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**A Community Psychology Approach to Program Development for Female Juvenile Offenders: A Community-based Arts Initiative**

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**Abstract**

This paper explores the benefits of taking a community psychology approach to designing and implementing a program for female juvenile offenders (FJOs). Despite policy initiatives calling for more gender-specific programming, few gender-specific programs for FJOs are evidenced-based and culturally sensitive, and the juvenile justice system still struggles to apply FJO research findings to FJO program development (Shepherd, 2002). This struggle to bridge research and practice is especially pronounced in community-based juvenile arbitration programs that often lack time and resources to develop research-based programs. This paper expounds on some of the gaps in FJO programming and argues that a community psychology approach is useful in addressing these gaps. It demonstrates the value of a community psychology approach by describing the process of developing a community-based arts intervention for FJOs participating in a community arbitration program. After discussing the process and challenges, the paper concludes with recommendations for the field.

Female juvenile offenders (FJOs) are the fastest growing population in juvenile justice systems worldwide (Tracy, Kempf-Leonard, & Abramoske-James, 2009). In the United States, FJOs comprise almost one third of all juvenile justice arrests, and although arrest rates have declined overall for both male and female juvenile offenders, in 2013, FJOs made up 28 percent of arrests compared to only 22 percent in 1986 (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013). In response to this trend, the federal government reauthorized the 1974 Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Act in 1992 and again in 2002, calling for gender-specific research on and programs for FJOs. The reauthorization of the JJDP Act has led to increased emphasis on gender-specific programming in the juvenile justice system particularly with regard to research on differences in FJO and male juvenile offender (MJO) delinquency (American Bar Association & National Bar Association, 2001; Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 1998; Sharp & Simon, 2004). In 2004, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention founded the Girls Study Group (2014), a research group dedicated to

“understanding and responding to girls’ delinquency,” and it has made considerable progress toward this goal (Zahn et al., 2008: p. 1).

Despite this progress, research has been slow to inform practice, and the juvenile justice system still struggles to apply FJO research findings to FJO program development (Shepherd, 2002). This struggle to bridge research and practice is especially pronounced in community-based juvenile arbitration programs that often lack time and resources to develop research-based programs. This paper expounds on some of the gaps in FJO programming and argues that a community psychology approach is useful in addressing these gaps. It demonstrates the value of a community psychology approach by describing the process of developing a community-based arts intervention for FJOs participating in a community arbitration program. After discussing the process and challenges, the paper concludes with recommendations for the field.

## Gaps in FJO Program Development

Though the reauthorization of the JJDP Act has led to increased FJO programming (Shepherd, 2002), often these gender-specific programs are not based on best practices or existing FJO research (Foley, 2008). In fact, many FJO programs are actually programs that were originally designed for MJOs and have been applied hastily to FJOs without prior evaluation or consideration of their differential impacts on girls (Belknap & Holsinger, 2006). While these programs claim to be “gender-neutral,” they are largely geared toward MJOs in both design and implementation, and therefore, may not be effective or appropriate for FJOs (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Foley, 2008; Zahn et al., 2008). Regardless, gender-neutral programming may prove an insufficient approach to female juvenile delinquency because research shows that FJOs do differ significantly from MJOs in terms of pathways to delinquency, the types of crimes committed (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 1998; Zahn et al., 2008), mental health factors (Zahn et al., 2010), and behavioral traits (Broidy et al., 2003). Therefore, FJOs likely have very different needs than their male counterparts (Chesney-Lind, 2001). Unfortunately, most programs available to FJOs continue to rely on research with MJOs (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004).

Like gender-neutral programs, many gender-specific programs that are designed for FJOs are not empirically based nor are they theory-driven (Foley, 2008). This gap between research and practice is problematic because in addition to proving ineffective, interventions that are not theory-based can also prove harmful. For example, lacking theoretical backing increases the chance that interventions may be based on misguided assumptions (Posovac, 2010). In this case, gender-specific programs for FJOs often assume stereotypical gender roles (Goodkind & Miller, 2006; Belknap & Holsinger, 2006),

teaching “feminine” skills, like cooking, parenting, and etiquette or providing career training for low-paying “women’s” careers, such as hairdressing. These types of FJO programs are based on assumptions of femininity – not theory or extant research on female juvenile delinquency. The lack of theoretical and empirical bases for many FJO programs also is critical because this lack may explain why FJO programs often disregard racial and ethnic differences and rely on notions of white femininity, (Goodkind & Miller, 2006), despite the fact that effective programs are those that respect diversity within groups and are culturally appropriate (Chesney-Lind, 2001; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004). Attention to culture and diversity within groups of FJOs is especially important given the disproportionate representation of minorities in the criminal justice system and the national call to address this discrepancy at the local level (Solar & Garry, 2009). Having a clear program theory can help assure that interventions are “culturally safe” for FJOs of diverse backgrounds (Sherman, 2005) and can also aid in identifying problematic program assumptions (Posovac, 2010).

Effective programs not only are based on sound theory backed by empirical evidence but also are subjected to rigorous evaluation. Program evaluation can help to identify assumptions and systematically measure effectiveness. Additionally, it aids program staff in articulating program goals, monitoring for fidelity, and linking program activities to outcomes (Posovac, 2010). Unfortunately, many existing FJO programs have not been formally evaluated (Foley, 2008; Shepherd, 2002), often because juvenile justice systems lack expertise and resources to conduct scientifically rigorous program evaluations. Another challenge to conducting evaluation is that FJO programs are often provided within short or variable time limits. FJOs may be released before

program effects can be detected, and this population is difficult to assess upon release from the system. In these cases, a process evaluation that assesses intermediate effects (e.g., attitude changes) may be more appropriate, especially when long-term effects (e.g., recidivism, graduation rates) that require follow-up may not be easily accessible. Unfortunately, juvenile justice systems lack sophisticated methods useful in conducting longitudinal studies and process evaluations, and most of the existing literature on FJO programming focuses primarily on anecdotal evidence and descriptions of program content not outcomes based on social science methodology (Foley, 2008).

In addition to relying primarily on anecdotal evidence of effectiveness, most FJO interventions focus on individual-level change only despite the fact that juvenile delinquency can be traced to family, community, and policy level factors (Bloom, Owen, Deschenes, & Rosenbaum, 2002; Chesney-Lind, 2001; Foley, 2008; and Jacobs, 1990). For example, research indicates that family can be both an important risk and protective factor for FJOs (Bloom et al., 2002), suggesting that family-level interventions may prove effective for FJOs. At the policy level, changes in laws, such as the zero-tolerance laws in school, and not actual behavioral changes, may have led to the disproportionate increase in FJO arrests (Chesney-Lind, 2001; Strom, Watner, Tichavsky, & Zahn, 2010). In addition to recognizing that multilevel factors contribute to FJO delinquency, researchers also know that programs that focus on higher or multiple levels are more effective at enacting lasting, second-order change (Ellis, 1998; Roesch, 1995; Saegert, Klitzman, Freudentberg, Cooperman-Mroczeck, & Nassar, 2007; and Trickett, 2009), while continued focus at only the individual level can lead to victim-blaming and treatments

that rely on an individual-deficit model (Roesch, 1995). Individual-deficit models are likely to be ineffective for FJOs because research suggests that FJOs benefit more from strengths-based models (Sherman, 2005). Multilevel interventions can address FJO delinquency in all its complexity and allow for strengths-based and empowerment-based interventions. Despite the benefits of multilevel interventions, the juvenile justice system has been slow to incorporate multilevel interventions into its programming, in part, because multilevel interventions are difficult to implement (Trickett, 2009), especially within a justice system setting that emphasizes individual responsibility and views delinquency as an individual deficit (Roesch, 1995). Additionally, multilevel interventions are also difficult to manualize and disseminate because they are so contextually based.

This struggle to develop and implement evidence-based, multilevel interventions is especially apparent in community juvenile arbitration programs (JAPs). JAPs are community-based restorative justice programs – often offered through county solicitors' offices – that function as pre-trial interventions for first-time juvenile offenders arrested for minor crimes. Once diverted to the program, youth offenders meet with a volunteer community arbitrator, who assigns sanctions tailored to the individual and/or crime committed. If an offender completes all of his or her sanctions, then he or she will not have a court record. JAPs rely heavily on paraprofessional volunteers and partnerships with community organizations to provide services and case management to juvenile offenders. Many JAPs operate on extremely small budgets, and in some cases, JAP directors must perform other duties for the county in addition to their JAP duties (Appenzeller, Nelson, Meadows, & Powell, 2011).

Because they are strapped for funding, JAPs lack resources for researching and developing interventions. To magnify this issue, little research exists on effective programming – particularly, gender-specific programming – for youth in arbitration. In fact, a literature review conducted for this paper revealed little research on effective gender-specific programming with FJOs in arbitration. This lack is alarming given that FJOs in arbitration are a very different population than FJOs in other types of juvenile justice programs. FJOs in arbitration have likely been arrested for minor infractions, like shoplifting, or a school-related incident, like fighting (Appenzeller et al., 2011), suggesting that a different approach should be taken when developing interventions for FJOs in arbitration as opposed to FJOs who have been convicted of multiple or more serious crimes and participate in other programs. More resources should be devoted to such research and programming for this specific group of FJOs.

In addition to limited resources and information on FJO programming, JAPs, like other juvenile justice programs, face challenges related to program evaluation. Most arbitration programs require cases to be closed within a short time limit – often less than 90 days. This time restriction requires short-term interventions in which lasting change is difficult to achieve and detect. JAP evaluations almost always use recidivism as an outcome. However, easily accessible and long-term outcomes like recidivism are insufficient measures of effectiveness by themselves (Appenzeller et al., 2011). Furthermore, limited resources means that arbitration programs often do not have adequate ways of tracking, storing, and analyzing data in a way that is useful for program evaluation. Perhaps as a result of these challenges, the majority of JAP evaluation literature focuses on evaluation of the overall JA program and not the

interventions that make up the program along with the intervention's specific goals (Appenzeller et al., 2011). As zero-tolerance policies appear to continue to lead to increased arrests for minor offenses (Theriot, 2009) – the types of crimes typically committed by FJOs in arbitration – monitoring interventions within arbitration programs is crucial to understanding what is really working.

Ultimately, more than 20 years after the reauthorization of the JJDP Act, the juvenile justice system still has a great deal of progress to make in developing evidenced-based, gender-specific interventions for FJOs that are sensitive to within-group differences, based on sound evidence and theory, and are targeted at the appropriate level(s). This is particularly true of those FJOs in JAPs. Many researchers and practitioners are well aware of this need but have struggled to connect what is known about FJOs with practice. Community psychology methods and values are especially useful with regard to FJO programming because they emphasize:

1. applying an ecological framework that considers individuals in multiple levels of context;
2. developing programs that accounts for diversity and are culturally appropriate;
3. developing programs that are theory-driven and evidence-based;
4. developing programs and theories that value empowerment over individual-deficit; and
5. the importance of rigorous program evaluation.

The following section illustrates an attempt to bridge the research-practice gap and describes the process of taking a community psychology approach to designing and implementing an effective program for FJOs in a JAP.

## A Community Psychology Approach to FJO Program Development



*Heroine Mural, 2005*

The Women's Well-being Initiative's (2014; WWBI) community-based arts intervention (CBAI) is a gender-specific program designed for FJOs, ages 12-17, who are participating in a JAP in a rural South Carolina county. The CBAI is the result of a collaboration between the JAP and a multi-disciplinary team of researchers, faculty, and students with the WWBI at the University of South Carolina (USC). The WWBI is a university-community collaborative that strives to improve the lives of South Carolina's women and children by leveraging university resources to meet community needs. Since its conception in 2001, WWBI has developed and conducted [long-term community projects](#) and many [short-term projects](#) in the community that engage faculty, researchers, and community members as equal partners. The CBAI is WWBI's longest-running community project, and it stemmed from an initial community needs assessment conducted with a nearby, historically marginalized community that, despite its proximity to the university, had been cut off from city and university resources.

Shortly after founding the WWBI, principle investigators from USC's Community Psychology Department and the College of Nursing conducted the needs assessment in order to identify both community needs and existing resources. Because a small cadre of social services and community-based organizations already existed in the area,

WWBI asked community leaders how WWBI could assist their organizations in terms of research and capacity-building rather than develop new services (Altman, 1995; Wandersman, 2003). One of the key informants was the local JAP director, who, seeing a rise in the number of female juvenile arrests in the district, expressed the need for a gender-specific program to be offered as a sanction. The director had become uncomfortable with arbitrators assigning FJOs to readily available programs originally designed for MJOs and was seeking effective programming options for FJOs but had limited resources to develop a new program. Though the county funds a full-time director and a part-time assistant (Appenzeller et al., 2011), the JAP did not have enough resources to invest in developing new programs, researching evidence-based practices, or conducting evaluation with existing programs. Instead, it relied on what programs were readily available and programs for which it had the resources and personnel to implement. Feeling it had the capability to address these needs, WWBI decided to join the JAP in developing a gender-specific programming for this niche group of FJOs.

### *Ecological Framework*

Before developing the program, WWBI sought to understand the ecological context of FJO delinquency in this community. WWBI researchers used existing research, information from JAP personnel, and the community needs assessment data to examine the possible influence of factors at the family, school, community, and policy levels. Using the needs assessment data, WWBI considered the need for FJO programming in context with other identified community needs (e.g., the need for more activities for youth) and with the demographic and social issues predominant in the community at the time (Weber, Messias, & Eaddy, 2012). For example, at the time of the needs assessment, this community

was largely working class and racially in flux (Weber, 2012). The Hispanic population had been increasing, and changes in racial compositions in schools had led to conflict. Additionally, youth in these largely poor and working class communities were often marginalized by race and class and lived in neighborhoods with few resources and services. Later CBAI workshop discussions and participant assessments confirmed that many FJOs had home and school environments categorized by gendered violence, drugs, alcohol, and poverty.

At the policy level, the rise of “zero-tolerance” policies in schools had led to an increase in FJO arrests for minor, school-related offenses, such as “disturbing schools” – offenses that were initially handled by the schools and not the justice system (Appenzeller et al., 2011; Cayir, Messias, & Weber, 2014). In fact, disturbing schools continues to be the second most common offenses committed by these JAP offenders (Appenzeller et al., 2011; Cayir et al., 2014), and the influx of disturbing schools cases was so great at one point, the JAP director asked school resource officers not to charge students until their third disturbing school offense. Based on WWBI’s ecological assessment, factors at the family, school, community, and policy levels undeniably impact this population of FJOs. Therefore, having a comprehensive understanding of this context was important to understanding and defining the problem, and to subsequently developing an effective program.

Based on this assessment, the WWBI was careful to define the problem in a way that considered the salience of contextual factors and that was consistent with its feminist commitment to social justice. Ultimately, WWBI and the JAP decided an individual-deficit approach would be inappropriate, considering the multilevel factors affecting

this population of FJOs. Offering an alternative to the individual-deficit approach was especially important given that most of the existing JAP interventions relied on this approach. In order to achieve social justice for FJOs without either “blaming the victim” or “blaming the environment” (Rappaport, 1981), WWBI and the JAP director viewed the problem as multilayered requiring a multilevel solution (Roesch, 1995) and decided to move beyond an individual-deficit model to a model that considers how the individual fits within a broader social context (Kelly, 1971; Trickett, 2009). When developing the intervention, WWBI relied on theories that reflected these values.

### *Theoretical Framework*

The overall CBAI model is based on feminist intersectional and ecological systems theories. Intersectionality recognizes that people’s identities are constructed by multiple, intersecting, and simultaneously expressed categories, like race, class, gender, and sexuality (Weber, 2010). Therefore, identity categories like “girl” or “offender” are intersected by other identity categories that impact an FJO’s sense of self and interaction with her environment. Furthermore, these categories are historically, culturally, and socially constructed, and thus, can change meaning depending on context; this suggests an FJO’s gendered identity may not be the most salient identity in every context. For example, when encountering the justice system, race may be more prominent than gender for minority FJOs. Relying on Weber’s (2010) intersectionality framework, the CBAI recognizes that these categories are embedded within macro- and micro-levels and are also relational and power-laden, influenced by larger systems that can work to oppress certain individuals and groups. This framework required program developers to consider the ways in which power functions in FJOs’ lives (Weber, 2010). Brofenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory helped

guide WWBI in considering both the multiple levels at which FJOs may be disempowered and those levels which the CBAI should target. Applying a community psychology ecological perspective (Trickett, 2009), the WWBI emphasized the interdependence of individuals and community, seeing FJO delinquency as inseparable from FJOs' community and their community's investment (or lack of investment) in them. Indeed, FJOs in the JAP reported feeling dismissed by their schools and their communities, and felt that the larger society had labeled them "bad girls" because of their mistakes. Considering the impact of this stigmatization along with the issues identified in the needs assessment, WWBI decided to target individual and community levels, hoping that destigmatizing FJOs would empower them and increase their sense of belonging to the community. Meanwhile the community, in turn, would gain more invested citizens who have much to offer. The linkages between individual and community were important components in the initial conception of the CBAI model.

The question then became how to connect theory to practice. WWBI turned to community art-making as a medium through which to create this link because of the arts' role in community building (Mulvey & Egan, 2015) and its ability to disrupt systems of power in a way that strives for social justice (Ivashkevich, 2013). As Mulvey and Egan (2015) note, both community psychologists and feminists have long recognized that the arts can be used to disrupt the status quo and can promote empowering change at individual and collective levels. Similarly, the CBAI uses art to deconstruct harmful narratives at both the community and individual level. At the individual level, it strives to encourage FJOs to "develop a sense of identity and community that w[ill] help them navigate through dominant culture without losing themselves" (Hardee & Reyelt,

2009). At the community level, the CBAI seeks to use public displays of FJO art to "challenge the pervasive discourses of 'girls gone wild,' and reinvent their public image as powerful writers and capable actors, directors, and editors" (Wolfgang & Ivashkevich, 2014). Though the CBAI primarily focuses on individual and community levels and the linkages between them, it also hopes to produce change in the long-term at school and policy levels. At this point, WWBI and the JAP developed the program curricula to reflect these goals, a task that began as and continues to be a reflexive process.

### *Individual in Context*

The CBAI consists of two major components that target the individual and community levels, respectively. The first CBAI individual-level component involves four FJO workshops offered over four consecutive Saturdays. Workshops are led by university faculty and graduate students from various disciplines, such as psychology, creative writing, art, and women's and gender studies. Each four-week session has a theme that directs the art project, and though the theme and type of project may vary by session, the curriculum outline and objectives remain the same. Objectives include:

1. Awareness: Building participants' understanding of negative issues that impact their lives and communities (e.g., family and relationship violence, gender stereotypes, substance abuse, peer pressure, body image).
2. Response: Teaching participants to critically respond to these issues through expressive art media such as creative writing, collage, drama, photography, and video production. (Women's Well-Being Initiative, 2014, p.1).

In order to meet these objectives, CBAI instructors strive to explicitly connect individual and context by cultivating FJOs' awareness of the impact of structural

processes in their lives. Relying on this “individual in context” perspective, the CBAI encourages FJOs to engage critically with social and interpersonal issues that affect them with the goal of developing a critical social consciousness (Hardee & Reyelt, 2009; Ivashkevich, 2013; Wolfgang & Ivashkevich, 2014). Ultimately, this component seeks to empower FJOs by encouraging the development of “decision-making/problem-solving skills necessary to negotiate successfully the sociopolitical environment” (Altman, 1995, p. 229).

Awareness. Using strategies to develop awareness of contextual factors. The first workshop begins with small and large group discussions that encourage participants to identify critical issues affecting their lives, usually using an issues mapping technique. One of the topics that repeatedly comes up in class discussions regarding contextual factors is harmful stereotypes – particularly of “bad girls” or “girls in trouble” – that often work to reify harmful misconceptions of and attitudes toward FJOs that can lead to systemic bias. One common misconception includes attributing FJOs’ delinquency to an inability to control emotions (Goodkind & Miller, 2006). While another misconception includes the notion that FJOs are bad girls who have committed a double crime: having transgressed both the law and their prescribed gender roles (Goodkind & Miller, 2006). FJOs often have the *perception* that girls who fight more are more likely to get in trouble than boys who fight. In this case, FJOs are implicitly aware of the system’s gender biases. For instance, during the first group discussion, FJOs often question why MJOs are assigned other sanctions, such as anger management or yard work, while they are assigned what they assume to be “art therapy.” They question why they are considered to need therapy, while boys who commit similar offenses are not. This perception, coupled with the gender

discrepancy in sanction types, seems to perpetuate the notion that aggressive boys need to be taught to manage or channel aggression, while aggressive girls are “deviant” for having aggression in the first place and need therapy to learn to control their emotions. Indeed, gender bias in the system is well-documented (Chesney-Lind, 2001), and FJOs in the CBAI tend to struggle not only with the system’s biases but also their schools’, communities’, and the media’s negative perceptions of them. Class discussions show that FJOs are often implicitly aware of these biases but are unsure how to respond to them. During discussion, CBAI instructors brainstorm with FJOs about how to dispel stereotypical notions of “girls in trouble.” FJOs are often pleasantly surprised when the class is not what they expect and often report feeling empowered during these discussions. For example, when asked what challenges she faced daily, a fall 2006 participant wrote on her program evaluation: “I would say that people at school treats us like we are little sluts sometimes. [I learned] to ignore them because I know I am not!!!”

Response. Following building awareness, instructors encourage FJOs to respond by reflecting and engaging critically with these issues through individual and group tasks, like journaling, artwork, creative writing and small group discussions. The first workshop also includes an introduction to the art medium and project to be used for the sessions, which involve instruction on the selected art medium, individual and group art making, and various types of self-reflective activities. Two recent sessions utilized the theme “Sheroes”: a redefining of the word “hero” that explicitly avoids the derivative of the masculine (heroine). The first class revolved around discussing Shero qualities and identifying individual and structural roadblocks that prevents participants from becoming their version of a Shero. The

participants responded to these roadblocks by working as a group to create mannequins that represented Sheroes. Each group responded differently to the prompt and produced insightful and provocative artwork that reflected individual and relational qualities of a Shero. For example, one of the mannequins held a shield that was littered with words that identified challenges presented by family, media, school, and relationship violence. When describing the mannequin to the group, the FJOs explained that the Shero's shield represented protecting oneself and others from the effects of negative stereotypes and other systemic and personal challenges. Another Shero was also designed to be a protector of others, this time, in the form of an angel that came to kids who

were victims of bullying. This Shero also had a more intimate and personal component because, as one of the artists explained, it represented an inner-child. The mannequin represented a complex juxtaposition between becoming a protector and resorting back to childlike innocence. The portrayal of a Shero as both an innocent child and a protector of innocence is incredibly powerful given that many FJOs indicated that they served as an adult caretaker in their families. Though each mannequin took a different approach, each depicted complex responses to the challenges facing FJOs and demonstrated powerful attempts to work together to redistribute power. Figure 1 illustrates mannequin work completed by participants.



Figure 1: Shero mannequins created by CBAI FJO participants

*Sense of Community and Empowerment.* By giving participants the opportunity to respond to critical issues, the CBAI hopes to empower participants and create a sense of community. Additionally, the CBAI curriculum explicitly encourages empowerment through developing a sense of community in class and by encouraging FJOs' connection to the larger community (Reyelt & Hardee, 2009). Instructors foster a sense of community within the class by inviting FJOs to participate in class agendas and through group discussion. Additionally, this

participation can be empowering because FJOs take responsibility for the class discussion, allowing them to set the agenda and define the topics relevant to them. Through class discussions, FJOs often are surprised to learn that they are not alone in their problems, which creates a sense of community quickly within the class. FJOs also report feeling empowered during the art-making portion of the class because it gives FJOs the opportunity to give voice to their thoughts, concerns, and stories through a creative outlet and also through sharing with

the group if they choose. Because each major project is collaborative and reflects the topics identified and discussed by the participants, these projects encourage their participation in the class community as well as the larger community. The artworks made are displayed within the community, and knowing that their work will be exhibited in the community helps FJOs feel like they have influence in their community and can change their community's perception of "girls like them" to a more positive one.

### Diversity/Culturally Appropriate

Throughout CBAI activities, the WWBI attempts to respect participants' diversity by training facilitators in issues of diversity and by keeping the curriculum flexible and adaptable. No class composition is identical, and as the students vary and the cultural context changes, so do the issues that are salient. For example, facilitators have recently seen more emphasis on cyber-bullying while some issues, like sexual health and family issues, have remained constant. The flexible curriculum structure allows the FJOs who experience these issues to determine the topics rather than facilitators deciding what topics need to be discussed, and it allows for systematic adaptations while remaining true to overall objectives and goals. Also, varied teaching methods, topics, and activities help ensure the CBAI is applicable to FJOs of different backgrounds and learning proclivities. Even if FJOs do not possess artistic skills or do not feel comfortable participating in group discussion, they are still able to contribute to and learn from the various workshops activities. Additionally, CBAI facilitators are sensitive to within-group differences and are trained in issues of race and class as well as in reflexivity. When developing the curriculum and implementing the CBAI, they are careful not to assume any one notion of femininity recognizing that social identities often defy categories, are in

flux, and are influenced and constructed by social processes.

Facilitators are also trained to be aware of the influence of race, class, and other dimensions of diversity on class dynamics and participant perceptions. Once again using the example of art therapy, facilitators learned to dispel the notion that the CBAI is "art therapy." Making this point explicit is important because this population of FJOs is distrustful of "therapy" as participants associate it with weakness or deficit. Therapy is often associated with the white middle-class, and indeed, its techniques are often designed with this population in mind and may be inappropriate for these primarily minority, working-class participants. Facilitators actually bring issues of race and class to the forefront of discussions, acknowledging their own biases and racial and classed identities. Overall, the CBAI strives to remain flexible without compromising purpose, showing commitment to both the program's goals and its participants' diversity.

### Community and System-level Change

The second component of the CBAI targets the community-level, hoping to spark change by "[e]ngaging participants in building a productive relationship with the community partners (e.g., schools, families, neighborhoods, law enforcement agencies) by exhibiting and presenting their artwork at different community venues" (Women's Well-Being Initiative, 2014). WWBI also strives to disrupt harmful stereotypes at a community-level by holding community art exhibits of the participants' work, giving community presentations, and involving community members in program implementation. For instance, the CBAI is always held at a location in the community despite the fact that the participants have frank discussions the about topics like sex and alcohol. In fact, a rather conservative community church has continued to offer WWBI its space for almost

six years. By involving other community members, WWBI hopes to change their perceptions of these “bad girls” and to encourage the community to become a more accepting and healthier place for young girls. Community art exhibits and presentations show the community that these FJOs experience many of the same issues as other female adolescents, and participants are often excited to show the community who they are and that they have something meaningful to contribute. For instance, one FJO group project involved developing, shooting, and producing “[public service announcements](#)” that responded to girl-on-girl violence, and participants were particularly eager for their peers to see the video in hopes that it might have an impact on school bullying. WWBI has since shown the video at school presentations and community art exhibits. WWBI hopes that these art productions will impact perceptions of FJOs and promote positive change at the community and school levels, creating healthier environments for FJOs.

Though it focuses directly on individual and community level change, WWBI also hopes to enact system-level change, in part, by manualizing and disseminating its CBAI model. Since 2005, WWBI has given presentations to schools, juvenile justice programs, guidance counselors, and policy-makers in an effort to encourage other groups that work with at-risk youth to adopt the CBAI model in a preventative effort to keep youth from the juvenile system altogether. This goal seems promising given that in 2012, targeting zero-tolerance policies in school, WWBI and JAP worked with a local high school to implement a version of the CBAI in which the school resource officer agrees to withhold incident reports from the juvenile justice system if youth complete the program. This program keeps male and female youth in the school and out of the system. The program is still ongoing today and has even expanded to include other schools in the area.

## Evaluation

WWBI values empirical analysis and theoretical grounding, and thus, seeks to assure adherence to program goals by examining program outcomes at individual and community-levels and monitoring the program for fidelity to the theoretical model. To assess the connection between its theory-informed practice and outcomes, WWBI has distributed participant evaluations since the first class in 2005. In 2012, WWBI received funding to conduct a more in-depth evaluation including pre- and post-tests of participants and recidivism rates of CBAI participants and a comparison group. The evaluation revealed that CBAI participants had lower recidivism rates than participants in other JAP sanctions and showed the inadequacy of gender-neutral individual-level sanctions, like anger management, which had the highest rates of FJO recidivism (Cayir et al, 2014). To assess community-level change, WWBI currently is conducting focus groups and interviews with community members who have attended art exhibits and/or presentations to assess attitudes toward FJOs and their art. These findings in addition to original evaluations will provide a richer view of program impact across levels. Like the CBAI itself, CBAI evaluation has been an iterative process, and WWBI has amended its model as it has gained new information. WWBI hopes to use these collective findings to continue to refine the CBAI model and to determine the effectiveness of the CBAI to affect individual and community change for FJOs and their communities.

## **Challenges to Practice**

Developing and implementing the CBAI has not been without its challenges. One of the challenges the WWBI has faced in implementing the CBAI has been negotiating its commitment to empowering participants through contextual perspective and feminist liberatory practices with the systemic

demand of individual responsibility. The majority of JAP's sanctions emphasize "making better choices." The JAP requests that CBAI facilitators focus on decision-making and requires, at the beginning of each session, that FJOs state their names, state their offenses, and reaffirm their guilt. This policy directly conflicts with CBAI goals that insist on changing labels like "offender." CBAI instructors negotiate this challenge by acknowledging that many FJOs do have choices but that these choices are restrained by contextual factors outside of their control. Indeed, class discussions consistently reveal that FJOs' restricted options often result in decisions that directly lead to delinquency and/or arrest. For instance, an FJO responded to a male peer who grabbed her inappropriately at school by punching him. Because of past experiences with school racism and sexism, she was unconvinced that school officials would protect her and felt that self-defense was her only option. When discussing decision-making, therefore, WWBI takes a nuanced approach, pushing participants to examine which options are available and to consider WHY other options are unavailable. However, there remains a tension between the justice system which emphasizes individual responsibility and our program which considers individuals within contexts. Navigating this tension, instructors guide participants to make connections between social structures and everyday roadblocks mentioned during discussion while still emphasizing individual agency.

Another challenge is the short timeframe for participation, which restricts the amount of change the program is realistically able to achieve. The JAP's structure requires short-term interventions. Therefore, the CBAI is held for only four Saturdays, and most other JAP programs are much shorter. For example, the anger management program is a one-day, 8-hour program. Relationships are difficult to cultivate within the compressed timeframe

even though they are created more quickly through shared experiences. Not only is it difficult to implement a multilevel intervention within this short time, but also some JAP personnel can have unrealistic expectations concerning the amount of change that is possible for any program implemented within this timeframe. Additionally, most evaluation measures must be completed while participants are still in the program because they can be difficult to locate after they are released from the JAP. The outcomes that the JAP expects in an evaluation may not be the kind that can be detected within four weeks. WWBI uses pre and post-tests along with a qualitative evaluation form to attempt to capture intermediate outcomes such as attitude changes and information learned.

Finally, enacting a comprehensive multilevel program has been a slow process. Fortunately, the Lexington County JAP was open to and supportive of WWBI's goal to implement a multilevel intervention, but it still took almost a decade to expand the CBAI to community, school, and policy levels. One of the reasons it took so long is the time that was necessary to build relationships in the community made more difficult because of funding and personnel turnovers. Instructors include some full-time faculty, but consists mostly of graduate students who come and go. In order to address this challenge, WWBI hired a program coordinator to maintain continuity. Currently, WWBI and the JAP experiences a high demand for presentations and exhibits on the CBAI, and other juvenile diversion programs throughout the state have requested adaptations of the CBAI for their participants.

## **Recommendations and Conclusion**

Based on the CBAI presented and a review of existing literature, this article offers the following recommendations for bridging the

research-practice gap when developing programming for FJOs. Researchers and practitioners developing and implementing FJO programs should: 1) be sure that the program is based on a community needs and ecological assessment of the targeted population; 2) avoid programs that rely on individual-deficit models and instead use strengths-based models that consider the individual in context; 3) consider targeting multiple (and appropriate) levels based on needs and ecological assessments; 4) consider utilizing diverse disciplines' methods and theories in developing effective programming for FJOs; 5) remember that programs may be more effective and culturally appropriate when using flexible curriculum frameworks instead of fixed content curricula; 6) have patience when developing multilevel programs; 8) include a plan for evaluation in the overall program design; 9) be sure the identified program outcomes are realistic and consider including intermediate outcomes, especially when working with time constraints; 10) be sure that the program design and activities are derived from theory and not assumptions of what works best for FJOs; and 11) remain flexible and open to adapting the program as needs and context changes. These recommendations follow from a community psychology approach, and in order to develop appropriate and effective programming for FJOs, researchers and practitioners should engage with community psychology frameworks that emphasize individuals in context, FJO diversity, and evidence-based interventions and evaluations.

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