

## PATHWAYS PERSONNEL

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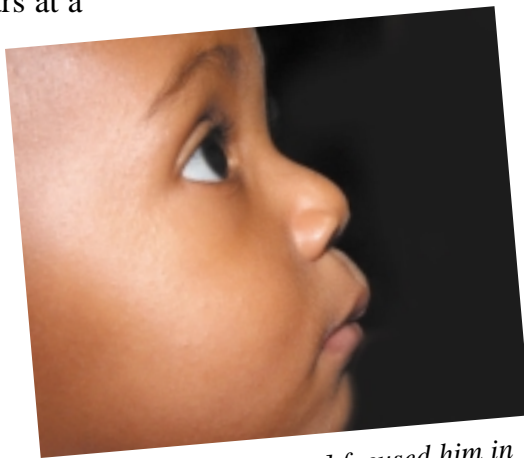
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tude came together in a predictable way. Manny was arrested for aggravated assault, and entered the juvenile justice system as an offender with a rather serious charge. "I got locked up for getting in a fight with some dude. I fractured his skull. The cops came, I got locked up. They took me to the youth study center. They gave me a date. They didn't release me. I went to court, my mom showed up and they just placed me." It all just happened from that one bad encounter.

For Manny, though, placement was the beginning of many positive experiences. Manny spent two years at a facilitiy, and became involved in some activities there that he may never have found in the community. "The sports are what really kept me focused. I played football, lacrosse and power lifting." The insitutional experience was a positive one for Manny, beyond just athletics. "I learned a lot from there. I was their student council rep there. I just did what I had to do and I had fun and it made it easier for me." The positive involvement that had eluded him in the community became possible in an institution.

After release, Manny was on probation for a few months and then discharged. His court involvement ended at that point. He went on to receive his diploma from a local high school in Philadelphia, went to work at an optics lab, and put aside money to pay for his college education. He later received an associate's degree, and he has recently married.



"It [the birth of his son] focused him in a way that other things didn't."

## A note from the Coordinating Center

*In this issue, one of our long-term interviewers, Donna Tozer, tells us about the changes in the life of one of the young people whom she has interviewed over the years. Two members of our study working group, Jeffrey Fagan, Ph.D. (Columbia University School of Law) and Alex Piquero, Ph.D. (University of Florida, Center for Studies in Criminology & Law) then provide reactions to Donna's essay. Each of the young people in this study has an important story to tell. It's our job to listen well.*

He and his wife both hope to go back to school soon to become health care technicians.

So how did Manny make this big shift from serious offender to achieving young person? He says that there was a point in his life when it just hit him that he was going nowhere; that he needed to keep himself occupied and out of trouble. Many of the youth I interview have not yet had this realization, and moved their life in a positive direction. Many simply go in and out of jail repeatedly, only their age and the number of charges seeming to change. No longer are they being sent to placement for short periods of time,

### Jeff Fagan's reactions:

*This vignette about Manny highlights an important and complex aspect of court involvement for many adolescents - the interaction of a developing sense of self and an institutional experience. Manny made a decision to desist, but it was a decision that he probably would not have made without his institutional experience. As he relates, his life seemed to be going nowhere in particular prior to his court involvement. Manny's positive experience in his institutional placement, however, seems to have changed this, showing how important the climate of a facility can be in promoting positive development. An institutional placement that provides things such as opportunities for vocational training or the experience of fairness can create a developmental "space" where new choices shape decisions about the future. Manny's choices could easily have been very different had he spent time in a different setting. The birth of his son became a turning point in his life because it took place just when he grew "tired" of his old life, when it no longer paid off for him. But this also happened when he could see other options for himself and his new family. His trust in the institutional staff set the stage for how he saw later life experiences; it gave him a new lens for viewing his old life and especially his old friends. Manny's story shows how what happens in placement - his relationships with staff, the opportunities for new roles and skills - can launch and sustain critical developmental processes to make desistance possible.*

### Alex Piquero's reactions:

*Manny's story fleshes out the quantitative data emerging from the RPD study. It adds a human dimension to the numbers and the patterns of findings using structured instruments and directed questions. Specifically, it makes it clear that turning points in life often seem to either continue a criminal trajectory or curtail a criminal trajectory. There are clearly points at which patterns of behavior shift for an individual, and the reasons for these shifts may vary considerably with the adolescents in this study. Fortunately, in Manny's case, the shift was away from criminal activity. Having a child brought much more focus to Manny's life and that instilled a newfound sense of what his roles and responsibilities were; not only to his son, but more generally as a human being. These sorts of life events have the capacity to instill changes in offenders, oftentimes toward lower rates of criminal activity and ultimately complete desistance/cessation from criminal activity. Additionally, Manny's story is one that talks about how the juvenile justice system offered him a set of opportunities to get back on the right track. Involvement with the system may present experiences that can serve as turning points or reinforce the impact of some potentially positive event in an adolescent's life. Manny's story highlights this positive potential of the system. It is encouraging to see that the juvenile justice system can still fulfill its original intentions of promoting positive development through the presentation of opportunities and alternative ways to view the world.*

but rather to adult jails, serving time that can range anywhere from a few months to life.

Events also fed into Manny's reorientation to life's challenges. The turning point for Manny was the birth of his son; it focused him in a way that other things didn't. "I just got tired of it. I decided on my own to just ...take responsibility for myself and stop worrying about everybody else. My son was born and I really was focused just on my son and trying to raise him the best way that I can. That was basically it, and then from there I just said forget everybody else and just do my own thing."

Obviously, though, his involvement with the juvenile justice system put him on more solid ground for handling these future issues and opportunities. Manny could not think of any negative experiences surrounding his contact with the juvenile justice system. He said that "Everybody was real cool and positive." In addition, Manny used the two years in placement to his advantage. He was an active member of the community and described the staff as positive and motivating. "Basically just the staff that worked with me up [there]. I remember a lot of them. Basically they were real with me. I think that plays a big part, you know people listening to you and gaining their trust. When

people just be real with you and tell you how it is, it gets a person focused on a lot of things. That's somebody that you can just relate to and talk to when you are down or whenever it is cause you know they're gonna be real with you and tell you the real stuff. They ain't gonna be fake with you." This last bit of advice was what Manny wanted to emphasize as the lesson for providers from his experience. He urged service providers to "just be real with them, be open. Don't always be trying to focus on making them do things, just be open and give them other routes to go to. Just be real, that's it. Trust and you get people's trust and from there you can go wherever....wherever you wanna go."

## Research in Review

### Developmental Trajectories of Legal Socialization Among Serious Adolescent Offenders

*Piquero, A., Fagan, J., Mulvey, E., Steinberg, L. Odgers, C. (2006). The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, 96 (1), 101-134.*



Individuals generally obey the law because they possess a set of values and beliefs that place these social rules above their own desires at any given moment. This set of attitudes and beliefs about the law, legal authorities and legal institutions is generally referred to as legal socialization. Extant research on legal socialization has identified two dimensions to this concept: legitimacy and legal cynicism. Legitimacy is the degree to which individuals feel an obligation to obey laws even when they may wish to do otherwise. Legal cynicism, on the other hand, taps the degree to which individuals feel it is acceptable or reasonable to disobey laws. People should obey the law to the extent that they see legal restrictions as highly legitimate and have low levels of cynicism about the legal system.

Understanding the process by which individuals acquire and maintain these values is important because it can provide leads about how to structure people's interactions with the legal system to promote more law-abiding attitudes. Prior work with adults has found a direct link between engagement in criminal activity and an individual's perceptions of the legitimacy of law. Numerous questions remain, however, about whether these attitudes are important in juvenile offenders and when and how these attitudes get formed. Of particular interest is whether this same link between perceptions of legitimacy and law abiding behavior is found prior to adulthood (i.e. in adolescence) and in a group serious adolescent offenders. Moreover, observing *how* legal socialization changes over time in a group of seriously offending youth could be useful. Such information could highlight formative differences between this group and other youths as well as point to pivotal points for intervention.

Using data from the first 18 months of the Pathways study, Piquero and colleagues applied

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Research in Review

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sophisticated analytic techniques in an attempt to describe patterns of change for both legitimacy and legal cynicism and the demographic variables which distinguished groups following different patterns of change. Several interesting findings emerged. For legal cynicism, four groups (differentiated by their baseline level of cynicism) were found and there was little change in the levels of cynicism over the follow-up period. That is, those who started off with low levels of cynicism retained that low level and those that started off fairly cynical remained so for the eighteen months. There was little movement away from the starting level of cynicism.

The two groups with the highest level of cynicism were different from the other groups in that they had more prior arrests and were more likely to have felt treated unfairly in previous interactions with the police and courts. Males were more likely to be in the more cynical groups, as were Hispanics. Age did not distinguish these groups across time.

For legitimacy, five groups were found and, similar to cynicism, these groups were also differentiated by their level of legitimacy at baseline. There was also very little change in perceptions of legitimacy across the eighteen-month period for all but one of the five groups. One very small group of individuals started off with a relatively high perception of legitimacy and increased dramatically over the 18-months. This group will be examined more carefully but the authors caution that this is a very small, atypical group (1.7% of the sample).

The five legitimacy groups differed in some important ways. First, older youth, African-American youth and youth with more time in juvenile justice placement were most often found in



groups with the lowest levels of legitimacy (less favorable views). Those with more favorable views (higher legitimacy) were more likely to have perceived their prior interactions with the police and courts as fair.

Three main findings come out of this work:

- For this group of serious adolescent offenders, there appears to be strong stability of both legal cynicism and legitimacy over the eighteen-month period
- Although there was stability across time, these youth do vary in mean levels of legitimacy and legal cynicism, and these mean differences are related to other factors
- There is interaction between these two aspects of legal socialization in logical ways: individuals who reported the lowest legal cynicism (more favorable) also reported the highest legitimacy (also more favorable) and vice versa.

The authors caution that the apparent lack of developmental change in legal socialization might be explained by methodological shortcomings or by issues related to timing (i.e., this may not have been a long enough period during which to observe change; this might be an age range which is either pre- or post- the most dramatic change in these attitudes; and/or youth who are at this level of offending might have previously formed their attitudes and beliefs and we are catching them too late to observe change). The stability of this finding will be examined as the Pathways study continues following these youth across time.

In the meantime, we encourage you to review the full article to learn more details about this study - the first study of the longitudinal, within-individual trajectories of two fundamental aspects of legal socialization among a large sample of serious juvenile offenders. And one that produced an unexpected finding - no dramatic shifts in these attitudes in offenders after their court involvement.

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DATA COLLECTION at a glance (as of December 2005)

- 1,355 participants
- Over 16,000 interviews completed to date (subject, collateral and release interviews)
- All subjects have passed through their opportunity to complete the 30-month interview
- 28 subjects have died since the baseline (2%)
- 33 subjects have dropped out of the study since the baseline (2.4%)
- Subject retention rates for each time point (6-54 month) are averaging 93%
- As of the 36-month interview, 91% of the subjects have completed 5 or 6 of their six possible interviews
- Yearly collateral reports are present for about 85% of subjects



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A Story of a Life Changed

Young people who become involved with the juvenile justice system can take several different paths as they move toward adulthood. Over the last five years, I have had the opportunity to witness many of these different paths firsthand as an interviewer at the Philadelphia site for the Pathways study. As a result of these experiences, I have become convinced that there is no single clear road for getting out of trouble and into a productive adulthood - and no guarantee that it will happen at all.

Clearly, there are some people who enter the juvenile justice system and then continue to offend well into early adulthood. At the same time, there are others who somehow find another route - an alternative path out of offending. They might have one more contact with the system or none at all. The young man I spoke with is an example of the latter.

Manny (not his real name and not the person shown in the picture on the right) had his first encounter with the juvenile justice system at the age of sixteen. At that time, he was spending most of his time with a woman who was considerably older. He was bored and didn't have much to do with his free time. Part of the reason that he had little direction came from his lack of investment in his home life. The relationship with his father was strained, and family life was generally unpleasant. "My dad was on drugs real bad. Things were hard. Life was just hard at the time." The stress at home meant that Manny faced the realities of life a lot sooner than he was prepared for, and that he adopted a tougher attitude than he really felt in order to survive. "I didn't have time to be a kid. I was real serious. I didn't have the pleasure to play around. I had to grow up real fast."

The combination of lots of free time, little supervision, a tough environment, and a tough attitude...

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Research on Pathways to Desistance



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