

**Societal access routes and developmental pathways:
Putting social structure and young people's voice into the analysis of pathways
into and out crime**

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Abstract

Central to pathways research is the analysis of the social processes involved in human action and the influences that have shaping qualities. At the heart of these social processes are human beings who exercise agency and help construct themselves and their environments. Shaping influences include changing social structures; political ideologies and policy innovations; and changes taking place in the cultural sphere of social life. In studying the actions of individuals within changing social environments it is important to make a distinction between *individual developmental pathways* and *societal access routes*. Access routes appear in different forms to different people in terms of accessibility and attractiveness. Understanding this perceptual dimension requires listening to the voices of children and young people. This is illustrated by reference to the work of the UK ESRC research network, *Pathways Into and Out of Crime*, which shows how culture, structure and policy influence young people's everyday lives and decisions. It also shows that what young people really value is not programmes but a supportive relationship with a non-judgemental adult who is able to help them negotiate their way through difficult circumstances. The focus of prevention efforts should be on changing social arrangements to create opportunities and systems that facilitate the formation of such supportive structures.

The starting point for this paper is our belief that Western societies could do better in improving the developmental pathways of children and young people if more attention were paid to understanding and changing social arrangements that limit opportunities for participation in mainstream institutions. We propose as a tool for thinking about how this might be done the development of a sharper analytical distinction between the concepts of *individual developmental pathways* and *social pathways* or *societal access routes* (concepts also discussed by Jacqueline Goodnow and Jeanette Lawrence in this issue). These concepts tend to intertwine in the literature, and it is often unclear whether change at the individual or at some structural level is being referred to (or whether both are meant in some sense). While the two concepts are indeed closely related, our contention is that longitudinal and prevention research has emphasised the study of individual pathways and behaviours to the detriment of research on social, cultural and political processes and the concomitant changes in social contexts that bear so directly on the lives of children and young people. Improvement in the wellbeing of individuals is always the bottom line, but sustainable individual change is underpinned by structural or cultural change that opens up new routes to social participation and hence new possibilities for individual development.

We also propose that our understanding of these processes could be greatly improved if we listened more to what children and young people have to tell us about their experiences of developmental pathways. Such an approach is not new to social science (James and Prout, 1997) or to certain areas of criminology (France, 2006) but within research on pathways and prevention the voices and perspectives of children and young people have not been prominent. An approach that values their

contribution would help us understand more about those broader societal access routes and the influences they have on the choices of young people and the opportunities open to them.

Writing in 2005 David Farrington has summarised some current theoretical debates in developmental and life course criminology. These include the extent to which antisocial behaviour exhibits continuity from childhood into adulthood, or is characterised by change and unpredictability; the usefulness of underlying constructs like antisocial propensity; the extent to which it is useful to attempt to distinguish types of offenders; and the importance of life events in influencing the life course, including offending behaviours. All these questions are of fundamental importance, and have their counterparts in other areas of life course and developmental research. However, they are very much focused on individual factors and processes. One way of broadening the agenda is to ask about social contexts and processes of change (Goodnow, this issue; Homel, 2005). Beyond this level of analysis, however, are larger questions about social and political processes, such as the reproduction and intensification over generations of the “social gradient” in health and developmental outcomes (Keating and Hertzman, 1999); and the failure of mainstream institutions such as schools to engage successfully with many socially disadvantaged children, young people and families (Connell, 1982).

Risk factor approaches, and longitudinal studies more broadly, have not been especially helpful in addressing these larger issues, or even the questions about immediate social contexts. This is partly because individuals’ social environments, including how these environments change or stay the same, are much more difficult to

study than intra-individual changes (Developmental Crime Prevention Consortium, 1999; Homel, 2005). This limitation is in turn partly a reflection of the narrow disciplinary focus of many who have worked in the field. For example much pathways research has conceptualised childhood either in terms of a biological experience that is developmental, linear and relatively deterministic, with behaviour understood as being linked to stages of cognitive and social development, or in terms of socialisation, where the environment imposes constraints and channels children's and young people's behaviour (France, 2006). Both approaches construct children and young people as passive, and are characterised by a tendency to fall into either a biological or cultural reductionism.

Recent research has shown that childhood is far more complex than these approaches suggest, being greatly influenced by historical trends, political processes, and social contexts, as well as by biological or psychological processes (James and Prout, 1997). Within these processes children themselves are active contributors to their own childhood. They are competent social actors who have to manage and negotiate their ways through the institutionalised processes that construct childhood in particular ways. Children and young people express their own agency through social action.

We therefore propose a life course theoretical perspective (Elder, Johnson & Crosnoe, 2004) that draws more fully than in the past on sociology and on research in human services, as well as on psychology and the health sciences, and which recognises both the social processes involved in human action and the influences that have shaping qualities. At the heart of these social processes are human beings who exercise agency and have a hand in constructing themselves and their environments. Shaping

influences include those forces to which we have already alluded: changing social structures; political ideologies and policy innovations; and changes taking place in the cultural sphere of social life. We argue in addition for a methodological pluralism that accords equal value to positivist and interpretive approaches, blending qualitative and quantitative data to study (for example) “developmental changes in parallel with sociological and demographic shifts in situation and context” (Furstenberg, 2004: 667). A critical methodological step, we propose, is to take seriously the voices of children and young people in understanding contexts and planning prevention (Prout, 2000). Some of the problems posed above by Farrington (2005) might take on new hues if viewed within this enlarged multidisciplinary framework.

In this paper we address these challenges, drawing on our experiences in doing research on pathways and on prevention policy and practice. In the next section we amplify our remarks on developmental pathways and societal access routes, highlighting the role that societal access routes and social contexts play in how children and young people negotiate and manage their relationship with crime. In the second part of the paper we explain why listening to children and young people is important to our understanding of pathways, showing how their voices can give us greater insight into their lives. In the third and major section we widen the questions to explore some of the theoretical issues around processes and changing social contexts, and ways of incorporating different methods and voices into the research process. Within this we illustrate how structure, politics and culture can influence the everyday lives and social contexts of children and young people’s pathways. We draw on examples from recent research carried out through the ESRC research network,

Pathways Into and Out of Crime that prioritised young people's explanations (www.shef.ac.uk/pathways-into-and-out-of-crime).

Developmental pathways and societal access routes

By *pathways research* we mean both theoretical and empirical work in the field of life course studies and the developmental sciences, including developmental psychology, life span sociology and psychology, life history research, and studies of the life cycle (Elder et al., 2004). Numerous methodologies are used in these fields, including biographical, historical and demographic analyses, and quantitative longitudinal methods. Distinguishing features of these broad fields are a focus that goes beyond age-specific studies on childhood or early adulthood (still the overwhelming bulk of the longitudinal research in criminology), and a concern with “social pathways, their developmental effects, and their relation to personal and social-historical conditions” (Elder et al., 2004: 7). So the *life course* refers to “the age-graded, socially-embedded sequence of roles that connect the phases of life” (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2004: xi), while Elder et al. define *social pathways* as “the trajectories of education and work, family and residences that are followed by individuals and groups through society ... individuals generally work out their own life course and trajectories in relation to institutionalized pathways and normative patterns” (p. 8).

These are useful concepts that have guided our thinking, although as we have already argued it is important to make a sharper distinction between individual developmental pathways and societal access routes. We define developmental pathways as sequences and chains of events and experiences over time involving changes both within and

around the person (Lawrence, this issue), while by societal access routes we mean the routes, opportunities, open doors, or ways forward that are available within a society to individuals at different points in their lives. The concept of a societal access route is by no means new, although a number of terms are used in the literature to capture the general idea. Elder et al. (2004) use “institutionalised pathways and normative patterns” as in the quote above, but they also talk about “social pathways” or simply “opportunities,” while Jacqueline Goodnow (this issue) refers to “available routes/opportunities/options.”

Societal access routes are shaped by social arrangements and institutional practices and so are features of the society rather than the individual. This makes social arrangements as important as individuals in prevention research and planning. However, access routes do not exist in some kind of Platonic realm of unchanging forms. On the contrary, they are constantly changing as society changes, and they have a strong perceptual dimension and so appear in different forms to different people. It is not just a matter of “what is,” it is also a question of “what is perceived to be” at any particular time, both in terms of the accessibility of opportunities and their attractiveness. Understanding the perceptual dimension therefore becomes fundamental both to studying pathways and developing effective prevention policies, reinforcing the importance of the voices of children and young people.

The key challenge, then, is how to conceptualise social context and opportunity structures, whether at the level of impact on individual behaviour or at the level of social programs or professional practices that aim to bring about social change in communities. With respect to the question of behaviour, we propose that the

developmental pathways and societal access routes of children and young people should be understood in relation to structural, political and cultural forces that operate at global, national and local levels. Most pathways research would recognise the influence of a range of external factors such as those within the local community or neighbourhood or peer groups (e.g., Farrington, 2003; Wikstrom, 2004), yet such concepts tend to be narrowly understood, reduced in many cases to individual and family interactions within small-scale geographical spaces. While we do not deny the importance of small-scale influences, we should also recognise the complex ways in which global and national economic and political forces influence community life and how informal and formal forms of social control within community spaces operate to include and exclude. Wider social and economic structures are usually given a limited role to play in any explanation, and the potential of government policies and programs to make problems worse is too rarely recognised (Armstrong, 2004; Bessant, Hil & Watts, 2002).

Putting the voices of young people into pathways research

How might research methods that help us understand the multi-dimensional aspects of social context be strengthened? Recent debates within developmental criminology have focused on using new advanced quantitative research methods as ways of understanding criminal careers, especially at the group level (Blumstein, 2005; Maughan, 2005; Nagin and Tremblay, 2005; Raudenbush, 2005). While such an approach has much to offer, it fails to fully comprehend the complexity of pathways or to provide insights into the meaning of life events (Sampson and Laub, 2005). It

also throws little light on the way children and young people make choices about their lives.

Social science research has traditionally been shaped by a dominant orthodoxy that sees children and young people as either unable to explain their lives or as passive social actors (James and Prout, 1997). For example, in the 1970s the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies theorised the newly emerging “youth culture,” arguing it was a new form of political resistance to structural changes (Hall and Jefferson, 1975). Their analysis was based upon their own observation and interpretation of events, and little credence was given to the voice and explanations of the young themselves (France, 2006). As a result we were left with a partial and uncertain interpretation of events. There was no certainty that the young people involved saw their actions in the ways portrayed by the researchers. More recently, research has shown that if we do prioritise children and young people’s voice we can gain valuable insights about the meaning they give to their everyday lives and actions (James and Prout, 1997). For example, Smith, Lister, Middleton and Cox (2005) explored young people’s understanding of citizenship. By talking to the young they were able to show how they defined their citizenship and how they acted upon it.

Such an approach to understanding children and young people’s lives does not privilege one epistemological position over another. There is much value in a form of methodological pluralism that rejects epistemological positioning and is pragmatic, recognising the important contributions of different approaches to accessing the social world (Payne, Williams & Chamberland, 2004). Qvortrup (1997) for example shows how quantitative data can provide a valuable mechanism for giving voice to children

and young people. Historically, the gathering and analysis of large data sets has marginalised their voices, and academic surveys tend to be developed around adult questions and assumptions. Approaches that actively engage children and young people can help identify the types of issues that are important to them and help us create tools that are “child and youth friendly” (France et al, 1999). Recent developments in childhood studies have also seen the emergence of a wide range of new qualitative techniques that assist in accessing their voices and perspectives (Lewis, Kellett, Robinson, Fraser, and Ding, 2004). For example, childhood and youth researchers have been developing methods that are less dependent on either the written or spoken word. These include “write and draw” techniques, vignettes that use storyboards taken from popular culture, and multi-media technologies such as computers, cameras and video cameras. There has also been much discussion over the use of traditional methods such as the interview and focus groups. Of course like all research methods these new developments have methodological challenges related to ethics, interpretation and validity.

The incorporation of some of these new methods into studies of criminal careers and developmental pathways would be valuable. Not only would they provide an understanding of what types of societal access routes might be open to children and young people in different contexts, they would illuminate how young people see themselves and their own futures in relation to societal opportunities or barriers. As Sampson and Laub (2005) argue, disciplines such as developmental criminology have not given much credence to the role of agency in notions of onset of or desistance from criminal careers. Yet by listening to the voices of children and young people we can gain a better understanding of the social processes and institutional interactions

that shape their pathways. Such an approach can also throw light on how agency is expressed in social action.

Widening the question: processes, opportunities and changing social contexts

In this section we discuss the social context of opportunities and developmental pathways by exploring the interplay between the structural, the political and the cultural. It is within these intersecting processes that children and young people make their choices, especially in relation to criminal activity. To enhance the argument we illustrate these processes by drawing on the work of the ESRC research network. Examples are taken from a project researching the pathways of young people with early evidence of problem behaviours (Armstrong, France and Hine, 2006). This project followed 110 children and young people aged between 11 and 18 with a mean age of 14 who had been either excluded from school, been identified as having an Emotional Behavioural Difficulty (EBD) or had just entered the criminal justice system. Eighty-one were boys and 29 girls with 26 being from Asian and African Caribbean decent. The research was conducted over three years and was located in four geographical areas in the UK. The examples that follow come from a sample of 13 case studies. These young people were interviewed three times and with their consent significant others, such as mothers, brothers, friends, and professional workers were also interviewed.

The influence of social structure

The choices available to us, and the structures around us are influential in shaping our lives. Human action is not purely an intra-individual psychological phenomenon. As individuals we are reflexive on who we are (including how we become who we are) and how others perceive us. Selfhood becomes a dialectical synthesis of internal and external definitions. “Self-identity is not something that is just given ... but something that has to be routinely created and sustained in reflexive activities of the individual” (Giddens, 1991, p. 52). The influence of modern structures and institutions is critical in this process and raises questions about freewill. Individuals negotiate and navigate their relationships with “society” and therefore the notion of “choice” must always be recognised as taking place within a particular context. So we are products of social and psychological forces, but we are also causal agents in the construction of our environments and ourselves (Gecas, 2004).

The influence of social structure on human action is critical in shaping our social context. External economic factors are particularly important (Devine, Savage, Scott, and Crompton, 2005). Developmental criminology has a tendency to rehearse the view that economic factors are low predictors of future offending (Farrington, 2002). Structural factors are understood as only one part of a jigsaw in identifying the relationships between parenting and offending (Farrington, 1996), neglect and offending (Weatherburn and Lind, this issue), or the decline of informal social control in disorganised communities (Sampson and Laub, 1993). The broader economic context of social life and its relationship to offending is missing in this form of analysis. Developmental criminologists also tend to theorise economic structures and re-structuring at the simple level of neighbourhood or community. Notions of changes to “place” or “locality” in a broader context that recognises other social spaces in

cities or town that are critical to the lives of the young, is not usually included in this analysis.

Major changes have been taking place in how cities are responding to global de-industrialisation (Taylor, Evens and Fraser, 1996). This is not only having a significant impact on shaping neighbourhoods and community life but also on both the opportunity structures in and around local areas (MacDonald, this issue) and young people's self-perception of their own social futures (Connelly & Neil, 2001; MacDonald & Marsh, 2005). While contemporary evidence shows that long term involvement in criminal careers can be greatly affected by employment patterns and opportunities in later life (Sampson and Laub, 2005), evidence also shows how young people's present day understandings of local labour markets and their emerging social futures can greatly influence their sense of inclusion, willingness and ability to take non-criminal pathways in adolescence (Craine, 1997). "Turning points" linked to young people's experience of work but also perceptions of their own future employment chances may well be influential in shaping criminal careers in late adolescence (Sampson and Laub, 1993). Life in such environments is challenging and difficult. Managing the limited opportunities and illegal pathways are a part of everyday life.

Economic restructuring is also influencing how local spaces and environments are used, policed, and managed (Loader, 1996). Major changes are taking place in the ordering of social space in cities and towns as a result of economic re-structuring (Taylor et al, 1996). This is having an effect on the everyday lives of the young and their engagement with law enforcement and criminal justice. For example, within new

out-of-town shopping malls and private housing estates young people are consistently seen as “the problems” to be removed (McCahill, 2002). These malls and estates are related to a range of changes taking place in the reconstruction of public space, where young people are “designed out” of certain spaces, especially those designated as “family friendly” (Malone, 1999). This can have major implications for the young. Evidence shows they are monitored more intensely through CCTV, being seen as potential problems, leading to increased arrests for minor offences (Norris and Armstrong, 1999). They are also being given more attention by the police, which is leading to many entering the criminal justice system before they have committed offences that warrant such a response (McAra and McVie, 2005). Such understandings of the impact of economic change are invisible within much developmental criminology.

Examples from the ESRC project show how these structural contexts can be influential in shaping access routes and opportunities. On leaving school one research participant, Jake, got a job with his uncle in the building trade. He did not really like the job finding it “boring” and offering little for the future, but he wanted to have all the things we take for granted as adults: a car, a home, nice clothes and a good life. He already had a girlfriend who was pregnant but was going to have an abortion. They were trying to make a go of it but were having difficulties. He also felt that working for £175 per week for his uncle was secondary to the possibilities of making £1000 a day selling heroin, although he was torn between the legal route and the illegal route claiming: “...there’s two of me really, there’s like me when I go on to work and me when I come home from work and I’m different.”

In the end Jake quit his job and college placement to spend more time with his friends (the “other self”) and to concentrate on dealing drugs. Six months later he was arrested for dealing. The choice for Jake was hard because he was keen to try and make it legally, yet this route offered limited benefits while criminal pathways offered hope of a better life.

Criminal activity can also offer a respite from boring lives, bringing pleasure into lives that are sometimes difficult. Yet getting pleasure for many was restricted to things that did not cost money. As a result finding fun was a major part of everyday life in the neighbourhood. Yet how the police (and the community) viewed this type of activity could be very different. For example, James lived in an area where the dumping of stolen cars was a normal practice. He had a record of petty offences. One of these was an incident when he and a few of his friends pushed an engineless car to a place where they could use it for a “bit of fun.” To not be involved was unthinkable for James, since it would have created problems for him in the form of exclusion and derision from his friends. But the movement of the car was not a “big deal” to James: it was not a criminal act, just a bit of fun that brightened up their day. This was not how the local police saw it as they accused them of stealing the car. With the increased forms of surveillance and policing this incident was defined as serious, leading to James and his friends being arrested.

Changing cultural patterns

So far we have considered the influence of the structural in terms of societal pathways but we must also recognise that human action is greatly influenced by culture. Pierre

Bourdieu (1991) has introduced the idea of *habitus* and the importance of cultural and social capital as a way of understanding cultural life. He argues that our way of life, our values and our dispositions are inherited from our own individual and collective histories and traditions. These guide us in responding to cultural rules, contexts and events. The habitus is set by the social and historical conditions of its production. It gives rise to and serves as the classifying basis for individual collective practices. It helps shape our world view and locates our practices in certain social environments, producing and reproducing existing cultural practices. In this context habitus produces a pre-disposed, yet seemingly normalised way of seeing the world and acting within it. The everyday routine and habits of individuals become critical to our daily lived lives (Giddens, 1991). Habitus not only provides a framework for “bracketing” or “answering” the experiences we encounter in our lives but also for creating feelings and emotions that underpin our sense of ontological security. This then helps shape our feelings of “taking life for granted”, “habit”, “routine” and the “everyday”.

Meanings of childhood, youth and their developmental pathways can therefore be structured in particular ways dependent upon the local cultural context. Local ways of doing things shape the everyday experience of being a child or young person. But we also need to recognise the importance of children’s and young people’s own cultures in this process (James and Prout, 1997). Historically this has been constructed around notions of “deviant youth subcultures” yet these are not always good representations of the everyday, being focused on minority groups of young men who are defined as problematic (France, 2006). Most young people live ordinary lives that have strong connections to the “normal way that things are done” in their communities. This can have significant influences on choices and opportunities and be important in how they

perceive and understand crime. There is a growing body of work that recognises the importance of this cultural context of criminal behaviour (Bottoms et al, 2004; MacDonald & Marsh, 2005; Sampson & Laub, 2005) and its relationship to everyday lives in deprived communities.

Young people in the ESRC research project not only lived in areas of high deprivation where opportunities were limited, they also tended to live in areas of high crime. Crime was clearly a part of their everyday lives and historically it has shaped community life. Most young people had been involved in some form of low level offending but more importantly the majority encountered crime on a regular basis either as victims or as witnesses to crime. As a result they had to find ways, on a daily basis, of managing their relationships with crime in their own neighbourhoods. In this context crime in the locality of place was normalised and what would seem, to us, as extraordinary lives was for most young people a normal part of the everyday. In this context pathways into and out of crime were not about choice, they were fluid and unpredictable and ever changing.

Jake's story is about drifting into crime with groups of friends in the area in which he lives. Here it is quite normal and ordinary to be involved in such activities. It has been what generations did before him. Jake explains it as wanting to feel "included," to be seen as "...one of the boys." But it is also about having a "laff" and having something to do. This interplay between crime and fun has always been how young people have managed the boredom of the everyday. But it is also about survival on the streets and the need to maintain status in a tough world. Jake believes that being on the street

requires him to be tough: "...you can't be weak... and ...you can't let no-one treat you like an idiot...you can't in that game."

Being strong and not showing weakness are critical for how Jake survives on "his" streets. These are culturally specific terms that can be historically located, forming a part of his habitus and guiding him on how "to be" in "this place." Doing crime therefore is not about the act itself but about the way it helps him manage his everyday life.

Political forces and changing social policies

Politics is a further powerful influence. Social policies can have a significant impact on shaping the institutional response to crime (Muncie, 2004). Recently children's policy in the UK has become more co-ordinated and holistic, aiming to increase children's rights and participation (Department for Education and Science, 2004). At its heart is the laudable desire to tackle child poverty and need amongst families and to protect children from abuse and neglect. Massive resources have been provided to create child friendly policies and practices, one consequence of which has been the expansion of childcare opportunities outside the family structure. However, the policies have also led to increased forms of negative surveillance, especially of those defined as "troublesome" (Muncie, 2004). Mechanisms have been created for monitoring risk across the life course and new forms of regulation and control have been installed in community structures (Brown, 2004). Within this we have also seen a separation of youth justice from the holistic approach to children's policy. This has

increased the use of punishment and especially imprisonment for those children and young people who are seen not to conform (Muncie, 2004; Pugh, in press).

While New Labour champions “evidence based policy” (Department for Education and Employment, 2000) many policy developments in this area have been driven not by evidence but ideology. Crime policies in particular are not always based on scientific evidence, being constructed more by a desire to be seen to the electorate to be “tough on crime” (Newburn, 2002). But this is not just about policies of youth justice but also prevention and early intervention. Risk reduction and early intervention programmes such as Sure Start and the Children’s Fund have consistently been restructured away from their original goals to meet political objectives around issues of employability (France and Utting, 2005). A recent example in the UK is Tony Blair’s threat to stop funding Sure Start (the Labour Party’s flagship early intervention initiative). He is highly critical of its “failure” to deliver on its promises and suggests the reason is poor multi-agency cooperation (*The Guardian*, May 24 2006). His argument is not informed by evidence but more by a desire to shift policy and cut national spending at a time when the national evaluation of Sure Start is unable to report on impact.

Research from the ESRC project also suggests that the risk factor analysis of young people’s lives is having negative impacts on those who are defined as “troubled” or “troublesome.” Risk assessments are developed as responses to “need” through measuring “risk” and the “problem” is then dealt with through structured interventions (France and Utting, 2005). In youth justice these tend to aim to reduce the potential for future offending and make young people more “responsible” (France,

2006; Newburn, 2002) rather than tackling need. For many young people this type of responses feels inappropriate and inadequate.

For example, Jake meets with his Youth Offending Team (YOT) worker twice a week but he has negotiated it to once a week because he is working. He has had relationships with other “social workers” and does not have much time for them. They haven’t ever “ ... made a difference to my life ... it’s the streets what’s made a difference though, a difference, it’s life realised ...”

From his YOT workers’ perspectives Jake is not a problem, just facing difficulties around balancing his life. Conflict exists over the amount of time he has to spend at work and the lack of space he has for friends. He is therefore not a priority as he does enough to make the YOT worker have a view of him as “... an alright person.”

Jake does what is required to fulfil his requirements with the YOT but does not feel it has much to offer him. The YOT worker talks about Jake mainly through his relationship with crime by drawing upon models provided in the risk assessment form. His explanation and understanding of “the problem” is framed in the language not only of targets and assessment but also the measurement of individual attributes. For example, when asked about the offence he committed, the YOT worker explained it as follows:

I don’t think he is impulsive and I think his cognitive skills, there are not really any deficits there that I can think, he would think twice and walk away. Whereas a lot of the young people I work with it’s

compulsive behaviour, egocentric behaviour, I don't think there's any of this with Jake.

Jake is actually into some serious forms of criminal activity, especially around drug dealing, yet none of this is picked up in the assessment process. Neither are Jake's needs given serious consideration, nor an understanding attempted of the broader context to his offending.

Many other young people showed similar cynicism about professional intervention. Structured programmes were seen as unhelpful and of little use to their future lives. Programmes that aimed to change their lives through cognitive and behaviour change skills techniques seemed to offer little help to their everyday lives in that they tended not to recognise the contexts within which young people have to manage crime and other difficulties. Nathan, for example was involved in a range of petty offending activities. He was put onto an anger management course and while he said he quite enjoyed it he saw little relevance to his daily life. Not only did he believe the course was inappropriate for him, being unrelated to why he was there, he also suggested it would not help him deal with street life in his own neighbourhood.

A strong message that does emerge from the ESRC research is that what young people really value is not so much programmes and content but a good supportive relationship with an adult who is not judgemental and is able to offer guidance and advocacy when needed. Trust and respect are important qualities that help young people negotiate their way through difficult decisions and circumstances. Having such assistance was for many of the young people a critical part of helping them move on

in their lives. The focus of prevention efforts should be on changing social arrangements to create opportunities and systems that facilitate the formation of such supportive structures.

Conclusion

We have argued in this paper that pathways and prevention researchers should place a greater emphasis on the social pathways or societal access routes that influence young people's pathways into and out of crime. Pathways research should encompass analysis of the power of structural, political and cultural processes and contexts, and how they can influence criminal behaviour. We have also argued that to gain a greater understanding of these processes we need to listen to the voices and perspectives of young people themselves.

These proposals challenge mainstream criminology, requiring it to recognise the contributions of a broader set of disciplines, theories and empirical evidence not only for a greater understanding of social pathways but also for the design of preventive initiatives. But our proposals also raise questions for other disciplines. For example, sociology, childhood and youth studies, and cultural studies are disciplines that have shown a limited interest in issues of pathways into and out of crime and the challenge of prevention. Yet as we have illustrated in this paper, they have the potential to make a significant contribution to our understanding of youth crime. Similar issues are raised in terms of methodology. If we are to include young people's voices more needs to be done to develop methods that not only encourage the inclusion of those most excluded but that are also ethical, developmentally appropriate, robust, and capable of withstanding both academic and political scrutiny. While childhood and

youth studies have come a long way in terms of methodology much still needs to be done.

Fundamental to our position is the contention that prevention researchers should be as concerned with the social arrangements that create or block societal access routes as they currently are with the study of individual developmental pathways. The kinds of “ecological ‘conspiracies’ that envelop children in high-risk social environments” (Garbarino & Ganzel, 2000, p. 91) and lock them out of the supportive relationships and opportunities that are taken for granted by their more privileged counterparts are the product of interconnected structural, cultural and political forces that must be understood and modified if truly effective prevention policies are to be formulated. Although this is a daunting challenge, we believe that many of the theoretical and research tools required in order to make solid progress are already within our grasp.

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