, while data recording of cases varies across services (CEOP, 2011: 36-37), as does understanding of the issue (Berelowitz et al, 2013: 23). In addition, victims are unlikely to report it the police, parents or carers, for fear of recrimination from their exploitation, feelings of embarrassment or even guilt, or because they may not recognise they are being exploited (CEOP, 2011: 36-37).

²⁹⁰ By way of 115 submissions from a variety of agencies, most commonly the police, in response to the call for evidence made to the Office’s Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Gangs and Groups.

²⁹¹ Data was collected from 44 police forces, 22 children’s services and Local Children’s Safeguarding Boards, as well as 12 specialist services identified 2083 victims of child sexual exploitation. But it was only able to gather data on ‘localised grooming’, described as where one or more offenders meet a child in a public place to groom and sexually abuse them in the local area over an extended period of time. excluding other forms, such as online grooming and peer on peer abuse).

Out-of-area placements

The proportion of youth-justice involved children in out of area care placements is unknown, although in 2013 more than one in ten children in care lived out of area, more than 20 miles from their home community (Ofsted, 2014: 4).

Appendix 5: Interview guide for children

Warm-up

- Talk about interests
- Example warm-up questions
 - Can you tell me what it's like living around here?
 - What non-sensitive detail about yourself (unknown to the YOS) can you tell me? (begin with a non-sensitive detail about by myself)
 - What are you most proud of?
 - Can you tell me what is going well in your life at the moment?

Perspectives on offending behaviour

- What do you think about getting into trouble/ a YOS order for what happened?
 - Did you think it was fair or not really?

About your order

- What kind of order are you on? And how long for?
- What did you first think when you were told you were being given YOS?
- What did you expect YOS to be like?
- What, if anything, did you want the YOS to help you with?
- Can you describe to me what it has been like doing a YOS order?
 - How do you feel before/after coming to your YOS appointment?
 - What kinds of things do you do in your appointments?
 - How often do you have appointments?
 - If you're on a referral order, what has it been like going to your panel meetings? [input into the contract; seeing different panellists or not? Have you felt listened to?]
- What, if anything, has been good or helpful about your YOS order?
 - Rate on a scale of 0 – 10, with 0 being unhelpful and 10 being the most helpful.
 - What are the reasons for your rating?
- What, if anything, have you learnt on your YOS order?
- Has your YOS worker done or said anything that helped you? If so what?

- Has the YOS or your YOS worker done or said anything that will help you stay out of trouble in the future?
- If you could change anything about your order or the YOS, what would it be?

About your YOS workers

- Who are the workers and people you spend time with on your order?
- Which worker do you get on best with or like most?
- Who do you get on least well with or like least?
- What do you think the reasons are that you get on better or worse with X?
- Describe your ideal YOS worker (using flashcards of different worker qualities. Pick five and then order from most to least important)
 - Why are those qualities important to you?
 - How can you tell that a worker has those qualities (e.g. trustworthy, respectful)?
- How would impact on you and coming to YOS if you didn't like your YOS worker?

Changes to life

- How, if at all, have you or your life changed since you have been on YOS?
- What has made the biggest difference so far?

Ambitions and hopes

- If I was to bump into you in the street in a year's time, what do you think you'll be doing?
- What would you ideally like to be doing in five years' time? [what is your idea of a good life?]
- What do you think needs to happen to help you get to where you want to be?

Appendix 6: Interview schedule for professionals

Background and role

1. Can you tell me about how became involved with the YOS?
 - How long have you been in your role/worked at the YOS?
 - Why did you decide to join the YOS?

2. What is your training background?

Prompt: social work qualified, probation, other?

Experiences of supervision

3. Can you talk me through what your day-to-day role involves?
 - How many young people are you supervising at the moment?
 - Is this type of caseload typical or not?
 - What is the nature of your caseload?
 - How often and for how long do you see them?
 - What proportion of your time is spent on 'paperwork' versus face-to-face work?
4. How do you approach working with young people? And what informs that approach?
5. What aspects of YOS supervisory practice seem to have a particularly beneficial effect on or work particularly well with young people?
6. What aspects of supervisory practice seem to have little effect/ are unhelpful for young people?
7. What do you see as the key ingredients of successful YOS work with young people?
8. What are the factors in whether or not supervision is successful with a young person?
9. What does a successful outcome with a young person mean for you?
 - What does the YOS's work with young people achieve?

The supervisory relationship

10. What role does the relationship between you and your supervisees play in supervision?
11. Can you tell me about any examples of where your relationship with a young person has appeared to have a particularly beneficial effect?
 - What were the features of the relationship?
 - What factors encourage the formation of such relationships (e.g. young person, worker, organisational and order factors)?
 - How was the relationship developed and maintained?

- How and why do you think that the relationship helped?
- 12.** Have there been examples of where your relationship with a young person has been positive but this has not appeared to have a particularly beneficial effect?
- If so, why do you think this was? (prompt for young person, worker, organisational, order and other factors)
- 13.** Can you tell me about examples of where you haven't formed or have had negative a relationship with a young person you have been managing?
- Why do you think this was? (prompt for young person, worker, organisational, order and other factors)
 - How, if at all, did this impact on the young person's order and progress?
 - How are poor relationships addressed?
- 14.** Overall, what are the factors that you think encourage or discourage the formation of positive supervisory relationships?
- Where worker skills are cited, ask what these mean in practice.
- 15.** Do you ever continue to provide informal support to a young person after their order has finished?
- 16.** If you could imagine the best YOS supervisory practice could be, what would it look like?

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