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Criers, liars, and manipulators: Probation officers' views of girls

Emily Gaarder a, Nancy Rodriguez b & Marjorie S. Zatz a
a Arizona State University
b Arizona State University West
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This study examines the perceptions of girls held by juvenile probation officers, psychologists, and others involved in juvenile court decision making. Through qualitative analysis of girls' probation case files and in-depth interviews with juvenile probation officers, we discuss the social construction of gender, race, culture, and class. Our findings suggest that in an environment marked by scarce resources, gender and racial/ethnic stereotypes leave girls few options for treatment and services in the juvenile court. Some probation officers expressed distaste for working with girls and had little understanding of culturally or gender-specific programming. Others were frustrated by the lack of programming options for girls in the state. Based on our findings, we question whether the current ideology or structure of juvenile probation can nurture a holistic approach to justice for girls.

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** Emily Gaarder is a Ph.D. candidate in Justice Studies at Arizona State University. She earned her M.A. in Women's Studies from the University of Cincinnati. She has worked extensively with at-risk and imprisoned youth in a variety of settings. Her research and advocacy focus on restorative justice, environmental justice, and girls in the criminal justice system.

*** Nancy Rodriguez is an associate professor in the Criminal Justice and Criminology Department at Arizona State University West. Her research interests include sentencing policies, juvenile court processes, and substance abuse. She has various publications on three strikes law, juvenile drug courts, and restorative justice. Please direct all correspondence to: Nancy Rodriguez, Ph.D., Criminal Justice and Criminology, Arizona State University West, 4701 W. Thunderbird Rd., Glendale, AZ 85306-4908, Phone: 602/543-6601, Fax: 602/543-6658; e-mail: Nancy.Rodriguez@asu.edu.

**** Marjorie S. Zatz is a professor in the School of Justice Studies at Arizona State University. Her research interests address the ways in which race, ethnicity, and gender impact juvenile and criminal court processing and sanctioning; social constructions of race and gender; Chicano/a gangs; Latin American legal systems; and comparative justice. She has published articles in scholarly journals including *Criminology, Journal of Quantitative Criminology, Social Problems, and Law and Society Review.*
Feminist scholars and practitioners who work with girls in the juvenile justice system have long been searching for ways to raise awareness about girls’ experiences and how their needs and issues might differ from boys’ (Alexander, 1995; Belknap & Holsinger, 1998; Chesney-Lind, 1997; Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2004; Kunzel, 1993; Odem, 1995; MacDonald & Chesney-Lind, 2001). A number of contemporary works by academics and practitioners alike call for an emphasis on gender, race, and class to fully understand girls’ social and economic realities, and to provide programming appropriate to that context (Acoca, 1998b; Bloom, Owen, Deschenes, & Rosenbaum, 2002a; MacDonald & Chesney-Lind, 2001). Accordingly, we reviewed juvenile probation case files and interviewed juvenile probation officers in one metropolitan county in Arizona to better understand how girls are perceived, how their unique histories of abuse and related problems are interpreted, and how juvenile courts respond to these perceptions and interpretations in prescribing treatments for girls.

Drawing from theories and research on the social construction of gender, race, culture, and class, we observe how such constructions influence perceptions juvenile court personnel hold and how such perceptions sustain the “disconnect” between girls’ images and their realities. How are ideas about “acceptable” behaviors and lifestyles embedded in notions of gender, culture, and class? To the extent that girls are seen as manipulative or “harder to work with,” we ask: What are the repercussions of this image? Last, we address whether and how probation officers understand gender and culturally specific needs and programming, and the availability of such programming. One of the conundrums faced in this court, as elsewhere, is that these constructions are nested within an environment characterized by scarce resources. We end by discussing how attitudes of probation officers interact with the structure and priorities of juvenile probation, including especially treatment options (given scarce resources), and implications for girls in the system.

**REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

*The Construction of Girls' Lives: Gender, Race, and Class*

The “intersectionalities” of gender, race, and class have been identified as central to studies of gender construction (see Chesney-Lind, 1999; Crenshaw, 1989; Daly & Maher, 1998; Kempf-Leonard & Sample, 2000; Martin & Jurik, 1996; Messerschmidt, 1997; Miller, 1998; Morrison, 1992; West & Zimmerman, 1987). We
know it is essential to connect racial and ethnic oppression, patriarchal domination, and culture if we are to expand current research in criminology (Mann & Zatz, 2002; Zatz, 2000). Moreover, those few studies that have explicitly addressed gender construction within marginalized communities add a distinct dimension to our understanding of girls' delinquency (see Arnold, 1990; Chesney-Lind, 1997, 1999; Joe & Chesney-Lind, 1995; Hunt, MacKenzie, & Joe-Laidler, 2000; Portillos, 1999).

The vast majority of research on girls and the juvenile court addresses the influences of gender on juvenile court processing (e.g., Beger & Hoffman, 1998; Bishop & Frazier, 1992; Horowitz & Pottieger, 1991; Johnson & Scheuble, 1991; Chesney-Lind, 1989; McDonald & Chesney-Lind, 2001; Miller, 1996; Triplett & Myers, 1995). Gender differences have been most consistently observed in cases involving status offenses. While self-report data show that girls and boys commit status offenses in roughly the same numbers, the proportion of girls arrested and referred to juvenile court for status offenses is higher (Alder, 1998; Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2004; Kempf-Leonard & Sample, 2000). To build upon these findings, we suggest that hypotheses addressing the treatment of girls by police, probation officers, and the courts must also consider the impact of social factors such as race and class.

Much research documents how Black women and girls are more likely to be targeted for arrest and processed more harshly than their White counterparts (e.g., Chesney-Lind, 1998; Gilbert, 1999; Mauer & Huling, 1995; Miller, 1996). The different gender role expectations of women according to race have contributed to differential treatment of both victims of crime and offenders (Young, 1986). Gilbert (1999, p. 234) attributes African American women's sentencing to prison more to "their racial status, sex role, and life circumstances ... than [to] their law violations."

Other research has delved into how depictions of youth are constructed according to gender and race. For example, Rosenbaum and Chesney-Lind (1994) found that case files routinely included notes about girls' physical appearance and sexuality, but not about boys'. Kempf-Leonard and Sample's (2000) survey of juvenile and family court judges discovered that "manipulative or deceitful actions" influenced case processing for girls but not boys.

Bridges and Steen (1998) conducted the most comprehensive analysis to date of how race plays into perceptions held by juvenile court staff. Their study examined probation officers' official court records, finding that court staff perceive and judge minority juveniles differently than they do White juveniles. Specifically,
probation officers tend to explain delinquent acts committed by Black juveniles in terms of negative internal attributes (e.g., personality characteristics and attitudes) while Whites' delinquency is more frequently attributed to external characteristics (e.g., family structure, substance abuse). Although the authors used a sample of boys and girls, they did not address the convergence of gender and race in probation officers' thinking about the youths, their offenses, future potential, or how those constructions influence gender appropriate treatment.

Although prior work has documented the role of class and gender on delinquency (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 2004; Rubin, 1976; Orenstein, 1994), relatively few studies have examined how gender, race, and class interact to influence juvenile justice decision making processes. Among those that have (see Miller, 1996; Sarri, 1983), findings reveal that White middle-class juvenile offenders are far more likely to be processed informally than their Black lower-class counterparts. Miller's (1996) work on delinquent girls, which relied on a content analysis of investigation reports of girls on probation, found that juvenile court officials use class-based standards (specifically, middle-class) to make disposition recommendations. Among adults, Visher (1983) and Chiricos and Bales (1991) point to the interaction of race, gender, and indicators of class (e.g., unemployment), finding that the influence of gender on police and court decisions differs depending upon the person's race and class.

We still lack adequate knowledge of how probation officers and other court officials view girls' pathways to crime, personal attributes, and future possibilities (Miller, 1996). Such descriptions can tell us a great deal about how girls are perceived and socially constructed according to race, gender, and class. They also allow us to compare these perceptions with the reality of girls' lives, helping to discover whether common stereotypes permeate probation officers' analyses of girls and influence treatment or confinement decisions.

The Disconnect Between Girls' Lives and Treatment Programs

The depiction of girls in the juvenile court system as documented in prior studies has brought to light many unique dimensions of girls' lives (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2004). One of the most recognized and well-documented realities of girls in the justice system is a prior history of abuse and neglect (Belknap &

1 Unfortunately, this study included the review of only 30 investigation reports.
In a study of girl offenders, Acoca (1998a) found that 40% reported being victims of sexual abuse. Furthermore, substance abuse among girls has been linked to multiple incidents of sexual abuse. The interaction between prior victimization and lack of appropriate treatment confounds efforts to address girls' delinquency and health-related problems (e.g., pregnancy, miscarriage, drug and alcohol addiction, eating disorders, and sexually transmitted diseases) (Holsinger, 2000).

Properly assessing the risk factors associated with girls' delinquency and recidivism is extremely difficult given the relatively few programs designed to serve girls' needs (Bloom, Owen, Deschenes, & Rosenbaum, 2002b; Hoyt & Scherer, 1998). Programs for young women have received low funding priority. As Chesney-Lind (1997) notes, only 5% of federal, local, and private funds for juvenile justice are designated for girls.

Belknap, Holsinger, and Dunn (1997) attribute the differential treatment of girls to stereotypes held by professionals. Studies have found that youth workers perceive girls as "difficult to work with" given their problems and available treatment options (Baines & Alder, 1996; Belknap et al., 1997; Bond-Maupin, Maupin, & Leisenring, 2002). The perceived difficulty in working with girls may be attributed to the lack of training in identifying girls' needs and the lack of appropriate programs to meet these needs. For example, Gaarder and Belknap's (2004) study of girls incarcerated in a women's prison found that officers received little to no special training on how to work with juvenile girls, and expressed frustration when assigned to work in the under-21 unit. The prison offered no groups on sexual abuse for the girls, and limited recreational, educational, and work opportunities. Cultural and linguistic barriers can exacerbate these programming problems. Indeed, Acoca (1998b) found that 20% of incarcerated women interviewed reported having difficulty receiving the services they needed because of language difficulties, specifically their own struggles speaking English.

We draw on the literature on the social construction of gender, race, and class to develop a more informed approach to effective programming for delinquent girls (e.g., Bloom et al., 2002b; Hoyt & Scherer, 1998; Miller, 1998; Messerschmidt, 1997; Chesney-Lind, 1999). Unfortunately, institutions and programs that house girls have often reinforced stereotypic gender norms such as femininity and passivity. These programs and institutions usually lack a more holistic approach to treatment, such as family involvement,
drug/alcohol treatment, sexual/physical abuse counseling, and community involvement (Chesney-Lind, 1997).

What Do Gender- and Culturally Responsive Programming Mean?

Given the importance that feminist scholars and practitioners place on the intersection of gender, class, race, and culture, the second part of our study explores how knowledgeable probation officers are with regard to gender- and culturally specific needs and programming. Defining gender and culturally appropriate programming is extremely important given the relatively few programs that address such needs. A national report by Girls Incorporated (1997, p. v) recommends that any program for juvenile female offenders “be gender specific, designed to meet the needs of young women as individuals, to take female development into account, and to avoid perpetuating limiting stereotypes based on gender, race, class, language, sexual orientation, disability, and other personal and cultural factors.”

Lindgren’s (1996) survey of members of the Minnesota Adolescent Female Subcommittee of the Advisory Task Force on the Female Offender in Corrections elicited a wide range of responses to the question, “What is your definition of gender-specific programming for adolescent females?” The most important themes that emerged were a safe and nurturing environment, the importance of relationships and connections, and comprehensive programming. Based on the comments derived from this study, Lindgren defines gender-specific programming as “comprehensive programming that addresses and supports the psychosocial developmental process of female adolescents, while fostering connections in the context of a safe and nurturing environment” (1996, p. iv).

In 1992, Congress listened to the concerns of practitioners serving youth, who related the need for more attention and services addressing the needs of girls. Subsequently, the reauthorization of the 1974 Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act highlighted the need for designing “gender-specific” programs for delinquent girls. A number of studies on gender-specific programming for girls followed, some aided by this new federal attention and funding. Keys to the girls’ success in these programs were staff recruitment and training, skills training for the girls, and family and community involvement (Greene, Peters, & Associates, 1997).

Other research has emphasized the importance of a continuum of care that includes both front-end prevention and back-end aftercare programs (American Bar Association, 2001; Belknap et
Counseling support and education around issues of sexual abuse, domestic violence, sexuality, and pregnancy are crucial for girls. Attention to cultural background, language barriers, and immigration concerns are essential elements. Economic needs, housing, jobs, and medical services were also identified.

While there are few existing templates that demonstrate the above characteristics, some programs do exist that can help us identify and measure what kinds of programming work for girls. Nationally based organizations such as Girls Incorporated, and local programs such as P.A.C.E. Center for Girls can serve as examples of successful programming (Girls Incorporated, 1996). Such programs provide comprehensive evaluations of girls based on gender-specific education and therapeutic services in educational-based settings. In Canada, Toronto's Earls Court Child and Family Centre has developed promising early interventions. Their Girls' Connection program is the first-known attempt in Canada to offer girls and their families a gender-specific, holistic intervention that provides long-term services and follow-up care (see Chesney-Lind, Artz, & Nicholson, 2001; Levene, 1997).

DATA AND METHODS

To address whether and how gender, race/ethnicity, and class influence perceptions of girls held by juvenile court personnel and how such perceptions may contribute to the already limited treatment options for girls, we use two primary data sources. The first are official case file narratives from court records for a random sample of 174 girls referred to juvenile probation in Maricopa County, Arizona during 1999. These files include juvenile court petition information, disposition reports, progress reports, and psychological evaluations normally maintained by the juvenile court, both from the 1999 case and from any earlier referrals of these girls to juvenile probation.2

Our intent with the girls' case files was threefold. First, we retrieved narrative statements about the girls and about juvenile court officials' presentations of their cases (i.e., perceptions of girls' behavior and situations). The majority of our data are these narratives written by probation officers, but we also include psychological reports. Although the latter are not written by

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2 In Maricopa County, the county attorney files a petition (i.e., referral) against a juvenile who has allegedly committed a delinquent and/or incorrigible act. The adjudication process begins with a hearing to determine whether or not a juvenile is delinquent or whether or not a juvenile is a status offender. A disposition occurs when a juvenile offender is assigned treatment and/or placement.
probation officers, they contribute to the overall “image” of a girl that is created in a probation file. These psychological reports are used by probation and other court officers to assess a girl’s background, behavior, and delinquency issues, and can influence the type of treatment or programming she receives. Second, in an effort to better assess girls’ lives, we collected narrative information on the girls’ parents/guardians, siblings, and extended family members. Third, given the well-documented need for gender appropriate treatment, we examined the treatment recommendations made by juvenile court staff and relate them to the experiences of girls (i.e., substance abuse, sexual abuse, pregnancy).

We supplemented the case file narratives with 14 semi-structured interviews conducted with juvenile probation officers. The women we interviewed included five Whites, two African Americans, one Asian American, one Hispanic, and one Middle Eastern. Of the four male probation officers, two were African American, one White, and one Hispanic. The probation officers averaged 11.2 years of experience, with a range from 1 to 24 years. Probation officers represented various units including standard probation, intensive probation, detention, a school safety program, treatment services, community services, a sex offender program, drug court, transfers, and program services. The semi-structured interviews lasted 45 to 90 minutes. All interviews were taped and transcribed by the interviewer.

The 174 girls in the sample were racially and ethnically diverse: 58% were White, 24% were Hispanic, 13% Black, 4% American Indian, and fewer than 1% Asian Pacific Islander. All were between 12 and 17 years old and had been referred to juvenile court for person, property, drug, and status offenses and for probation violations. To capture information on the structural dimensions of the girls in our sample, we linked their residential zip codes with 2000 census data (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). While these data are aggregate, they provide insights into the demographic characteristics of the geographic areas where the girls lived. The median family income for census respondents

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3 The names and contact information for these officers was supplied by the director of Juvenile Court Services. We requested a diverse list with respect to gender, race/ethnicity, years of experience, and probation jurisdiction. After completing 14 interviews, we felt we had reached a point of saturation and were ready to begin review of the case files.

4 The girls in our study are a random sample of girls referred to juvenile probation in 1999. Compared to all girls on probation, though, our sample underrepresented Hispanic girls and overrepresented White and African American girls. In 2001, the Maricopa County Juvenile Probation Department reported that 51% of girls referred to juvenile court were White, 35% were Hispanic, 8% were Black, 3.7% were American Indian, and fewer than 1% were Asian Pacific Islander (data supplied by the Maricopa County Juvenile Probation Department).
within the girls' zip codes was $42,258 a year. Twenty-two percent reported having less than a high school education, 6% reported being unemployed, and 10% lived below the poverty level. The majority of the communities were occupied by Whites (61%) and Hispanics (28%). Twenty-two percent identified Spanish as their primary language.

Thematic content analyses of the interview and case file data were conducted to explore major themes in the data, which are described in later sections (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). A coding scheme was created to quantitatively analyze these themes. We report both the prevalence of the themes and excerpts from case files. Following each excerpt, we provide a case number and the ethnicity of the girl. We do not provide the gender and ethnicity of probation officers because they could too readily be identified given the demographics of our interview sample.

**FINDINGS**

Three dominant themes emerge from the case file narratives and interviews with probation officers. The first of these is the gap between probation officers' and other court officials' perceptions of the girls as whiny and manipulative and the realities of the girls' lives, including sexual abuse and teen motherhood. The second is the disconnect between official perceptions of the girls' families as "trashy" and irresponsible and the realities of the girls' family circumstances, including such structural dimensions as poverty as well as individual histories of abuse. The third is the lack of knowledge and understanding on the part of probation officers regarding culturally and gender appropriate treatments, as well as the reality of limited programming services for girls.

It is important to note that prevalence speaks not to how often girls in the sample were abused or how many mothers fit negative stereotypes, for example. Rather, prevalence refers to how often a juvenile court official noted a particular issue in the girls' files. Thus, the percentages that we present are underestimates if the court officials, for whatever reason, did not explore and/or comment on a particular theme (e.g., abuse that was part of the girls' family history and circumstances).

While the realities of girls' lives were consistently emphasized in case file narratives and interviews, we found that stereotypical images of girls outweighed any realities. We also found that girls were often referred to treatment services that did not appear to match their needs. Moreover, the juvenile court lacked the insight and capacity to meet their needs. That is, we found that probation officers, like other criminal justice officials, seem to inadvertently
"blunder" when attempting to be sensitive to race, gender, and class (Zatz, 2000, p. 519). They also had little training and few resources at their disposal to match the gender and culturally specific needs of girls on their caseloads.

Perceptions of Girls: Criers, Liars, and Manipulators

Consistent with findings of Baines and Alder (1996), Belknap et al. (1997), and Bond-Maupin et al. (2002), common images in girls' probation files included fabricating reports of abuse, acting promiscuously, whining too much, and attempting to manipulate the court system. In our sample, about 20% of girls were depicted by probation officers and other court officials as sexually promiscuous and 16.5% as liars and manipulators. For example, girls were described in case files as: very manipulative, whining, pouting (#126—African American girl); not inhibited in any way... possesses loose morals (#39—Hispanic girl); and manipulative, unpredictable personality (#12—Hispanic girl).

Interviews with probation officers revealed similar images. Several probation officers used words like promiscuous, manipulative, liars, and criers in their descriptions. Girls were "harder to work with," "had too many issues," and were "too needy." The following responses convey these messages.

They play the system real well. Girls play the system better than the boys do. They're manipulative. They, you know: "Pity poor me. I'm the innocent bystander and nobody's listening to me." They play the role as if they're so helpless... and the majority of the judges are male and they fall into that trap every single time.

You just don't see a lot of girls in here [intensive probation]. And to be honest with you we groan when we have one... you know, the issues. I don't know why you groan—maybe because they're definitely a lot needier.

It's very important to be clear with the girls... because they're more manipulative.

They're more like criers. Girls will do that. They'll break down and you'll be in the sympathy thing for awhile you know, but then you realize what they're doing.

Two female probation officers, however, commented on some of the reasons why girls might lie or complain.

They always say when you get girls on your caseload—oh, they're so whiny and they're so needy. I mean, that's true, but sometimes they just need to vent, they just need to bitch a little bit... they have a lot of problems.

Another officer who worked in the detention unit offered a different perspective.
Oh yes, that's their survival sometimes... getting what they need by going around the back door, not giving the truth, or just flat out lying.

She recalled a recent incident where a girl had reported being raped at her residential treatment center. The girl wanted to speak to a counselor about it. The probation officer later discovered that the incident did happen, but more than 2 years ago. The girl had reported it as though it had just happened.

What she wanted was some one-on-one attention with an adult staff. Girls get their needs met through attention, through their relationships with people.

When attempting to explain the cause of girls' delinquent behavior, Baines and Alder (1996) found that youth workers often relied on the abuse histories of girls to contextualize their path into delinquency. Consistent with their findings, 11 of the 14 probation officers we interviewed felt that most of the girls on their caseload had histories of sexual and/or physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect. Most made connections between the offending behaviors and past victimization. One remarked, “I hardly ever get a girl who hasn't been raped, sexually abused, or physically abused,” noting an apparent direct correlation. Another indicated that girls have usually been victims and that “involvement in sexual activity, criminal activity, is increased after that.”

Some probation officers also identified poverty and lack of opportunity as directly related to girls' delinquency.

American Indian girls... some of them come from reservations and a lot of poverty. The connection in talking with them has been a lot of abuse and drinking. They don't see a lot of future. Education does not appear to be valued in their families, because there's no future whether you have an education or not.

Although most officers were sympathetic to the girls' histories, a few believed that the abuse stories that girls told were untrue or exaggerated, or that girls were partially responsible for being abused.

They feel like they're the victim. They try from, “Mom kicked me out” to “Mom's boyfriend molested me” to “My brother was sexually assaulting me.” They'll find all kinds of excuses to justify their actions. Because they feel if I say I was victimized at home that justifies me being out on the streets... Or while they were out there they got raped. Or, they were mistreated. Personally, I think 98% is false... 98% of the girls say the exact same story, so it's as if they just get together on the units and think up these things.

[The interviewer asked about victimization/offending connections.] I think there is a connection but it starts
before that. It started with their behavior, being out there on the streets, being out there with those people. You know, they end up in these situations. One of them—she was already incorrigible before this—took off with her boyfriend. She was raped and she refused to give his name because he was in a gang and she was afraid. She came home and did detention for a little while because she had run away, so yeah, because I don't think she's dealt with these issues, she runs away from them. So they do have a correlation, but I don't know which one comes first. The behavior came first because she, you know, got in that situation.

One psychological evaluation echoes these sentiments.

She has walked extensively on the wild side, committing many misdeeds, making many bad choices, and now... she is already haunted by a lot of ghosts. Her past is catching up to her, and it is spoiling her present and future. Her depression is a part of her own doing. She has used practically every street drug, she has been promiscuous, and in general, she has committed many unforgivable misdeeds. The problem here is that she is unable to forgive herself for all the bad choices that she has made... Perhaps she should be referred to a psychiatrist and prescribed antidepressant medication, for this might relieve her depressive symptoms some. However, to completely rid herself of the depression, she must reach a stage of innocence again, which is unlikely (from psychological evaluation #123—Hispanic girl).

As these probation officers and court psychologists indicate, girls are seen as being very difficult to work with. Whether the officers blame or sympathize, they perceive the girls as being troubled and troublesome. We turn next to the realities of the girls' lives, with particular attention to their histories of sexual abuse, substance abuse, and teen motherhood.

Reality of Girls' Lives: Sexual Abuse and Teen Motherhood

The direct and indirect relationships between girls' emotional, sexual, and physical abuse and delinquency have been substantially documented in prior work (Alexander, 1995; Belknap & Holsinger, 1998; Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2004; McCormack, Janus, & Burgess, 1986; Rhodes & Fischer, 1993). Given the prevalence of sexual abuse histories reported in previous studies (e.g., Acoca, 1998a; Belknap & Holsinger, 1998), we were surprised to find that a relatively low percentage of girls in this study (18.8%) were identified as victims of sexual abuse. However, as previously noted, these data represent instances where a court
official was informed of such abuse and actually reported it in the
girl's file.

Pregnancy is also a distinct reality for girls in the juvenile
justice system (Acoca, 1998a). Although we found that 12.5% of
girls were teen mothers and 7.8% became pregnant while on
probation, probation officers document the problems teen mothers
face but rarely recommend treatment options or services. Two
cases illustrate this problem.

(Girl's name) was stressed due to overwhelming
responsibility with school and her infant. This officer set
up counseling to remedy the problem. The juvenile wanted
to hang out with friends rather than stay home caring for
her baby. The family decided that it would be a good idea
to have her live with her father in (city omitted),
California and attend school there after her probation was
up on (date omitted). Her mom would care for the baby to
relieve some of the stress (#114—African American girl)

It appears that (Girl's name) has tremendous concern for
her unborn child. She is concerned about being a teenage
mother, and not married at this time. Due to (Girl's name)
not getting along with her stepmother, it appears she runs
away from home instead of dealing with the circumstances
in the home. (#113—White girl)

In the first case, counseling was recommended given the girl's
stress. No concrete support system, however, was made accessible
to her. In the second, the juvenile was placed in parenting classes
and given community work hours. Again, parenting classes are the
best the probation officer can recommend for a girl in this situation
of needing a safe place to stay because she runs away from home.

The depiction of girls' sexuality as "dirty" or inappropriate has
led to an assumption that girls need to be protected from the
dangers associated with their sexuality. Interestingly, we found
minimal effort to protect or assist these girls. Girls' sexual activity,
while documented in case files, was not dealt with in conjunction
with other risk factors such as sexual abuse or mental health
problems. In fact, even when these two girls had suffered extensive
sexual abuse, they were still perceived as manipulators.

(Girl's name) also claims a history of rape on two
occasions, but according to her mother, she did not report
it to anyone and did not mention it to anyone for over a
year after it supposedly happened. She also was pregnant
in (date omitted) and attempted suicide. The letter in the
record is suggestive of a long and somewhat chronic
history of mental health issues and it would appear that
she has been somewhat manipulative in her behavior.
There are indications to suggest that she has superficial
lacerations on her forearms, suggestive of cutting herself
subsequent to an argument with the parents. In the past, (Girl's name) was raped four different times. The first occurred when she was 7 years old; twice at age 13 (once by three boys) and another time at a party. She would not talk about the most recent incident, the fourth rape (#82—White girl)

She reports being sexually active and also reports having an abortion two months ago. She states that the father of her child is actually a 35-year-old man who has his own business. She reports being sexually active, as she prostituted herself on and off since she was 13. (Girl's name) reports for her evaluation in a very candid manner, yet she does appear to be somewhat manipulative. She likely, in fact, sexualizes many of her relationships when communicating with males. She states that she tried to commit suicide recently while in detention, reporting trying to tie a sheet around her neck (#165—White girl)

We found these depictions of girls as manipulative thought provoking. On the one hand, it is not surprising that girls with a history of abuse might be seen as manipulative. For example, the mental health literature tells us that victims of incest might try to control or manipulate individuals (e.g., an abusive father) or situations to reduce the likelihood of further abuse. Manipulating others thus becomes a survival tactic.

Yet our reading of the case files and our reflections on the interviews with probation officers suggest that rather than simply describing a behavior as manipulative, the probation officers take the further step of ascribing a personality trait. There is a difference, we argue, between a recognition that girls may be manipulative in specific situations to achieve a desired end (e.g., not being abused) and the construction of the girl herself, and of all girls by extension, as manipulative by nature and therefore difficult to work with.

The key, we suggest, is whether the probation officers reflect on the girls' contexts and the underlying problems to which manipulative behaviors may be a reasonable response. If they do, we should expect to see them searching for appropriate programs that can adequately respond to the girls' problems and needs. Unfortunately, we do not find that to be the typical response. Rather, some probation officers simply assume that the girls are making up stories. Too many others recognize that girls have problems due to their histories of victimization but do not respond in sympathetic ways, instead writing the girls off through gendered stereotypes and treating the victimization and manipulative behaviors as independent realities.
Perceptions of Girls' Families: Trashy, Manipulative, and Sexually Irresponsible

Perceptions of girls' families were also examined. The majority of the probation officers interviewed felt that the family was crucial to the juvenile's success. In particular, they commented on how important it is that parents take responsibility for their children, seek help for their parenting problems, and be willing to work with probation officers.

Yet some of the same probation officers spoke of the girls' mothers in terms similar to those used to describe the girls themselves—"promiscuous" and "sluts." Indeed, in 6.1% of the case files, the probation officers made such notes. Again, we emphasize the particular language used to describe girls' mothers, and not on using such statements as an indicator of mothers' behavior.

The girl was accompanied to the intake interview by her mother who was dressed in black Bermuda shorts and a white, sleeveless crop top (#24—Hispanic girl)

[From an interview] Her background is the classic. Her sister uses drugs. The other sister has a baby, has had two or three kids. Mom—she's a slut. Mom—she's on her third marriage.

[From an interview] The daughters and sons are going through life with no supervision, no rules. All of the sudden the girl is 14, comes home with hickeys and dressed like a slut and Mom wants to give her rules. And Mom comes home at 3 a.m. with five different guys.

Interestingly, not a single probation officer commented on the fathers' marital status, physical attire, or sexual activities in the case files. We also found that 7.9% of mothers described in case files were presented as liars, or as manipulating the juvenile court system.

Class was an important factor in assessments of the girls' families, though this seemed to operate in several, perhaps contradictory, ways. The most extreme examples of economic disadvantage were cases where families were homeless. Three case files noted that girls living in homeless families were being punished for not attending treatment sessions regularly or missing appointments with their probation officers, both of which are considered probation violations. Probation officers sometimes noted that girls were being labeled delinquent simply because they were homeless. Some probation officers expressed sympathy for girls and families with economic challenges. One derogatory comment, however, targets the economic situation of a low-income, single-parent household.
This officer has tried to work with this family in order for (Girl's name) to be successful on probation, since much of her problems appear to be related to the lifestyle which they choose to live. This officer was not raised in an environment where people chose to live around discarded items, even having disabled vehicles permanently placed in the driveway, but it is still this officer's opinion that it is a choice of lifestyle that (Girl's mother) chooses for herself and her family (#6—White girl).

During interviews, some officers said that lower-income parents were easier to work with because they were uneducated, intimidated by the court, and not knowledgeable of court services. Another probation officer, however, identified these as barriers that poorer families face in seeking help for their children.

Basic communication skills and having the confidence to interact with government and community agencies. A lot of lower-class/working-class parents are afraid to get the phone book out or go to the police station or their community center and start asking what they think are maybe awkward or silly questions.... Middle- and upper-class parents are more confident through their jobs and education and everything. They're more confident to interact with the bigger system.

This officer also noted that very poor and middle-class families receive more services than working poor families, because they either qualify for free services (in the case of poor families) or can afford to pay for treatment (in the case of middle-class families).

The lower middle-class or working poor make $20,000 and don't qualify for welfare or have medical benefits. They can't pay $50 per hour for a counselor.

As a result, these girls are left with few options. If their families are working but do not qualify for federal assistance they do not receive services.

An African American probation officer noted that because his caseload was predominantly Hispanic and African American, it limited the types of services he was able to provide. He saw a relationship between race/ethnicity and class. Some services were located in geographic areas at a considerable distance from neighborhoods where economically disadvantaged minority families tended to live. Girls were frequently unable to travel to the locations where they could receive treatments. In essence, services were simply not an option for all.

*Realities of Girls' Families: Abuse, Poverty, and Racism*

Culture and class are central to the social construction of gender, including both what girls see as their available options and
what others see as appropriate behaviors for girls. Portillos (1999)
has shown how Chicanas and Mexicanas, in search of
independence from the expectations of the family, may turn to
gangs to alleviate experiences as marginalized women. Others
have identified the traditional household duties of Hispanic girls
(see Burgos-Ocasio, 2000) and the development of values such as
strength and independence among African American girls to deal
with the challenges of labor markets (Rice, 1990). We found that
12.3% of Hispanic women in our sample dealt with language
barriers, poverty, discrimination, and familial and economic
expectations associated with living close to the Mexican border.

It is believed that this family is somewhat economically
disadvantaged, which may influence the family, on
occasions, to change their address. (Girl's name) parents
are Spanish speaking only, but the juvenile seems to have
a fairly good grasp of the English language (#75—Hispanic girl).

(Girl's name) was indicating that if her parents divorced,
that she and her mom would move out. (Girl's name) stated that her mom plans on going back to Mexico to live.
(Girl's name) stated that if this happens, she will most
likely live with her 22-year-old sister, O. However, (Girl's
name) stated if the divorce does not happen before she is
18, once she is 18 in February, she may go live with a
friend "up north" (#17—Hispanic girl).

Interestingly, and consistent with Bridges and Steen's (1998)
findings regarding court officials' perceptions of intrinsic causes of
African American delinquency and extrinsic causes of White
delinquency, when Hispanics and/or their families contradict some
of these cultural dimensions, their involvement in delinquent acts
are viewed as mishaps. For example, a Hispanic girl's family is
described as cooperative and functional because they speak
English and are in the country legally.

Substance abuse plays a significant role in these girls' lives.
Case file narrative data showed that 43% of girls were current
drug users or had a history of drug use. For some, language
barriers made treatment or assessment difficult given the
probation officer's inability to communicate effectively with
parents.

There was no response from the family regarding my
initial letter to them and the request to contact me. I was
able to finally get a hold of the father at his work number.
(Father's name) speaks mostly Spanish and therefore
conversation with him was limited. He speaks some
English but may not have fully understood some of my
questions. Parents are divorced but are still living
together. They both work long hours and [are] rarely home
in the day. Both parents admitted that lack of supervision is contributing to the behaviors of their daughter. It was very clear that the parents know their children are using drugs but that there is little that they feel they can do to stop the behavior. This officer found their complacency about the activities in their home disturbing (#59—Hispanic girl).

In 18.8% of cases, we found that extended family members served as guardians when biological parents were unable to raise their children.

There are eight other children also living with grandparents. The grandparents are in their 70s and both are still working; they seem to be very responsible caring people. Both natural parents have histories of problems with the law. Mom has problems with alcohol and "rock" and dad also has alcohol problems (#105—Hispanic girl).

(Girl's name) family life has been far from ordinary. She lost her mother in 1995 due to excessive alcoholism, drug use, and a blood clot in her brain. (Girl's name) also lost her older brother in a gang-related shooting in (date omitted), and her youngest brother died at 2 months of age approximately 2 years ago. (Girl's name) was passed around from her maternal aunt to her grandmother. In the process, she has been in 13 different schools (#137—Hispanic girl).

Research has found that girls are much more influenced by family expectations and family conflict than boys (Hoyt & Scherer, 1998). These experiences vary by race/ethnicity. For example, Taylor, Biafora, Warheit, and Gail (1997) found that Hispanics are significantly influenced by family substance abuse, and African American youths by the levels of family communication. For some girls, substance abuse in combination with other family problems, including financial stability, domestic violence, and sexual abuse, compound their situations. Two narratives illustrate this clearly.

(Girl's name) is currently a ward of the state and is living in a group home. She was brought to the interview by her CPS caseworker B. (Girl's name) mother is living somewhere on the streets in (city omitted) and reportedly is dying of AIDS while her father is incarcerated in Mexico for murder. The caseworker reported that (Girl's name) has had a lot of problems with anger but seems to be making some progress recently. She was kicked out of her grandmother's house for assaulting her and then kicked out of her foster mother's house for assaulting her also. She has run away, attempted suicide, been assaulted and abused, been involved with gangs, drugs, and marijuana and has been on probation previously. However, as I stated, it appears that there has been progress and (Girl's name) seems to have mellowed out some. According to her
grandmother, (Girl's name) was sexually abused at 6 years of age (#48—Hispanic girl)

(Girl's name) is a 17-year-old American Indian youth who, at the present time, is doing quite well with her counseling and doing well at (school name). She has had a very sad and rocky childhood, she had to watch her mother die in front of her eyes from drug and alcohol abuse and has been from foster home to youth home and in hospitals and numerous counseling sessions to deal with her depression, her anger, and some of the violent and abusive situations that she has been exposed to (#58—American Indian girl)

Bond-Maupin et al. (2002) found that probation officers were often sympathetic to the conflicts Hispanic girls faced (i.e., having “traditional” parents and living as an “Americanized” girl). During our interviews with probation officers, we found they also identified with the struggles faced by Hispanics and commented on the valuable support system that extended families provide:

Personally I think some of the girls, especially Hispanic girls, are brought up to believe that their purpose in life is to stay home and have kids and do nothing. But they're growing up in the 90s.... I think a lot of them feel really torn—well, am I supposed to go out and have kids or am I supposed to have a career?

(The interviewer asked if she used different techniques with juveniles/families of color.) A Hispanic family or African American family for example, with a family intact—that becomes a real resource. Usually with extended families, you can include them as a support system, because they have been historically used as a support system. You have grandparents raising grandkids. You have uncles and aunts coming in and that has been a source of support.

Regarding family conflict, many probation officers expressed concern about domestic violence and noted that children were often punished for fights started by parents.

Politically, there was a change roughly 10 years ago... the legislature decided if the police go into a home and there's a domestic violence incident, somebody has to leave. And starting at that point the kids were the obvious ones to take out of the home. If you arrest the parents, than you have to shelter the kids.... So the police just make the kids go away and the numbers of kids being referred to the juvenile court for assaulting their parents or for disorderly conduct or punching walls or doors... the numbers have just been increasing tremendously because of that political change.

The whole thing just burns a hole in me.... Say the police respond to a case of domestic violence. You have a 3-year-
old girl, a 16-year-old girl, and the mother fighting. Say the mother grabbed that girl and started pounding her face into cement. They’re not going to take Mom to jail when there is a 3-year-old daughter there. But they need to separate the two of them. So a lot of times it really is the parent’s fault but the kid gets hauled away to jail for protection and they’re not going to take Mom who has to support the 3-year-old and go to work the next morning.

Although some probation officers identified the conflicts at home, economic instability, and substance abuse as the root of the problems the girls faced, they were unable to provide the needed services. The lack of appropriate treatment options and services for girls is our third theme.

**Gender-Specific Needs**

Many scholars and practitioners recognize the need for more appropriate treatment for girls but the small number of girls relative to boys makes it difficult for court officials to justify specialized, often expensive, treatments that are culturally and gender appropriate (Alder, 1998; Bloom et al., 2002a; Freitas & Chesney-Lind, 2001; McDonald & Chesney-Lind, 2001).

In our interviews, we asked probation officers whether they believed girls had different problems or needs than boys. We also asked if they worked differently with the girls on their caseloads. The majority of probation officers noted immediately that girls were more likely to be referred for incorrigibility or domestic violence offenses. Other likely offenses included probation violations (usually running away), truancy, drugs, and prostitution. Half of the probation officers reported that girls were more likely to be arrested for status offenses. These officers said that parents tend to “keep a closer eye” on girls, or try to “over control” them. They also noted that boys were more likely to be rewarded for sexual behavior and girls punished. As one probation officer noted, “Girls get picked up for stuff that males don’t.”

Another said, “Girls are involved with the court process more for their best interests, not necessarily because she is a danger to the community, but for her own safety.” Yet not all officers saw this as positive. One commented, “Domestic violence and incorrigibility needs to be directed away from the courtroom and into specialized programs. We’re turning a lot of these girls into criminals.”

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5 To contrast this point of view, we also note that one officer said, “I can’t take any example of any kid... where the parent was excessive or punitive in discipline. I see just the opposite. I see an incredible permissiveness in parents allowing kids freedoms and privileges that shouldn’t have been extended to the kid.”
However, four of the 14 probation officers asserted that juveniles all had similar needs and should not be treated or approached any differently based on gender. They rejected the need for gender-specific programming, preferring to decide on treatment options based on individual characteristics or circumstances. When asked about the kinds of programs in which girls were successful, another officer replied,

I don’t feel like you can just say that this program works for girls or whatever—they’re children. Some of them are ready and some of them aren’t. Whether they be boys or girls.

Some of these officers believed that treating girls “differently” would be assuming that all girls had the same issues and problems. Three alluded to the fact that some girls were not in fact acting normally.

These days you can’t do that. I have some young ladies on my caseload that are kind of like—they have a macho side, I guess.

[There are] girls on our caseload who are kind of macho girls. They’re not the normal, everyday girl that you deal with.

They’re not your typical girls... you know, the fingernails, the make-up, the Ms. Prissy. They’re just like the boys. They’re worse than some of the boys. They go out and they prove themselves like they’re not feminine. You know they don’t want anybody to think... well, I’m helpless. I can take care of myself, so they play the role as portraying to be something that they’re not.

When girls did not adhere to “feminine” behaviors or attitudes, there was often an assumption that they were “becoming more like boys,” and should be treated as boys would be. Probation officers also relied on gender stereotypes to define specific issues facing girls. Several of the probation officers believed that the girls were promiscuous and needed sexual education programming. Early sexual activity, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases were seen as feminine issues. As one officer commented,

It would be good to have gender specific—all girls—for feminine problems or feminine-related issues—we have a lot of STDs transmitted.

Another suggested that sex education was needed, “definitely for the females because they ... they produce the seed.” Interestingly, one probation officer who earlier had called promiscuity a “girl problem,” began to question herself after prompting from the interviewer.

Probation officer: You know what? (long pause) I think there is ... umm ... you know I think there is, but maybe
with the girls it's more noticeable. They're always getting STD's—but they must be getting them from the guys, so ...
(trails off)

In addition to labeling girls' sexuality as specifically problematic (as opposed to boys), two probation officers also made reference to the "hormonal" issues underlying girls' tendency to be "difficult."

Girls are much more difficult to case manage. Their affect is different—they will push you away when really they want to come closer. They will make your life miserable—whereas boys will just sort of go along with the program.... A lot of it, I think, in my opinion, is hormones. In fact, when I had a lot of girls on a caseload, you could almost watch the ebb and tide. When their hormones are on the move and they're ovulating, you couldn't stand to be around them.

Males and females—I mean male delinquent teenagers go through different things than females. You know females ... get to that certain age—they, you know, got different hormones ... psychological issues they might have to deal with also.

Despite gender stereotyping, or conversely, the denial that any differences existed, nearly all the officers admitted that they "talked to girls more." Girls were more open than boys to sharing details about their lives and relationships. This was in spite of the fact that many of the probation officers felt uncomfortable "acting like counselors."

It is important to note here that only one probation officer had ever attended training that focused on gender or culturally specific needs. This is a particularly disappointing finding given the federal resources (e.g., challenge grants) allocated to make juvenile court practitioners more attentive and responsive to gender. In fact, we found no evidence in case files noting a need for gender or culturally specific programming. However, there were a few probation officers who spoke at great length concerning the specific needs of girls in the system, and their style of working with girls.

For me it's very respectful.... I try very hard not to be judgmental, because I don't always know where they're coming from. So I try to find out who they are, and what their backgrounds are before I say anything... but at the same time setting boundaries on what is acceptable behavior here.

Research suggests that one of the most important factors in working with girls is establishing relationships (see Alder, 1998; Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1998; Taylor et al., 1995; Lindgren, 1996). For example, Belknap et al.'s (1997) data from focus groups with incarcerated girls outlined the importance of respectful and
caring relationships between girls and adult staff. In general, girls did not feel respected by the staff in their agencies and institutions. They wanted to be listened to by caring adults, and desired one-on-one relationships in which they could discuss their feelings. In step with this, when asked what kind of problems the girls on her caseload faced, one officer had this to say:

Girls face relationships. Their number one problem in my opinion is self-esteem issues, and how to relate to the world around them.... Girls are more interested in whether the relationship—you know, if they like you as a P.O. or whatever. You have to get through that barrier first.

Despite a few exceptions, which we have noted, most of the probation officers understood gender-specific needs and programming for girls as sex education (especially STD and pregnancy prevention), good parenting skills, and building self-esteem. Their interpretations are not surprising, given the attention to issues such as sexual activity, pregnancy, and victimization in case file narratives. When it came to dealing with these issues, however, the only resources that the probation officers offered the girls were Planned Parenthood and Parents Anonymous.

**Gender-Specific Programming**

Both the interviews and our review of case files revealed a severe lack of programming for girls. The majority of probation officers in our study could not name a single program designed specifically for girls. A persistent theme regarding treatment services for girls was the disconnect between the realities of the girls' lives and appropriate treatment options. As mentioned, a girl whose family was homeless and living on the streets had probation violations for not attending her drug treatment and for not staying in contact with her probation officer. Sadly, the only option the probation officer could suggest was counseling. In another case, a pregnant teen received sex education as part of her terms of probation.

(Girl's name) is currently pregnant. She reports that she has used marijuana since being pregnant. She denies any other usage. (Girl's name) and her grandmother are hopeful that they can find an adoptive family for the baby. At her doctor's appointment on (date omitted), (Girl's name) admitted to having an abortion in (date omitted). She is in need of life skills training and sex education (#5—White girl).
Case file narrative data reveal that nearly 16% of girls were referred to detention or a state institution for treatment. Unfortunately, a lack of available and appropriate treatment programs made confinement the only option for some.

In some cases where girls were sexually active and suffered from histories of abuse, probation officers openly admitted to being "confused as to what is best for the child." For others, institutionalization was the only alternative given the "difficult" nature of girls' cases—often meaning that girls frequently ran away or did not succeed in existing programs. Many probation officers expressed frustration with the lack of funding for programming in general and for girls specifically. This attitude is consistent with Kempf-Leonard and Sample's (2000) survey of juvenile and family court judges and officers. The majority of those surveyed noted that females did not have adequate access to treatment, especially for mental health problems, status offending, chemical dependency, and sexual victimization.

Half the officers believed that gender-specific programming was a good idea. "Maybe it would be good to have a gender-specific program for girls—just to see how they'd react," one officer said, adding, "I don't know if any are available." Different reasons were given, however, for why gender-specific programming might be needed. Some reasoned that girls and boys become distracted by each other when they are together. Others recognized that girls may be reluctant to talk about their situations when boys are present.

Attempts to address girls' needs all too often result in ill-fitting programs and frustration regarding the limited options available. Most programs that were all girl were in locked institutions. There were even fewer options for early intervention programming or chemical dependency issues. Once a psychological evaluation was conducted and mental health issues were identified, girls were usually placed on medication and sent to counseling.

Culturally Specific Needs

The cultural differences identified in prior works have stressed the importance of addressing the cultural dimensions of girls' lives (e.g., Fishman, 1998; Miller, 1998; Chesney-Lind, 1999). Recognizing the relationship between gender, culture, and class is a first step toward providing girls with the services they need. Some officers spoke at length about cultural differences and needs of the girls on their caseloads. One response was particularly representative.
Girls of color have a double whammy pretty much. They are minorities from ethnic standing. They are female from gender standing. There are different psychodynamics when you talk about different ethnic females. If you have Hispanic females—the males the machismo. If you have African American—African American females tend to be the backbone of the Black culture. It's just different. It's different all the way down the line.

Other officers tried to incorporate culturally sensitive methods in their work, but lacked training and resources. Racial stereotypes and misunderstandings regarding cultural differences can persist if probation officers are not adequately trained. False assumptions about cultures can lead to inappropriate assessments of girls' needs. For example, a probation officer told the story of a Hispanic boy molesting a cousin, and of their therapist not being aware that cousins do marry in some Hispanic cultures. The officer suggested that therapists should better understand the cultures of those they work with.

Culturally Specific Programming

When asked about culturally sensitive programs we found that, again, probation officers could not name even one program that was culturally aware. Many officers reported that they referred kids to programs based on the gender and race of the counselor, not on what the program itself offered. The growing and varying racial/ethnic make-up of juveniles on probation seems to only compound the problems associated with providing proper programs for juveniles. Two probation officers mentioned that there were no culturally appropriate resources available to deal with the growing Asian American population.

We don't have anything within the probation department that focuses on Asian American issues. Right now, I'm seeing more kids of Asian parents... the parents may be first or second generation in the U.S. They don't know the language. They're more easily manipulated by their kids. And the kids are more quickly sucked into the drugs and alcohol and partying and rebellious stuff... that's happening a lot with Asian American families. I got a bunch of Filipino families... They do not know how to be a parent in the U.S. with all these problems. They're just desperate. They're begging for help. [But] they're not real receptive once we start making suggestions, because it is totally foreign to them.

There are a lot more Southeast Asians here now. It's a trend from California—Vietnamese, Laotian, Cambodian... there are no resources for them, no interpreters, no communities, there's really nothing.
When asked if there were differences in terms of race/ethnicity that needed to be considered in programs or counseling, one probation officer remarked:

The only time I'll typically look for ethnicity is when I have a Spanish-only speaking kid and I need a counselor who speaks Spanish.... I don't like making big issues about that. I have major issues with people saying a lot of rights are broken because of the color they are, when a lot of rights for White people are as well. My perspective is, if they're a good counselor, they can work with any of them. It's only an issue if it's a language barrier or an ethnic issue in it. Like Indians—they do their sweat lodges and they do all that. I can't do one of those. So in essence, they need to have an Indian do that.

On the other hand, another probation officer saw her race/ethnicity (Asian American) as a helpful attribute in working with girls of color:

I went with another probation officer to see the girls on our caseload. She had an American Indian girl on her caseload and the girl would not talk to her. She made some kind of comment about 'just another White agency person coming to see me.' But she would talk to me.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The social construction of gender, race/ethnicity, and class has a profound impact on girls in the juvenile justice system. In this study, we found that juvenile court staff often act based more on the perceptions they have of girls and their families than on the realities the girls face, including both individual and societal factors. Our findings suggest that gender and racial/ethnic stereotypes leave girls few options for treatment and services in juvenile courts.

Some probation officers we interviewed believe that the ideology of the juvenile court means they should do what they see as best for the juvenile while at the same time providing equitable treatment for all. In doing so, they struggle between providing the best services available to girls and dealing with the possibility of stereotyping or providing preferential treatment. As in other studies (Bloom et al., 2002a), staff acknowledge that they need training in dealing with girls. For example, most probation officers identify the need for gender and culturally responsive programming. It is important to recognize that girls have different issues and different histories than boys, and that the most effective styles for girls may differ significantly from those for boys. These probation officers, however, often find that existing programs and
institutions did not have the resources to provide such programming. The inevitable outcome is either that needs are not met, or that officers must recommend that girls be committed to residential or institutional confinement as the sole locale in which the girls' needs can be addressed. It is noteworthy that a handful of probation officers expressed a prevailing disbelief in the need for gender- or culture-specific services.

Whether probation officers are sympathetic to girls' needs or not, they generally seek to maintain a certain emotional distance from them, both because they do not think they should act as counselors and because they see the girls' needs as so overwhelming. One consequence of this emotional distance is that the girls may not trust the officers. A second and related consequence is that officers may not understand the extent to which gender enters into many of the girls' problems and efforts—some of which get them into serious problems with the law—to solve those problems. Both of these points also speak to research on the gender-specific needs of girls. As stated, a number of studies highlight the fact that girls seem to respond best to court interventions and programming when they have positive, trusting relationships with adults. To effectively communicate with a female probationer, a probation officer must first build a connection with her.

The lack of available funding for gender-specific programming and the paucity of information available to court workers on programs has a destructive impact on girls within both juvenile and criminal courts. A few officers in this study commented that gender-specific programming is present in detention, but not before that point. We know that detention and other forms of institutionalization are used in place of programs because either there are no services available or there is a lack of spaces in the programs that do exist (Bond-Maupin et al. 2002). Gaarder and Belknap's (2002) research on girls sentenced to adult prison found that of the 22 studied, five had no prior record, and 10 had never been placed in foster care, residential treatment, or a long-term correctional program before being sentenced to prison. "Essentially," the study concludes, "many of these girls had never been given a chance to succeed in the juvenile justice system before being sentenced to adult prison" (Gaarder & Belknap, 2002, p. 509). Remand decisions assume transferred youths have failed in

6 Unfortunately, this has not yet resonated with some court personnel. One probation officer we interviewed admitted that "placements overall are being dismantled and being noncontracted.... we don't have enough resources across the board." However, when asked whether adult prison was appropriate for girls or did them any good, the officer replied, "It's not a matter of doing them good or not. It's a
the juvenile court and choose not to make use of treatment (Bortner, Zatz, & Hawkins, 2000). In reality, girls may be transferred to the adult system without ever receiving appropriate treatment within the juvenile justice system. The unaddressed issues of girls were exacerbated within the walls of an adult prison that offered little therapeutic programming and was ill-equipped to meet even the most basic needs of the girls imprisoned there (Gaarder & Belknap, 2004).

These issues demand the serious attention of both researchers and practitioners. One important move is to step up our research on gender and culturally specific needs/programming. There is a certain amount of confusion over what gender or culturally specific programming looks like and why it works. For instance, Kempf-Leonard and Sample’s (2000, p. 118) review of current gender-specific recommendations found it “difficult to understand how good female-specific services differ from good youth services.” There is also disagreement about whether and when “gender-specific” programming means separate programming (all girls).

Furthermore, Kempf-Leonard and Sample (2000) caution that advocates of gender-specific programming be aware of how such language can actually be used to perpetuate “separate but equal” juvenile justice interventions, such as the overmedication of girls, “bootstrapping,” and other forms of gender bias. If more resources are allocated to programming for girls, we must be careful that these programs fulfill existing needs, rather than simply contributing to the widening net of social control.

There is still much discussion and debate around the meaning of “gender-specific” needs and programming. Not surprisingly, the lack of clarity regarding the concept of gender or cultural needs/programming (along with the relative “newness” of the terminology) leads to confusion among practitioners about how to implement such ideas. In step with our findings, Belknap et al. (1997) found that practitioner awareness of gender differences and appropriate services varied widely. One of their recommendations includes the coordination of “regional gender-specific sensitivity training and information sharing sessions for juvenile justice and youth serving professionals” (1997, p. 33). They also note that “few individuals have developed the ability to identify appropriate and effective programs for delinquent girls” (1997, p. 33). They urge the development of assessment tools to measure the effectiveness of

matter of consequence, because they've had all their chances and there is nothing else you can do for them. My opinion is that once they've gone all the way to the adult court, then it's a consequence issue, not 'Can we turn them around?' anymore.”
girls' programs, as well as periodic program evaluations. While we recognize that additional resources are needed to better serve all juvenile offenders in the juvenile court system, risk/needs tools that focus on mental health (e.g., depression, which is more often internalized by girls than boys) and victimization would more appropriately address female delinquency than current efforts. Programming that highlights relationship building and incorporates an understanding of how culture directly influences girls' delinquent and nondelinquent behavior is also needed. Last, family-based treatment can provide girls with an important support system, one that is often lacking in girls' lives.

CONCLUSION

The juvenile justice system has long been criticized for inadequate attention to the situations and needs of girls. We suggest that framing the problem theoretically as the social construction of gender, race, and class in juvenile probation helps us to better understand the disjunctures between court actors' perceptions of girls and what they see as culturally appropriate gendered behaviors. Probation officers expect one set of behaviors and attitudes from the girls and their families, but due to economic and social forces (e.g., homelessness, immigration restrictions, histories of sexual abuse) as well as individual factors (e.g., mental health problems), the girls do not manifest these hegemonic expectations. This results in disappointment on both parts—girls are not treated according to the reality of their lives, and probation officers continue to express frustration and even hostility towards girls who are not responding favorably to the programming being offered.

As Chesney-Lind and Shelden (2004, p. 6) remind us, "An appreciation of a young women's experience of girlhood, particularly one that attends to the special problems of girls at the margins, is long overdue." We urge the continued development and implementation of gender and culturally responsive approaches and programming that can help confront the social and economic realities of girls. More detailed information and rigorous evaluation of programming for girls is needed. Without these analyses, probation officers and other court officials will continue to rely on stereotypical images of "proper girl behavior" and psychological assessments of their conduct, while discounting the power that oppressive structures and institutions hold over people. As contemporary feminist research begins to solidify its definition and understanding of "what works for girls," we face the equally enormous task of communicating this information to practitioners,
administrators, and other decision makers. It is apparent from this study that the message has not yet been heard.

REFERENCES


