

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND MENTORSHIP AS PREVENTATIVE MEASURES TO
DETER ADOLESCENT DELINQUENCY

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Sociology

Sam Houston State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in Sociology

by

Latrice Leonard

December, 2018

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND MENTORSHIP AS PREVENTATIVE MEASURES TO
DETER ADOLESCENT DELINQUENCY

by

Latrice Leonard

APPROVED:

Gene Theodori, PhD
Committee Director

Brooklynn Wynveen, PhD
Committee Member

Karen Douglas, PhD
Committee Member

Abbey Zink, PhD
Dean, College of Humanities and Social
Sciences

ABSTRACT

Leonard, Latrice, *Civic engagement and mentorship as preventative measures to deter adolescent delinquency*. Master of Arts (Sociology), December 2018, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.

Positive adolescent behavior is key to a productive future for society; however, mental factors, influential peer factors, environmental factors, and socio-economic factors tend to influence adolescent behavior. This study seeks to examine preventative measures (i.e., civic engagement and mentorship) to reduce delinquent behavior in adolescents. The research questions investigate civic engagement and mentorship as buffers to delinquent adolescent behavior through three social theories which include: 1) the social learning theory, 2) the social control theory, and 3) the social support theory. In-person interviews were conducted to obtain qualitative data from five community leaders/mentors and fifteen adults who were involved in civic engagement activities/mentorship programs as adolescents.

KEY WORDS: Adolescent delinquency, Risk factors, Civic engagement, Mentorship, Social learning theory, Social support theory, Social control theory, Adolescent behavior

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER I.....	1
Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER II.....	4
Literature Review.....	4
CHAPTER III.....	9
Conceptual Framework.....	9
CHAPTER IV.....	13
Methods.....	13
CHAPTER V.....	15
Findings.....	15
Civic Engagement.....	15
Attachment to Peer Group.....	15
Purpose.....	16
Civic Responsibility.....	17
Mentorship.....	18
Identity.....	18
Motivation.....	20

Consistency	21
Security	22
Problem-Solving	23
CHAPTER VI	24
Discussion and Conclusion	24
CHAPTER VII	29
Limitations	29
REFERENCES	30
VITA	33

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Adolescent delinquency is a notorious social problem in our society. Delinquent adolescents are highly likely to become delinquent adults without intervention. The lack of intervention could cause increases in crime, property loss, police presence, taxes, and the prison population. Without intervention, the costs associated with adolescent delinquency can impact the progression of society. Delinquent behaviors in adolescents are associated with violence and the use of harmful substances which include alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs. Delinquent adolescent behaviors include, but are not limited to, burglary, motor-vehicle theft, robbery, and aggravated assault. Delinquency could lead to impairments and barriers that may impact the adolescent and society in the future (Bridges 1927; Hawkins and Weis 1985; Noyori-Corbett and Moon 2010).

In our society, the justice system deals with adolescent delinquency in two distinct ways, namely, 1) prevention and 2) control. Prevention requires an action that will stop delinquent behavior from occurring. Control requires a reaction to a past or recent offense. Prevention of adolescent delinquency is an essential component in improving the development of adolescents (Hawkins and Weis 1985).

To prevent delinquent behavior in adolescents, risk factors and current behaviors must be analyzed. The risk factors that promote delinquent behavior include deviant peer influences, socio-economic factors, and environmental factors. Delinquent behaviors exhibited in adolescents include, but are not limited to, violent behavior, drug abuse,

alcohol abuse, and tobacco abuse (Bridges 1927; Hawkins and Weis 1985; Noyori-Corbett and Moon 2010).

For this study, civic engagement and mentorship have been examined as preventative measures for delinquent adolescent behavior. Civic engagement and mentorship are tools that are associated with positive adolescent development (Erdem, DuBois, Larose, Wit, and Lipman 2016; Rossi, Lenzi, Sharkley, Vieno, and Santinello 2016). Civic engagement is influential in adolescent development as well as the next stage in life, adulthood. Research findings suggest that civic engagement activities improve psychological well-being, problematic behaviors, and educational progression (Chan, Ou, and Reynolds 2014). Civic engagement requires adolescents to participate in activities that will improve their local neighborhoods while developing skills, values, and other positive characteristics (Chan et al. 2014). In addition to civic engagement, mentorship provides developmental progression for adolescents. Mentorship occurs when an experienced individual guides an adolescent through choices and decisions that will improve the adolescent's outcome in life. Mentors are role models that can influence an adolescent's thinking processes and opinions about pivotal circumstances and/or situations. Mentors also support an adolescent's participation in community service projects (Chan et al. 2014).

Schmidt, Shumow, and Kackar (2012) suggests that community service participants are more likely to be adolescents who attend private schools, who have a high family income, and whose parents hold advanced degrees. For this study, I have examined the behavior of adolescents who have a lower socio-economic status (i.e., at-risk) and who participate in civic engagement activities and/or mentorship programs.

Previous studies were not able to bridge the gap in research concerning the participation of at-risk youth in civic engagement and mentorship as buffers to delinquent adolescent behavior.

The research questions that I have investigated include: 1) In what ways, and to what extent, do civic engagement activities buffer delinquency in adolescents?, and 2) In what ways, and to what extent, does mentorship buffer delinquency in adolescents? The objectives of this study were to explore civic engagement and mentorship as buffers to delinquent adolescent behavior through three social theories, which include: 1) the social learning theory, 2) the social control theory, and 3) the social support theory. The social *learning* theory states that behavior “is learned and maintained ...when it results in a reward (positive reinforcement) and it is not learned or is extinguished when not rewarded or punished (negative reinforcement)” (Hawkins and Weis 1985:78). The social *control* theory suggests that attachment to others can decrease or increase the likelihood of delinquency depending on the group that initiates the social bond (Conger 1976). The social *support* theory asserts that support received decreases the effects of stressful life events (Lakey and Cohen 2000). These three social theories produced a further understanding into delinquent behavior in adolescents and how to mitigate delinquent behavior through civic engagement and mentorship.

This study used qualitative methods and data. I conducted twenty in-person interviews from five community leaders who mentor and provide civic engagement opportunities for adolescents and fifteen adults who were involved in civic engagement activities/mentorship programs as adolescents. These twenty individuals were the sample population that provided detailed information that contributed to the study.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Adolescence is a pivotal transition from childhood into adulthood. As the transition occurs emotional, mental, and physical changes occur. Factors can influence the behavior of adolescents during development. The negative influential factors could be associated with adolescent delinquency. Bridges (1927:531-532) stated “Delinquency itself is a socially inadequate adjustment on the part of the individual to difficult situations. The factors which go to make up these difficult situations, together with the mental and physical conditions which influence an individual’s capacity to adjust, constitute the causes of delinquency...in spite of the great complexity and diversity of the causes of delinquency, cases are found to have many factors in common.”

The common factors that influence adolescent delinquency include mental factors, influential peer factors, socio-economic factors, and environmental factors (Bridges 1927; DeCamp and Ferguson 2017; Hawkins and Weis 1985; Noyori-Corbett and Moon 2010).

Mental factors can be expressed through delinquent behavior in three ways which include: 1) direct responses, 2) uncontrolled impulses, and 3) attempts to rectify mental impairments. One of the mental factors that contributes to adolescent delinquency is the presence of mental defects. Mental defects have been examined with the Binet and Simon (1908) test that measured the mental development of adolescents. Research findings suggest that repeated offenders have a higher percentage of mental defects (Bridges 1927). Adolescent delinquency is ascribed to mental defects when there is: 1) a lack of

reverence for social values; 2) an inability to comprehend delinquent actions; 3) an inability to associate actions with consequences; 4) an inability to adapt to social norms; 5) a lack of fundamental resources that promote mental health; or 6) an inability to satisfy the requirements made by family, peers, and institutions (Bridges 1927). Within institutions, adolescents interact and influence one another in many ways, which becomes a factor in adolescent behavior (Bridges 1927; Hawkins and Weis 1985; Noyori-Corbett and Moon 2010).

Influential peer factors that contribute to adolescent delinquency exhibited within peer groups include truancy, theft, risky sexual behavior, and robbery. Influential peer groups that negatively affect adolescent development include, but are not limited to, gangs, homeless adolescents, juvenile delinquents, and delinquent foster children. The “mob mentality” occurs when the thoughts, actions, and opinions of those in the group become unanimous. The thoughts, actions, and opinions of the group, whether good or bad, become acceptable and justifiable. An increase in acceptability of deviant behavior amongst the group is associated with an increase in delinquent adolescent behavior. The notions of responsibility and self-control vanish as the group bonds and begins to think as one. Some delinquent groups originate from congested neighborhoods which entail overcrowded homes and classrooms. Additionally, overcrowded bedrooms allow adolescents to hear and witness conversations as well as scenes that they do not comprehend, leading to delinquent adolescent behavior (Bridges 1927). Overcrowded homes can also be viewed as a socio-economic factor that contributes to adolescent delinquency (Bridges 1927; Hawkins and Weis 1985; Noyori-Corbett and Moon 2010).

Socio-economic factors that increase the likelihood of adolescent delinquency are material deficiencies. Material deficiencies include a lack of: 1) financial stability, 2) clothing, 3) space and toys, and 4) personal belongings. The lack of fiscal stability strips the adolescent of independence and a comprehension of monetary value. The lack of clothing makes the adolescent feel self-conscious or inadequate around their peers resulting in the emergence of delinquent behavior. The lack of toys and personal belongings can cause the adolescent to steal and/or bully to obtain possessions, which constitutes a delinquent act (Bridges 1927). Bullying is associated with mental impairments that are connected with environmental factors (Bridges 1927; Hawkins and Weis 1985; Noyori-Corbett and Moon 2010).

Environmental factors contribute to adolescent delinquency through home conditions which include 1) mental abnormalities within the family, and 2) a lack of parental involvement and honesty. Mental abnormalities that plague the parents of the adolescents create an atmosphere of irritability and unhappiness within the home. Mental abnormalities consist of: 1) mental defects, 2) mental diseases, 3) psychopathic tendencies, and 4) addictions. The atmosphere created by mental abnormalities breeds irritability, which causes adolescents to act out in ways that will remove stability from the home. The lack of parental involvement and honesty between the parent and the adolescent establishes a lack of concern for the interests of the adolescent. Parents are expected to give a certain amount of time, energy, and consideration into the interests of their adolescent. If an adolescent is not able to share his/her interests with their parents, an adolescent could participate in delinquent behavior to gain the attention desired, resulting in an endless cycle of failure throughout life (Bridges 1927; Hawkins and Weis

1985; Noyori-Corbett and Moon 2010). To prevent delinquent adolescent behavior, I have analyzed two preventative measures, namely, 1) civic engagement and 2) mentorship.

Civic engagement is critical to the positive development of adolescents. Research findings suggest that adolescents who engage in civic activities have an increased state of well-being and positive development (Chan et al. 2014; Erdem et al. 2016; Rossi et al. 2016). Civic activities have been associated with positive community involvement and positive societal factors. Civic engagement is defined as an adolescent's beliefs, behaviors, attitudes, skills, and knowledge that are aimed at beneficial societal and personal advancement (Chan et al. 2014). Civic engagement has also been associated with an attachment to community. The stronger the attachment that the adolescent has to his/her community, the more likely the decision to participate in civic actions. Previous studies examined the influences of peer factors, neighborhood factors, social factors, and family factors to explore adolescent civic behaviors and civic attitudes (Chan et al. 2014; Erdem et al. 2016; Rossi et al. 2016). Rossi and colleagues (2016) explored three social domains: 1) chances for civic involvement, 2) the degree of civic involvement and participation, and 3) the support given to the adolescent to participate in civic involvement. Social domains were positively associated with adolescent civic development. Adolescent interactions with adults in a neighborhood, who promote civic engagement, are associated with positive adolescent development. Similarly, schools that promote civic responsibility are associated with an increase in adolescent civic engagement. Likewise, close family members who show interest in civic actions are positively associated with civic responsibility and behaviors. Furthermore, peer groups

are also strongly associated with civic engagement. Research findings suggest when adolescents develop personal relationships with adults within their neighborhood, have frequent conversations about civic responsibility, and perceive close members of their social group are civically active, they are more likely to participate in civic engagement (Chan et al. 2014; Erdem et al. 2016; Rossi et al. 2016). Positive relationships with adults through mentorship are positively associated with civic engagement.

Abrams, Mizel, Nguyen, and Shlonsky (2014) discussed mentorship programs as facilitators of support, guidance, and encouragement directed at challenged adolescents. Mentorship programs act as mediators to reduce the risky behaviors of adolescents which include violence, poor academic performance, antisocial behavior, and drug abuse. Mentorship programs promote community involvement, positive behavior, values, job training, and goal setting. Mentorship programs are associated with the prevention of illegal adolescent behavior through increasing an adolescent's self-esteem and self-image. The greater the impact of the mentorship connection between the adolescent and the mentor, the more likely it is to reduce adolescent delinquent behavior. By utilizing positive youth development as a theoretical perspective, Erdem et al. (2016) examined: 1) the positive outcomes of mentorship, and 2) the quality of the mentor's relationship with the adolescent. On-going mentorship relationships are associated with higher levels of mentor support and higher levels of positive youth development. The perceived support of on-going mentorship relationships is associated with positive youth development. On-going mentorship relationships must be stable and consistent to achieve positive youth development (Abrams et al. 2014; Erdem et al. 2016).

CHAPTER III

Conceptual Framework

Mentorship and civic engagement are explored as buffers to delinquent adolescent behavior through three social theories, which include: 1) the social learning theory, 2) the social control theory, and 3) the social support theory.

Conger (1976) explored the relationship between two social theories and the effect the social theories have on delinquent behavior. The two social theories that were examined included 1) the social control theory and 2) the social learning theory. The social control theory suggests that an adolescents' bond to society reduces delinquent actions and/or behaviors. The social control theory predicts that when an adolescent's social bond is weakened, delinquent behavior is more likely to occur. Social bond traits involve an adolescent's attachment level, commitment level, involvement level, and belief level in society. Strong social bond traits are associated with reduced delinquency in adolescents. The social control theory suggests that attachment to parents and school officials is associated with a decline in delinquent behavior. Commitment to academics is positively associated with both school attachment and the prevention of deviant actions. Attachment is viewed as a reward or reinforcement to the adolescents. Attachment to positive individuals increases the likelihood of positive youth development. Attachment is also positively associated with commitment levels. Involvement in school activities is an indicator of an adolescent's commitment level and is positively associated with an adolescent's advancement. As noted above, an increased focus on academics decreases the adolescent's likelihood of participation in delinquent behavior. (Agnew 1985; Conger 1976; Hirschi 1969).

The social learning theory examines delinquent behavior through cognitive techniques to explain the causes of certain deviant acts. The social learning theory focuses on operant conditioning, which suggests that behavior is maintained or changed depending on the circumstances that arise. Previous research has shown that delinquent behavior is “learned and maintained in both social and nonsocial situations...” (Conger 1976:23). The social learning theory requires knowledge of an adolescent’s learning history to understand a given response. Social learning explains why the adolescent will perform the learned deviant act. Deviant behavior can be learned from family or peers (DeCamp and Ferguson 2017). The consistent viewing of family violence (i.e., yelling, arguing, fighting) increases the likelihood of deviant behavior and/or actions.

Participating with negative peer influences in activities such as bullying and name-calling also contributes to delinquent adolescent behavior. The social learning theory requires social interactions or role modeling with the adolescent to decrease the likelihood of delinquent behavior (Bandura 1978; Conger 1976; Erdem et al. 2016). In addition to the social control and the social learning theory, social support is essential to the prevention of delinquent adolescent behavior.

The social support theory asserts that support received decreases stressful life events and their effects on the adolescent. As stated by Lakey and Cohen (2000):

...social support will be effective in promoting coping and reducing the effects of a stressor, insofar as the form of assistance matches the demands of the stressor. According to this view, each stressful circumstance places specific demands on the affected individual. For example, having someone lend you money may be

useful in the face of a temporary job loss but useless in the face of the death of a friend. (P.31).

Within the social support theory, stress is seen as a reaction to a situation that causes an adolescent to change his/her behavioral patterns (Thoits 1995). Coping is a strategy that manages the demands the adolescent may face in any given situation. According to Folkman (1984:844), “Coping is viewed in the formulation as having two major functions: the regulation of emotions or distress (emotion-focused coping) and the management of the problem that is causing the distress (problem-focused coping).” Social support acts as a coping fund from which adolescents can withdraw resources to cope with the stressors of life. Social support is delivered to the adolescent from family members, friends, community organizations, and church groups. Social support from social networks can provide an adolescent with “positive experiences and a set of stable, socially rewarded roles in community...” that increase the well-being of the adolescent (Cohen and Wills 1985:311). Social support is associated with a positive self-image, positive societal integration, an increase in mental and physical health, a reduction of stress, and stress-buffering for the adolescent (Cohen and Wills 1985; Thoits 1995).

Guided by the literature, this study has examined various aspects of civic engagement and mentorship as potential buffers to delinquent adolescent behavior. Civic engagement and mentorship have been explored through: 1) participation in civic engagement opportunities (i.e., volunteering, organizational involvement, community-driven activities); 2) social support (i.e., mentorship); and 3) quality mentoring relationships (i.e., time spent, proper guidance, on-going relationship). The type of activities and the amount of time the adolescent spent in civic participation and whether

the participation influenced the adolescent's behavior were investigated. The perspectives and experiences of the mentors as well as the perspectives and experiences of the former adolescents were investigated. This study has explored the extent to which social support received from the mentors influenced the adults during adolescence. This study has also focused on adolescent behaviors that deviate from social norms such as violent behavior, criminal activity, drug abuse, and/or tobacco use.

To further explore civic engagement, mentorship, and adolescent behavior qualitative research was employed. The research questions include 1) In what ways, and to what extent, do civic engagement activities buffer delinquency in adolescents?, and 2) In what ways, and to what extent, does mentorship buffer delinquency in adolescents?

CHAPTER IV

Methods

The purpose of this qualitative study has been to explore civic engagement and mentorship as buffers to delinquent adolescent behavior. All research participants were made aware of the study's purpose and the goals of the study through informed consent. All research participants volunteered to participate in this project. The research participants' identities will be protected through the use of pseudonyms and all data will be kept confidential.

In qualitative research, it is imperative to identify "how participants contribute to the sampling frame... [and] add depth to readers' understanding" (Archibald and Munce 2015:36). The interviewees were the best choice that allowed for a better understanding of how civic engagement activities and mentorship programs act as safety nets for adolescents who are at risk. The interviewees participated in civic engagement activities/mentorship programs which provided a firsthand experience of the interactions between the mentors and the adolescents. All interviewees met the requirements of balance and thoroughness by being able to expound on the "important facets and perspectives related to the phenomenon being studied" (Sargeant 2012:1). The quality of data increased while engaging with the participants in the setting before and during the analysis, thus reducing biases while conducting the research which improved the success of the research project (Archibald and Munce 2015).

For this study, twenty participants were recruited from a local non-profit organization located in Houston, Texas. The non-profit was founded in 1998. The

mission of this particular non-profit organization is to prevent and/or rehabilitate at-risk individuals in their area by providing mentorship, volunteer opportunities, drug counseling, guidance and career counseling for all individuals that are enrolled in their program. This study recruited sixteen female participants and four male participants ranging in age from 18-67. Of the twenty participants, 100% graduated from high school and are currently employed. The in-person interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions that were constructed prior to the interview. The interviews lasted between thirty and forty-five minutes. The data were transcribed and coded to categorize the themes for this analysis.

I used a thematic analysis method to analyze and identify patterns (i.e., themes) within the qualitative data that addressed the research questions. I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) practical approach to identify themes. The practical approach included: 1) reading transcripts and taking notes; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes within the initial codes; 4) reviewing themes to check validity in relation to the research questions; 5) generating, defining, and naming themes; and 6) producing a qualitative research report (Gray 2014).

CHAPTER V

Findings

I identified themes and key quotes that were necessary to address the research questions of this current study: 1) In what ways, and to what extent, do civic engagement activities buffer delinquency in adolescents?, and 2) In what ways, and to what extent, does mentorship buffer delinquency in adolescents? The main themes helped guide the organization of this research project.

Under the subject of civic engagement activities as a buffer to delinquent adolescent behavior, three themes emerged: 1) attachment to a peer group; 2) purpose; and 3) civic responsibility. Under the subject of mentorship as a buffer to delinquent adolescent behavior, five themes emerged: 1) identity; 2) motivation; 3) consistency; 4) security; and 5) problem-solving.

Civic Engagement

Attachment to Peer Group. Former adolescents described an attachment to their peer group while participating in volunteer work. The majority of the participants described an initial feeling of loneliness and/or abandonment before participating in civic engagement activities. The group dynamic involved in participating in outreach activities filled the gap of loneliness for most adolescents. As the group meetings became more frequent, so did the interaction amongst the group of adolescents. The attachment to the peer group promoted positive social bonds, positive social interactions, and positive support for the adolescents. Former adolescents compared their attachment to their peer group to the attachment in familial relationships. A former adolescent, Nancy, stated, “I felt like I was

a part of something and I never really felt like that before...I had friends who wanted to do something good like me...it was like I found a family, my family.” Rebecca, another former adolescent, described her peers as her “...brothers and sisters.” The majority of the former adolescents indicated that members of their peer group consistently encouraged them through various situations. Former adolescent, Allen, stated, “I have always been self-conscious...but all of my friends that I worked with helped me break-out of my shell and face my insecurities...by calling me, including me in activities, telling me I was appreciated and that I was doing a good job.” Another former adolescent, Mary, described her peers as “...caring friends that shared their struggles with me...and made me feel that I could change some of my stuff too.” Mentor Edward explained how adolescents used the influence of their peer group by stating “...they have all developed a strong bond with one another...and my job is to show them how to use that bond and to make a difference in our community.” Former adolescent, Jack, expressed that “...without the friends that I had, I would have given in to my circumstances because at times, the pressures seemed too much to bear.” The social support the former adolescents received from their peers decreased the effects of the stressors in their lives. Mentors conveyed that they encouraged adolescents to communicate with one another prior to participating in civic engagement activities to understand the importance of teamwork and solidarity. Adolescents gained a strong attachment to a positive peer group and a strong attachment to their community by participating in civic engagement activities.

Purpose. Former adolescents mentioned the concept of purpose while describing participation in civic engagement activities. In this study, purpose was associated with

committed actions that improve the lives of others. Former adolescents conveyed that their participation in civic engagement activities included positive actions that improved their environment. Prior to participating in civic engagement activities, former adolescents described their actions as “reckless” and “self-harming.” Through the positive actions exhibited in civic engagement activities, adolescents began to recognize their “self-harming” behavior and refocus their energy into purposeful actions. Former adolescent, Ashton, stated, “When I was participating I felt that my actions mattered, and I wanted to do more.” The consistent participation in civic engagement activities increased the former adolescents’ aspiration to help improve their direct environment. Mentors indicated that adolescents became aware of the improvements needed in their neighborhood and frequently requested to do activities there. The former adolescents expressed a strong commitment and attachment level to fulfilling civic engagement activities that change the lives of others. Mentor Susan explained that “...when children participate in activities like outreach or giving back, it gives them a sense of purpose. A sense that their actions can cause their environment and their community to actually change. It gives them a sense of pride.” Former adolescents also confirmed a sense of pride when participating in civic engagement activities. The former adolescents labeled their participation in civic engagement activities as an achievement. Former adolescent, Allen, stated, “I was so proud of myself, which was rare for me...The feeling I got when I was helping others made me feel as if I had purpose because I hadn’t felt that way before, it changed my life and the way I viewed everything.”

Civic Responsibility. As the former adolescents’ attachment to their peer group and purpose developed through the participation in civic engagement activities, so did their

commitment to their society, which is known as civic responsibility. Former adolescents conveyed that before participating in civic engagement activities, they did not have reverence for their society and/or their neighborhood. While participating in civic engagement activities, the former adolescents began to pay closer attention to societal problems. Their awareness of societal problems resulted in an increased commitment level to rectify those societal problems that were influencing their environment. Mentors communicated that adolescents need an attachment to their society to change social barriers that they tend to face. Mentor Tracy stated, “Activities that require kids to step outside of their selves and help others are so important. Like feeding the homeless is one of the most humbling for the kids because although they may not have a lot in their eyes, giving back to someone who has nothing gives them a different perspective about their situation.” Former adolescents recognized the responsibility and the commitment it took to change their society through acquired social skills from their mentors. Former adolescents viewed civic responsibility as an important step in their emotional and behavioral transformation. Former adolescent, Jack, stated, “While volunteering, I never once thought about my own stuff...meaning I was in a bad situation at home, but I knew during this time I was helping someone who needed me...it made me want to change how I was, how I behaved...” Former adolescents indicated that participating in civic engagement activities increased their level of attachment and responsibility to their neighborhood, their city, and their overall society.

Mentorship

Identity. Former adolescents who participated in mentorship programs referenced the concept of identity by describing personal characteristic traits that they were lacking.

Former adolescent, Jack, stated, "...I needed information on how to carry myself and certain things about who I was supposed to be." Specifically, Jack described an absence of parental guidance. The lack of parental guidance caused most of the former adolescents to take care of their own essential day-to-day needs. Former adolescents expressed that self-teaching was a common occurrence when parental figures were not in the home on a regular basis. They further indicated the replication of behaviors demonstrated by their peers which include: the use of foul language, participation in drug/alcohol abuse, participation in risky sexual behavior, and a lack of respect for authority. The former adolescents also expressed a desire to separate from poor peer influences and to obtain positive guidance. Through the supportive actions of mentors, adolescents began to develop positive characteristics that shaped their identity. The positive characteristics that the adolescents obtained included but were not limited to confidence, integrity, determination, dependability, and optimism. Former adolescent, Christine, stated, "Having a mentor gave me a blueprint to follow on how to be a better me." Former adolescents indicated that their mentors introduced them to the traditional functioning of society and how to become a successful societal member through advice and guidance. Advice and guidance given by mentors altered each adolescent's characteristics and actions. Former adolescents described their involvement in the mentorship program as "...a path to success," an alternative to the negative factors that commonly influenced adolescents in low-income areas. Mentor Edward stated that he encourages his adolescents to "...not become a product of their environment, but to take their power back and make their own decisions that will improve their life..." which allows them to become driven individuals despite the environmental pressures. Former

adolescents who applied the advice and guidance given by their mentors gained positive identifying characteristics which is an example of the social support theory.

Motivation. Motivation was another concept that former adolescents who participated in mentorship programs mentioned. Motivation was a supportive action that mentors used to stimulate, inspire, and cultivate an adolescent's interests. Former adolescent, Sarah, stated, "my mentor encouraged me to not focus on what I didn't have, but what I could have." Most former adolescents described a lack of enthusiasm and optimism because of familial relationships, environmental pressures, and social barriers. They further expressed that the lack of inspiration kept them stagnant in delinquency. Through mentorship programs, former adolescents were able to detach from delinquency and to strive to accomplish their personal goals. Former adolescents indicated that mentors helped them identify talents and interests that could be used in the future. A former adolescent described an interest he had in writing; through the mentorship program, the adolescent was able to take an interest and make it a career. Former adolescent, Melanie, stated, "Without my mentor, I would not feel like I was worth it. Honestly, I didn't think I would make it out of my neighborhood, much less graduate from college...my mentor motivated me to do better." Melanie's mentor provided social support, which motivated her to obtain a higher educational status. Former adolescents also indicated that their mentors spent time communicating with them about their interests, found resources that would help cultivate those interests, and taught them how to apply the resources. Mentor Jane stated, "...it's easy to motivate adolescents because they tend to already have an idea of what they want to do, and my job is to help them reach their goal by any means necessary because all these children deserve to be somebody and to have someone on

their side.” Jane provided her mentees with the support needed to achieve individual-specific goals.

Consistency. Mentors were viewed as consistent figures in the lives of the adolescents. The former adolescents described their mentors as an unchanging presence in their everyday lives. Most of the former adolescents indicated that their mentors were easily accessible on a consistent basis. For instance, David stated, “my mentor has always been there for me...acting the same way no matter if I upset him or disappointed him and I have made many mistakes that I feel he should have walked away from me, but he never did and that’s worth so much to me.” The social support that David received from his mentor increased his confidence and self-worth. Former adolescents described an initially low self-image level, but through the presence of a mentor, their personal view of themselves began to change positively. The former adolescents expressed that before having a mentor there was always a feeling of abandonment, but having a mentor filled a void that a lack of parental guidance or a negative peer influence caused. Former adolescent, Valerie, indicated, “Having a mentor gave me an authority figure that listened to me...and gave me real perspective.” Mentor Tara stated that “...listening is key. Most of these kids are never heard. They are treated as if their feelings or thoughts don’t matter when they truly do. They are the future.” Most former adolescents stated that they did not have a consistent figure in their lives who wanted to positively influence their well-being before having a mentor. The former adolescents viewed listening as an irreplaceable skill that a consistent mentor must have. According to mentor Tracy, listening is part of the responsibility mentors take on as well as “...being available for any general questions a child has...and being aware of a child’s growth...” Mentors provide adolescents with

support by being a constant outlet that helps guide decisions and/or deal with the consequences of poor decisions made by the adolescent.

Security. Former adolescents conveyed that their mentors gave them security. Security was facilitated by the mentor giving the former adolescents a safe zone to share sensitive details of their lives. A former adolescent, David, described a situation in which he was being pressured to become a gang member. He stated, “I didn’t know what to do because in my neighborhood you either choose to be apart of the gang or the gang causes trouble for you and your family...I was afraid, but I felt safe enough to tell my mentor and he fixed it for me...” Without a safe zone for the former adolescents to express their feelings, their lives could have been greatly altered. For example, a former adolescent, Mary, described an experience which involved illegal substances and stated, “...all I wanted to do at that time was get high, but as time went on, I wanted to quit, but couldn’t...a lady came into my life and she helped me beat my addiction...” Mentors provided the former adolescents with confidential guidance that helped improve their circumstances. Former adolescents were able to utilize their mentor’s commitment to confidentiality to start making life changes. Former adolescent, Rose, expressed, “I felt that I was able to step out of my comfort zone with my mentor...I trusted her with a lot of secrets that I would never share with anyone...she made a difference in my life...my life is so different now...” Mentors shared a similar level of comfort, confidentiality, and freedom within the mentoring relationship. Mentor Susan confirmed by stating, “...it gives the child a freedom. A freedom to be ok with their selves...to get the information they need without judgement...an opportunity to evolve and grow with their interests in mind, a venue outside their normal...peace, mental strength, and emotional strength...”

Former adolescents received mental integrity and emotional security through discussions and guidance from their mentor.

Problem-Solving. Mentors conveyed the importance of an adolescent's ability to resolve factors such as peer pressure, drug abuse, alcoholism, and parental abandonment in low income areas. Former adolescents communicated the normalcy of violence, death, and substance abuse in their environment. Mentors provided the former adolescents with a venue to discuss environmental, social, and economic factors that impacted them.

Through discussions, mentors guided the adolescents through different stages of their thought process, which include recognizing the problem, listing options to address the problem, and choosing the best solution for their specific problem. Former adolescents indicated that the discussions increased their confidence in their voice and actions.

Former adolescent, Evelyn, stated, "I felt that anything I said made no sense because no one made me feel that I had something important to say, but I found out that I have a lot to say and that I could get myself out of situations before they became too dire. My mentor made me realize that..." Mentors described a strong relationship between problem-solving skills prep and the adolescent's application of those skills to difficult situations. Former adolescents' application of their problem-solving techniques increased their overall well-being. Mentor Edward stated, "...I come in to help them learn problem-solving skills...that will help them navigate through problems and circumstances...the improvements I have seen are tremendous...because I know what they deal with on a regular basis..." Former adolescents learned how to navigate through life by applying skills learned from their mentors, changing the course of events that may have impacted their life, otherwise.

CHAPTER VI

Discussion and Conclusion

Adolescence is a stage in life that occurs for all members of society; therefore, adolescent delinquency is a societal issue. Adolescent delinquency is influenced by multiple factors which include: mental factors, peer factors, socio-economic factors, and environmental factors (Bridges 1927; Hawkins and Weis 1985; Noyori-Corbett and Moon 2010). Through the use of the social learning theory, the social control theory, and the social support theory, mentorship and civic engagement activities were explored as buffers to adolescent delinquency in this study. Previous research has suggested that at-risk adolescents typically do not participate in community service and/or mentorship programs (Schmidt et al. 2012). This current study examined at-risk adolescents who have a low socio-economic status and who participate in civic engagement activities and/or mentorship programs.

An adolescent's participation in civic engagement activities is associated with a positive attachment to his/her peer group, purpose, and civic responsibility. In reference to the social learning theory, former adolescents learned cognitive skills through participating in civic engagement activities, which allowed them to positively interact with one another and to develop an attachment to one another. As the former adolescents' attachment level to their peer group increased, so did their bond to society, which is explained through the social control theory. Former adolescents described their positive bond to society as a direct result of their participation in civic engagement activities. They explained that the participation in civic engagement activities with their peers increased their commitment level to their neighborhood and surrounding areas. In

addition to the attachment to their neighborhood, the former adolescents indicated that their peer group offered social support through guidance, encouragement, and advice while sharing life experiences. The former adolescents' social interactions within their peer group and their experiences from participating in civic engagement activities strengthened their attachment to their peer group, which deterred delinquent actions and behaviors.

The former adolescents also associated their participation in civic engagement activities with positive and purposeful actions. Through these positive actions, they were able to recognize their unacceptable behavior and change it. The cognitive techniques, as described in the social learning theory, allowed the former adolescents to acquire skills to alter their behavior through role modeling and social interactions with their peers and mentors. Mentors were viewed as positive role models by the former adolescents. The mentors encouraged the former adolescents to make a difference in society through purposeful actions. The former adolescents' bonds to society were strengthened as their dedication to their neighborhoods increased. They also associated a feeling of pride and achievement while making changes to their neighborhoods. Social support was given to the former adolescents by their social network, mentors, and peers while participating in a positive and socially accepted experience, civic engagement. Civic engagement gave the former adolescents a positive purpose that deterred delinquent behaviors.

Former adolescents also indicated that participation in civic engagement activities made them aware of societal problems and the importance of civic responsibility. Through social interactions and role modeling, the former adolescents were able to apply learned behaviors to activities that improved the lives of others as well as their own. The

socialization skills obtained by the former adolescents increased their desire to be more proactive and involved in their community. Former adolescents also explained that the social support received from their mentors allowed them to learn coping techniques that helped them to positively change their emotional and behavioral makeup. The changes the former adolescents made to their behavior while participating in civic engagement activities deterred further delinquent behaviors and actions.

An adolescent's participation in civic engagement activities is associated with identity, motivation, consistency, security, and problem-solving. Former adolescents obtained positive characteristics (i.e., integrity, confidence, determination) through interactions with their mentors which shaped their identity while in the mentorship program. Former adolescents' views towards their society and their environment positively changed. They wanted to be more involved with the efforts to improve their environment and circumstances. Their mentors were able to continue to give the former adolescents social support through positive feedback and guidance, which manifested itself into positive actions that deterred delinquent actions and behavior.

Former adolescents received motivation from their mentors who concentrated on their individual interests and skills. As the former adolescents focused on their strengths, they were able to bypass social barriers and environmental pressures that they had previously encountered by applying social skills acquired from their mentorship programs. The former adolescents explained that their mentors concentrated on specific challenges that plagued each adolescent to provide measures to counter the challenge. The confidence that the former adolescents obtained gave them the strength to detach from delinquent behavior and to encourage their peers to do the same.

Former adolescents described their mentors as consistent figures in their lives that invested time and energy into them while allowing them to recognize deficiencies in their own personal characteristics. The former adolescents were able to recognize and change their characteristics because of their strong relationship with their mentors, who offered effective guidance and advice. Their mentors were able to provide them with a constant presence that helped deter delinquent behavior and actions.

The consistent presence of the mentors provided the former adolescents with security through confidentiality, which allowed them to share sensitive details about their life. Those sensitive details that were shared gave the mentors a better understanding of the adolescent. Through a better understanding of the adolescent, the mentors were able to provide a plan that was suited to each adolescent. The former adolescents described a feeling of freedom when they were sharing personal experiences and emotions with their mentor. Through the confidential conversations with their mentors, the former adolescents were able to learn the triggers that caused certain circumstances and issues to occur. As the former adolescents improved on their reactions to their triggers, their behaviors and their contributions to their peers and society began to positively change which, in turn, deterred delinquent actions and behaviors.

Mentors provided the former adolescents with a safe zone to discuss many issues. Through those discussions, the former adolescents were able to recognize problems, list solutions for the problem, and select the best solutions. These problem-solving skills were learned by the former adolescents and applied to various situations in their lives. They indicated that they developed confidence through the application of this social skill. The mentors conveyed that problem-solving skills helped the adolescents gain awareness

and that awareness was used to help their peers and their surrounding environment.

Problem-solving skills were positively associated with the former adolescents' ability to deter delinquent actions and behaviors.

Based upon these findings, civic engagement and mentorship is associated with positive youth development. These findings call for the implementation of programs that focus on civic engagement participation and mentorship as preventative measures to adolescent delinquency in low-income areas. Participation in civic engagement activities would promote positive social support, bonds, and interactions for at-risk adolescents involved in the program. Also, participation in mentorship programs would encourage positive characteristics through social interactions and social support from the adolescents' mentors and peers.

CHAPTER VII

Limitations

Although the research aligned with the previously mentioned literature, there were a few limitations worth mentioning. The first limitation was the recruitment of all the participants from one non-profit organization, which does not produce a general view of all mentoring programs and/or participants involved in civic engagement activities. The second limitation was the use of one coder, who read, transcribed, identified themes, and produced the research report, leaving no room for comparisons. The third limitation was that all participants came from one socio-economic rank. Future research is needed to address the above limitations.

In addition to addressing the limitations, further research is needed to identify other factors that could deter delinquency in adolescents. In this study, parental involvement and parental guidance were concepts that continued to be discussed by the former adolescents. If parental involvement was combined with mentorship and civic engagement activities, adolescent delinquency could be further deterred.

REFERENCES

- Abrams, Laura S., Matthew L. Mizel, Viet Nguyen, and Aron Shlonsky. 2014. "Juvenile Reentry and Aftercare Interventions: Is Mentoring a Promising Direction." *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work* 11:404-422.
- Archibald, Mandy and Sarah Munce. 2015. "Challenges and Strategies in the Recruitment of Participants for Qualitative Research." *University of Alberta Health Sciences Journal* 11(1):32-37.
- Agnew, Robert. 1985. "A Longitudinal Test of Social Control Theory and Delinquency." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 28(2):126-156.
- Bandura, Albert. 1978. "Social Learning Perspective: Mechanisms of Aggressions." *Psychology of Crime and Criminal Justice* 198-236.
- Banham Bridges, K. M. 1927. "Factors Contributing to Juvenile Delinquency." *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 17(4):531-580.
- Braun, Virginia and Victoria Clark. 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2):77-101.
- Chan, Wing Yi, Suh-Ruu Ou, and Arthur J. Reynolds. 2014. "Adolescent Civic Engagement and Adult Outcomes: An Examination Among Urban Racial Minorities." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 43:1829-1843.
- Cohen, Sheldon and Thomas Ashby Wills. 1985. "Stress, Social Support, and the Buffering Hypothesis." *American Psychological Association* 98(2):310-357.
- Conger, Rand D. 1976. "Social Control and Social Learning Models of Delinquent Behavior." *Criminology* 14(1):17-40.
- Creel, Ramona. 2017. "Project Management Plan: 5 Steps to Organizing and Managing

- Any Project.” Smead. Retrieved November 13, 2017 (<http://www.smead.com/hot-topics/project-management-plan-1371.asp>).
- DeCamp, Whitney and Christopher J. Ferguson. 2017. “The Impact of Degree of Exposure to Violent Video Games, Family Background, and Other Factors on Youth Violence.” *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 46:388-400.
- Erdem, Gizem, David L. DuBois, Simon Larose, Davis De Wit, and Ellen L. Lipman. 2016. “Mentoring Relationships, Positive Development, Youth Emotional and Behavioral Problems: Investigation of Mediational Model.” *Journal of Community Psychology* 44(4):464-483.
- Folkman, Susan. 1984. “Personal Control and Stress and Coping Processes: A Theoretical Analysis.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 46(4):839-852.
- Gray, David E. 2014. *Doing Research in the Real World*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hawkins, J. D. and J. G. Weis. 1985. “The Social Development Model: An Integrated Approach to Delinquency Prevention.” *The Journal of Primary Prevention* 6(2):73-97.
- Hirschi, Travis. 1969. *Causes of Delinquency*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Lakey, Brian and Sheldon Cohen. 2000. “Social Support Theory and Measurement.” *Measuring and Intervening in Social Support*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Lune, Howard and Bruce L. Berg. 2016. *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social*

Sciences. 9th ed. Boston, MA: Pearson.

- Noyori-Corbett, Chie and Sung Seek Moon. 2010. "Multifaceted Reality of Juvenile Delinquency: An Empirical Analysis of Structural Theories and Literature." *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* 27:245-268.
- Rossi, Giulia, Michela Lenzi, Jill D. Sharkey, Alessio Vieno, and Massimo Santinello. 2016. "Factors Associated with Civic Engagement in Adolescence: The Effects of Neighborhood, School, Family, and Peer Contexts." *Journal of Community Psychology* 44(8):1040-1058.
- Sargeant, Joan. 2012. "Qualitative Research Part II: Participants, Analysis, and Quality Assurance." *Journal of Graduate Medical Education* 4(1):1-3.
- Schmidt, Jennifer A., Lee Shumow, and Hayal Z. Kackar. 2012. "Associations of Participation in Service Activities with Academic, Behavioral, and Civic Outcomes of Adolescents at Varying Risk Levels." *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 41:932-947.
- Thoits, Peggy A. 2011. "Mechanisms Linking Social Ties and Support to Physical and Mental Health." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 52(2):145-161.

VITA

Latrice Leonard

EDUCATION

Master of Arts student in Sociology at Sam Houston State University, January 2016 – present. Thesis title: “Civic Engagement and Mentorship as Preventative Measures to Deter Adolescent Delinquency.”

Bachelor of Arts (December 2015) in Sociology, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

Leonard, Latrice. Multigenerational Families Effects on Adolescent Development. Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas, Spring 2017.

Leonard, Latrice. After-School Programs as Social Support Systems for Working Families. Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas, Fall 2017.

ACADEMIC AWARDS

Walter and Minnie Bennett Scholarship, Department of Sociology, Sam Houston State University, 2014–2015.

Ruth A. Deblanc Scholarship, Department of Sociology, Sam Houston State University, 2017-2018