A Relational Approach to Reducing Youth Incarceration

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B.A. in Philosophy, June 2012, St. Mary's College of Maryland

A Thesis submitted to

The Faculty of
The Columbian College of Arts and Sciences
of The George Washington University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

January 31, 2017

Thesis directed by

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Introduction

In recent years, the issue of mass incarceration in the U.S. has gotten a great deal of press. It is safe to say that the scale of the problem is unique to the U.S.: we incarcerate 716 per 100,000 citizens, compared to 147 in the United Kingdom, the nation with the next highest rate. The issue is not only distressing in its own right, but is characterized by massive disparities in race. Michelle Alexander's 2010 New York Times bestseller, *The New Jim Crow*, methodically details the way in which the United States justice system systematically targets African-Americans. The data backs this up; a report released by The Prison Policy Initiative entitled "Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2016" shows that while African-Americans make up 13% of the total U.S. population, they account for 39% of its prisoners. (Rabuoy, Wagner) If ending mass incarceration is a valid social goal, sweeping policy changes are needed within our justice system. This paper, however, will focus on one particular piece of the broader issue of mass incarceration: the incarceration of minors.

In an article published by Anna Aizer and Joseph Doyle entitled "What is the Long-term Impact of Incarcerating Juveniles?", they analyze administrative data for over 35,000 juveniles in Chicago and conclude that incarcerated youth are "39 percentage points less likely to graduate from high school and are 41 percentage points more likely to have entered adult prison by age 25 compared with other public school students from the same neighborhood." (Aizer, Doyle) Thus, according to this study youth incarceration is to some degree an indicator of incarceration later in life. Furthermore, rates of youth incarceration reflect the racial disparities in adult facilities, with African-Americans making up a disproportionate percentage of incarcerated youth. The Campaign for Youth

Justice released a report entitled "Key Facts: Youth in the Justice System", which states that "African-American youth make up 30% of those arrested while they only represent 17% of the overall youth population", and are "28% more likely to be detained" than their white counterparts. Finally, youth incarceration reflects the trend in the U.S. of over-reliance on confinement to deter crime. A 2011 report released by the Annie E. Casey Foundation entitled "No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration" found that "America's youth custody rate (including youth in both detention and correctional custody) was [according to an international comparison] 336 of every 100,000 youth in 2002- nearly five times the rate of the next highest nation (69 per 100,000 in South Africa)." (Mendel, 2) As these figures show, the phenomenon of youth incarceration closely resembles mass incarceration more generally in key ways.

On a deeper level, driving both the mass incarceration of adults and youth is a punitive model of dealing with criminal activity. This paper will highlight an alternative to this punitive model for delinquency in particular, embodied in an organization that I worked for from September 2014-2015: The Choice Program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC). The Choice Program is a holistic, people-centered, non-profit organization that hires recent college graduates to serve for one year as "Choice Fellows" (mentors and advocates, among a number of other roles) for at-risk youth, many of whom have been arrested. I will show that by tacitly embracing what I will call "the relational perspective", The Choice Program serves as an example of how we can make significant strides toward ending youth incarceration. Through exemplifying the relational perspective, The Choice Program can further serve as a model

for the types of approaches we should embrace while working toward ending the greater issue of mass incarceration in the U.S.

As this paper is both about what the relational perspective looks like as well how The Choice Program embodies it, it is divided into two chapters. The first chapter outlines what is meant by the term "the relational perspective", and will describe concepts introduced by a few key thinkers who embrace it, such as Seyla Benhabib, Virginia Held, and María Lugones. These concepts serve as frameworks through which I analyze The Choice Program in the second chapter. Here, I explain how the philosophy and specific practices of The Choice Program can be seen as embodying a relational approach.

My major claim will be this: embracing some iteration of the relational perspective is not merely supplemental to the macro level changes needed in addressing youth incarceration, but fundamental to such changes. This paper will ultimately serve to advocate for holistic, people-centered policies and programs similar to The Choice Program. My analysis will shed some light on further work that needs to be done in undoing this destructive force within American society and illuminate the necessity for the relational perspective in addressing it. Before discussing the ways in which The Choice Program (or "Choice" as I will often refer to it) combats youth incarceration, it is essential to understand why youth incarceration is such a serious issue.

Youth Incarceration in the 21st Century

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Although youth are incarcerated at high rates in the U.S., the argument could be made that youth incarceration itself is not a problem. If facilities succeed in rehabilitation, then it would seem that they serve a legitimate social purpose. However, the evidence is overwhelming that this is not the case. The problems with our current system are numerous: not only is youth incarceration a massive financial burden on society (the Annie E. Casey foundation report estimates that incarceration costs between 66,000 and 88,000 dollars per youth), but it fails to successfully rehabilitate youth. Rates of recidivism are startlingly high, with 70 to 80 percent of youth being rearrested within two or three years. (Mendel, 10) Furthermore, the Annie E. Casey foundation report states that for less-serious offenders in particular, recidivism *increases* after incarceration. A number of studies are cited showing that incarceration is "no more effective than probation or alternative sanctions", and that "correctional placements actually exacerbate criminality." (11) If, as these studies argue, youth incarceration does not elicit the desired result of decreasing delinquent behaviors and rehabilitating youth, why do we continue to rely on it? Is there a way that we can improve facilities to make them more effective, or are there better alternatives?

There are many historical reasons why the U.S. incarcerates so many young people as well as adults, but a significant turning point was the "War on Drugs" officially launched by President Reagan, and the "tough on crime" legislation that followed. According to Katayoon Majd's article, "Students of the Mass Incarceration Nation", such legislation included

> mandatory minimums that removed discretion in sentencing, "three strikes" laws that required up to life imprisonment for the commission of a third, typically violent felony offenses, and "truth in sentencing laws" which required offenders

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to serve 85% of their sentences before they can be released. (Majd, 353) While these policies largely affected the adult population, the "tough on crime" paradigm set the stage for the incarceration of large numbers of youth as well. "Zero-tolerance" policies in schools, which encouraged youth suspension, expulsion, arrest, or referral to juvenile courts for minor infractions, were a major factor in the formation of the "school-to-prison pipeline". This term commonly refers to the symbiotic relationship between the education system and the juvenile justice system. Via the "school-to-prison pipeline", youth have been funneled directly from schools into facilities through mechanisms like increased law enforcement presence in schools, policing for trivial student misbehaviors like talking in class, and lack of educational resources in urban environments.

The "tough on crime" era was coupled with and supported by a media presence that frequently criminalized African-American men and boys and portrayed them in a negative light. This, rather than crime itself, was a significant factor fueling mass incarceration; while more and more individuals were being locked up, crime rates were at historic lows. As Majd points out, in 2003 only 24% of youth were locked up for violent felonies, suggesting that increased incarceration was at least not entirely driven by an effort to make society safer. Although youth incarceration was born more of a political climate rather than a public necessity, the question remains of how we are to deal with youth crime if not through confinement. Has youth incarceration really been that disastrous, and if so, are there alternatives that work better?

Problems within youth incarceration facilities are rampant, and are not likely to change. According to the Annie E. Casey foundation report, over the past four decades, "57 lawsuits in 33 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have resulted in a

court-sanctioned remedy in response to alleged abuse or otherwise unconstitutional conditions in juvenile facilities." (Mendel, 5) Physical abuse and excessive force by staff, sexual abuse, and youth-on-youth violence are among the problems that are documented in the report. These serious issues continue today, and public officials have been utterly unable to resolve any of them. Fortunately, as The Campaign for Youth Justice points out, "community-based programs, including diversion programs, drug treatment, evening reporting centers, treatment clinics and family programs, have been shown to be less costly than detention or incarceration and to help youth stay out of trouble and to not re-offend." Furthermore, certain "evidence-based models", programs which have been proven to reduce recidivism, have emerged in recent years. "Multisystemic Therapy" (MST) and "Functional Family Therapy" (FFT) serve as examples of evidence-based programs that offer counseling and treatment to both youth and families. Finally, career preparation programs, educational programs, and "intensive advocate/mentor programs" like The Choice Program have also shown promising results.

Although youth incarceration is still a serious problem, it has been on the decline. Between 1997 and 2007, "the juvenile population confined in correctional custody nationwide declined from 256 of every 100,000 youth to 194- a 24 percent reduction." (Mendel 26) Furthermore, large numbers of youth correctional facilities have been closing. But the news is not all good. In many cases, the closures have been due to state government fiscal crises, federal investigations, and class-action lawsuits. Thus, the trend does not reflect a shift in the punitive model of dealing with the behaviors of young people that society deems "criminal".

What is needed instead is a new paradigm. Community-based alternatives like those I have mentioned, either proven to work or reporting positive results, share certain characteristics and embody a certain perspective on youth crime that incarceration generally does not. While responses that promote coercion and fear of punishment do not work, those that "address specific risk factors known to influence delinquent and criminal behavior" (16) do. Instead of punishing youth for criminal activity, these alternatives take a rehabilitative approach. However, they also do more than that: they identify specific barriers in the lives of youth and families that are affected by youth incarceration and address them. Among factors proven to be correlated to youth crime are mental health needs, educational impairment or disadvantage, substance abuse issues, lack of family stability, lack of access to basic resources, and race and class status. The method of identifying and taking steps to address these contextual factors in the lives of youth connects to key aspects of the relational perspective I will be advocating for in this paper.

In many ways, reducing youth incarceration will require massive structural change within society. Steps will include making sweeping reforms to the justice system, ending incarceration policies that target African-American communities, ending "zero tolerance" policies in schools, and changing financial incentives for localities to incarcerate youth. These are all important and necessary macro-level, societal changes that our policies should work to accommodate. However, Choice takes a unique approach and embodies a fundamental piece of the puzzle by embracing many of the principles of the relational perspective. The structural shift to a focus on addressing contextual factors rather than punishing offenders is both supported by and expressed within the model of The Choice Program. While many other community-based alternatives are critical to reducing youth

confinement and do embrace some aspects of a relational perspective, the model of Choice does so to a striking degree and in ways that other models fail to. Before delving fully into what The Choice Program is and does, however, it will be important to understand what I will be discussing when I refer to "the relational perspective".

Introduction to The Relational Perspective

"The relational perspective" I will be advocating for in this paper is firstly grounded by the notion of "the relational self". This relational self, I suggest, acts as a promising alternative to common conceptions of selfhood that have persisted throughout the history of western philosophy. The relational perspective, secondly, deals with the development of moral and social theories and concepts that follow from the relational self. I will discuss the works of five thinkers who either implicitly or explicitly appeal to a relational notion of the self: Seyla Benhabib, Virginia Held, Nel Noddings, Linda Martín Alcoff, and María Lugones. These thinkers represent a multitude of ways of thinking about identity, but they all employ the idea that human beings are fundamentally constituted by and dependent on relationships. While Held and Noddings, with their articulation of care ethics, emphasize the fact that human beings are dependent on one another for both survival and flourishing, Lugones argues that individuals' identities cannot be disentangled from relationships at all and exemplifies this point through her discussion of "world"-traveling.

Much of the ethical theory developed in western philosophy has ignored the relationality of human existence. Instead, western philosophy has often posited an autonomous and self-sufficient notion of the self. Relationships, in this case, are not fundamental to who we truly are, but incidental. The result has been to treat ethical

dilemmas as abstract problems which an independent, objective observer can solve. When we challenge the idea that human beings are ultimately independent and self-sufficient creatures, we challenge the idea that individual choices are made in a vacuum and that the goal of ethics is merely to evaluate these choices. The relational perspective, in challenging the independence, autonomy, and self-sufficiency of human beings, challenges the view that ethical judgments can be made without considering contextual factors. The relational perspective complicates the process of making ethical judgments by forcing us to think about how individuals are constituted by and embedded within relationships. Moralizing from the perspective of an independent, objective observer does not make sense from within the relational perspective.

The relational perspective has serious implications that can inform efforts to ending youth incarceration. By viewing youth and families affected by this issue through their interpersonal relationships and relationships to society, we come to a better understanding of the real world impacts of youth incarceration. This gives us the tools and knowledge to advocate for people in meaningful ways. As I will show, The Choice Program effectively embraces the relational perspective and is premised on many of the insights it offers. Thus, Choice represents a paradigm that can and should be extended to the issue of mass incarceration as it affects adults as well as youth, and may even serve as a model for addressing other social or political issues.

Structure and Final Introductory Remarks

Each of the thinkers I discuss in the first chapter of this paper enhance our understanding of the relational perspective and provide the language for analyzing the philosophy and methodology of Choice. In the second chapter, as indicated earlier, I discuss how The Choice Program embodies and embraces a relational perspective to prevent and reduce youth incarceration. I frequently discuss my experiences as a Choice Fellow to give concrete examples of what the relational perspective looks like in action. Finally, I will conclude by stressing the importance of embracing a relational perspective in ending youth incarceration, in contrast to more traditional western perspectives that have failed.

As I have emphasized, embracing the relational perspective is critical to reducing and preventing youth incarceration. Our efforts to achieve this latter goal are more effective when we understand and address the interlocking factors that affect the lives of at-risk youth. By investing in and centering the experiences of these people and their families, we come to both a more comprehensive and more nuanced, particularized understanding of the issues with which they contend on a daily basis. This gives us the ability to enact meaningful change in the lives of individuals and undermine the forces that have led to the incarceration of young people. As I will show, it is when we place real human beings at the base of the discussion that progress becomes genuine and lasting. This ultimately serves to illustrate the strength of the relational perspective for which I will be advocating, and suggests more productive ways of thinking about and addressing other social issues.

Chapter 1: The Relational Perspective

In this chapter, I will be outlining in detail what is meant when I use the term "the relational perspective". The following theories and concepts are grounded in a relational notion of the self. While there are many ethical and political implications of relational selfhood, I have chosen these works because they create the necessary backdrop for my later discussion of The Choice Program and its efforts to reduce youth incarceration. Although this model contains a myriad of perspectives, they are all tied together conceptually by the relational self.

The Relational Self

Throughout the history of western philosophy, a particular vision of the human self has informed dominant theories either implicitly or explicitly. This self can be described as autonomous, self-sufficient, primarily rational, and "disembodied" as Seyla Benhabib refers to it. It is a self defined by abstract characteristics and can be conceived as pre-social or *a priori*. This vision of the self can be traced back to the writings of Plato, and has been continually invoked within ethical and political theories as recently as John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, published in 1971. While alternative views have always existed, it is within the framework of feminist philosophy that they gained the most traction. In the early 1980's, Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings coined the term "Care Ethics", offering an alternative ethical framework that embraces a different vision of the self. This notion of the self, which I will refer to as *the relational self*, grounds the relational perspective for which I will be advocating.

It is not a coincidence that feminist theory was the backdrop for this new self and ethical perspective, even as it proposes an account of the self that applies to all people and offers an ethics that everyone can embrace. According to Seyla Benhabib, in a chapter entitled "The Generalized and the Concrete Other" from her book *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, the development of the archetypical western self has been historically based on men's experiences and social positioning. Benhabib describes how this came to be as follows: "An entire domain of human activity, namely, nurture, reproduction, love and care, which becomes the woman's lot in the course of the development of modern, bourgeois society, is excluded from moral and political considerations and relegated to the realm of 'nature'." (155) According to Benhabib, the exclusion of women from the public domain is directly tied to the elevation of social and political theories that posit the autonomous, western self. Furthermore, it is no surprise that it has been primarily men in western philosophy, concerned with the ethics of public life, that have promoted such theories. Still, we do not wish to say that the relational self and relational ethical frameworks like care ethics are only appropriate for the private and domestic spheres. Rather, part of what care ethics and feminist theory more generally wishes to challenge is the very distinction between the private and public sphere. An important priority for many proponents of care ethics is to show how the values necessary within the home and in caring contexts can and should be applied to public life. The patriarchal intuition has instead been to dismiss the experiences of women from ethical and philosophical discourse, and in turn the experiences connected to doing what is arguably the most important work of all: raising children, caring for the elderly, sick, or disabled, and forming and maintaining bonds that

both sustain life and often give it meaning. Care ethics seeks to remedy this lack in ethical theory by positing the relational self as opposed to the autonomous self.

In many ways, the relational self is the antithesis to archetypical western conceptions of the self. While this "western self" is autonomous, acting entirely of its own accord and exhibiting individual agency, the relational self acts from within social networks and interpersonal associations. While the western self is seen as self-sufficient, the relational self is seen as dependent on relationships for its existence. While the western self is characterized most prominently by rationality, the relational self is also constituted by emotions. Finally, while the characteristics that define the western self are abstract and pre-social, the relational self is constituted by social realities.

Western philosophy has hinged on this atomistic conception of the self, and in doing so has failed to acknowledge the importance of human relationships in structuring identity. The two ethical theories most commonly discussed and debated, deontology and utilitarianism, both share this atomistic vision of the self. Deontology, embodied in Kant's "categorical imperative", ascribes certain inviolable rights and absolute duties to human beings. The self in this case is universal and undifferentiated, in that *all selves have the same rights and duties* toward one another. Ethical principles within this framework are abstracted from the standpoint of a fully rational, emotionally detached agent. The assumption that this is even possible negates the fact that we are each uniquely situated within society and interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, this tendency to prescribe absolute rights and duties that can apply to all people obscures the relational aspects of life and the fact of our dependency on one another for existence. Utilitarianism, despite its radically different prescriptions, shares the same fundamental

conception of the self. It does not ascribe absolute duties or rights to individuals, but instead is focused on increasing pleasure and decreasing harm for the greatest number of individuals. In this case, ethical judgments are made on the basis of consequences. When making a moral judgment, the important question for utilitarianism is this: to what extent will this action increase pleasure and/or decrease pain for the greatest number of people? Like Kantianism, ethical judgments are made from the standpoint of a detached, rational observer. In this theory as well, individual selves are viewed as equal and undifferentiated. Again, the particularity of selfhood is ignored.

Benhabib describes how both deontology and utilitarianism appeal to a similar conception of the self. In her words, both theories "abstract from the individuality and concrete identity of the other." In each case, "we assume that the other, like ourselves, is a being who has concrete needs, desires and affects, but that what constitutes his or her moral dignity is not what differentiates us from each other, but rather what we, as speaking and acting rational agents, have in common." (159) Benhabib calls this view, in which assumptions of equality and sameness are the proper starting point for moral deliberation, the standpoint of the "generalized other". Benhabib develops an alternative to the "generalized other" by suggesting the possibility of occupying the standpoint of the "concrete other". This perspective "requires us to view each and every rational being as an individual with a concrete history, identity, and affective-emotional constitution." (159) By affirming the ways in which individuals are uniquely situated, the standpoint of the "concrete other" calls on us to respond to the particular needs of others.

Later, when I turn to my analysis of The Choice Program, the benefits of reasoning from the standpoint of the "concrete other" will become clear. The assumption

that individuals can easily understand where another is coming from by "putting themselves in their shoes" implicitly appeals to the ideals of sameness and equality characterized by the "generalized other". Choice instead focuses on the needs of particular others and centralizes their experiences. The emphasis is not on projecting onto individuals an abstract moral framework from which they will thereby benefit, but on allowing them to tell their own stories and tailoring responses to whatever needs they may identify.

Ultimately, Benhabib does not wish to abandon the language of rights and duties entirely and sees some value in the perspective of the "generalized other". Benhabib instead proposes a synthesis of the "concrete" and "generalized other". She goes on to explain what this moral theory would look like: "Such a moral theory allows us to recognize the dignity of the generalized other through an acknowledgement of the moral identity of the concrete other." (164) Rights and duties, in this case, could be derived by embracing the experiences of particular others and applying more general moral reasoning based on this information. Benhabib calls this theory "interactive universalism", and it is meant to preserve ideals of justice without ignoring the fact that every individual is uniquely situated and defined in terms of interpersonal relationships and social positioning. Critical to my project will be to establish the ways in which a justice orientation, consonant with the standpoint of the "generalized other", must be grounded in these relational factors of human existence.

Justice and Care

The standpoint of the "generalized other" in many ways informs what has been referred to by some thinkers as an ethic of justice. Virginia Held, in her book *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global*, describes justice ethics and how it differs from care ethics. Held states that "an ethic of justice focuses on questions of fairness, equality, individual rights, abstract principles, and the consistent application of them. An ethic of care focuses on attentiveness, trust, responsiveness to need, narrative nuance, and cultivating caring relations." (15) While an ethic of care and an ethic of justice ask different moral questions and apply moral reasoning differently, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For example, we can value the rights of children not to be harmed by working to end child abuse, and at the same time we are responding to their need for safety. In this case, the same moral response can be guided by different moral reasoning: the language of justice (rights) and the language of care (responsiveness to need) can both be used as rationalizations against child abuse. However, I would argue that the concerns of care ethics ground an ethic of justice. A particular child has a right not to be abused *because* of that child's need for safety. Justice ethics derives the right not to be harmed from universal principles, such as the general human need for safety, but the needs of particular others ground an ethic of care.

The relational self, in which human beings are seen as fundamentally dependent on one another for meeting needs, serves as a basis for care ethics. Held defends the relational self and the limits of the western self that underpins an ethic of justice in this passage:

> Many persons become ill and dependent for some periods of their later lives, including in frail old age, and some who are permanently disabled will need care for their whole lives. Moralities built on the image of the independent,

autonomous, rational individual largely overlook the reality of human dependence and the morality for which it calls. (10)

In positing absolute, individual rights, an ethic of justice ignores how the fact of human dependencies like those described by Held can inform ethical decision-making. While the relevant qualities for a moral agent from the perspective of justice ethics are rationality and detachment, a moral agent from the perspective of care would work toward cultivating qualities like patience, compassion, and receptivity to the needs of others. Care ethics accounts for the fact that we are all constituted by relationships of dependency by promoting the virtues necessary to navigate them and allow them to thrive.

Although children, the disabled, and the elderly are clearly dependent on others for survival, the ethics of care makes the stronger claim that dependencies are inescapable in broader social contexts as well. Many of these dependencies are involuntary and unavoidable. For example, Held claims that "people do not choose which gender, racial, class, ethnic, religious, national, or cultural groups to be brought up in." (13) These factors are important to think about from the perspective of care ethics, as individuals are seen as fundamentally intertwined and constrained by social positionality. For this reason, care ethics is not a system that should only be applied to problems in the private sphere. The moral issues that arise in this sphere should be taken seriously in public life as well.

When I later discuss The Choice Program, it will be clear how care ethics can contribute to our understanding of social issues. Choice works toward a more just society, and embraces some of the ideals associated with justice like fairness and equity, but does so from the perspective of the relational self. In taking a holistic approach that identifies

and seeks to respond to the needs of individuals, Choice implicitly embodies the values promoted by the ethics of care.

The Primacy of Care

In *Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy*, Nel Noddings seeks to establish caring as the primary ethical consideration, and show how care can and should be used to inform social policy. While our purposes will not require examining her specific policy suggestions, she adds important contributions to the question of what it means to care and why care is fundamental to ethical questions within the public sphere. The crucial distinction that Noddings makes in order to do this is between *caring-for* and *caring-about*. Caring-for, according to Noddings, is both the logical and moral precedent to caring-about, and is the direct act of working to meet the needs of another. Caring-for occurs in interpersonal contexts, within what Noddings calls "caring encounters". (Noddings, 10) These encounters occur between two parties: the carer, and the cared-for. Meeting the needs of the cared-for is the primary goal of a caring encounter, and thus any carer must be receptive to the former's needs. Noddings intentionally equates caring with reception rather than empathy: she likens empathy to projection, by which a carer attempts to "understand" where the cared-for is coming from and ultimately tries to identify with them. Much like Benhabib's notion of the "generalized other", this empathetic perspective assumes that commonality between individuals is a guiding moral principle. While empathy may be well-intentioned, whether or not a caring encounter is successful does not depend on the efforts, intentions, or virtues of the carer, but rather on how successfully the needs of the cared-for are received and met. To truly care for another, we must see them in all of their particularity. Noddings describes what this looks

like: "In caring encounters I receive the other person and feel what he or she is feeling even if I am quite sure that I would not myself feel that way in a given situation." (14) This means that in order to care for another, we do not have to understand their perspective, but we must prioritize and centralize their experiences.

As caring-for is not simply about the actions of the carer but the results for the cared-for, mere reception is not morally sufficient on the part of the carer. There is also what Noddings calls "motivational displacement", which occurs when one's "energy begins to flow toward [another] and his projects." (17) In order to successfully care, one must actively work to meet the needs of the cared-for. As such, for Noddings, caring is an activity that prescribes certain actions and prohibits others. The work of care involves the cultivation of virtues rather than the mere exercise of rationality, as Noddings elucidates here: "Care theorists do not turn to logic for a categorical imperative; rather they turn to an ideal of character." (30) This ideal of character prompts us to work toward being more receptive and attentive, and to fully commit to meeting any needs that the cared-for may have. Unlike in a justice perspective, where abstract principles guide moral behavior, the only absolute principle for Noddings is the needs of individuals themselves. Whether or not these needs are met is the ultimate criterion to which moral action must aspire.

When faced with large-scale social issues, our moral efforts must be geared toward larger groups. While Noddings recognizes this reality, she warns us of the dangers involved in taking on such projects, wherein "individuals become elements in a collection, and principles govern what might better be guided by caring responses." (22) Still, caring-for in the sense of responding to particular individuals is impractical in many situations. Many times justice orientations are able to at least guide us in some direction;

rather than having to consult every individual affected by a policy influencing many people, we can appeal to ideals like rights and fairness. Instead of invoking abstract, universal principles, however, Noddings introduces her idea of "caring-about". This concept helps to bridge the gap between caring and justice; caring-about is firmly rooted in the requirements of caring-for but seeks to extend care to those whom one cannot care-for directly. Here, Noddings describes the role that justice can play in an ethic of care: "When we cannot care directly for others but wish that we could- when, that is, we sincerely care about the well-being of others- we rely on principles of justice that approximate (or enable others to undertake) the actions we would perform if we could be bodily present." (3) Because principles of justice rely on what we would do if we were "bodily present", i.e. engaged in a caring interpersonal relationship, social and political theories should pay close attention to how caring relationships are established and maintained. As care ethics posits a self that cannot be disentangled from social connections and positionality, Noddings maintains that "we must not start with a collection of 'specimens'; rather, we must meet the individual." (14)

For Noddings, caring relationships are both the conceptual basis for ethics and social policy and the proper end for ethical theory. When we cannot directly care for others, our work should be to create conditions so that caring relationships can flourish. Caring relationships not only make life possible, but oftentimes make it worth living. Because the relational self is defined by embeddedness within relations of dependency, working to create networks within which individuals can thrive is a fundamental moral concern. The most basic relationships of dependency, between family members or friends, are often where caring-for takes place most directly and thus they can serve as

important models for the kind of relationships society should work to promote. As I will later show, The Choice Program utilizes Noddings notion of caring-about by working toward a more just society through establishing caring relationships. In complicating the distinction between justice and care by introducing the notion of caring-about, Noddings is able to extend the principles of care to the greater society. Choice serves as a concrete example of what this looks like.

The Problem of Speaking For Others

In 1992, Linda Martín Alcoff published an article entitled "The Problem of Speaking For Others" that dealt with the question of how it can be morally permissible to advocate for oppressed groups of people without simultaneously silencing them and replicating systems of oppression. Alcoff states that "the practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for." (3) Alcoff uses the example of a white Canadian author, Anne Cameron, who wrote first person accounts of the lives of native Canadians. At a book fair, Cameron was asked to "move over" by a group of Native Canadian writers because her work was disempowering to them. The importance for Cameron to "move over" is expressed in the claim made by these writers that her speaking for them from a privileged location solidifies her privilege and perpetuates their oppression. In Alcoff's words, Cameron's speaking "does nothing to disrupt the discursive hierarchies that operate in public spaces." (3) When privileged groups attempt to represent the experiences or interests of oppressed groups, oftentimes they end up normalizing the "discursive hierarchies" mentioned by Alcoff in which marginalized communities are not given the voice to advocate for themselves.

While she does not specifically invoke the relational self, Alcoff assumes this conception of selfhood. She states that "in both the practice of speaking for as well as the practice of speaking about others, I am engaging in the act of representing the other's needs, goals, situations, and in fact, who they are based on my own situated interpretation." (5) In much the same way that moralizing from the standpoint of Benhabib's "generalized other" falsely assumes the possibility of rational detachment, speaking for others falsely assumes the neutrality of the speaker without confronting how social factors influence the content of such speech. Furthermore, in Alcoff's view, there is no neutral place from which we can speak. Even when we speak for ourselves, we are "participating in the creation and reproduction of discourses through which [our] own and other selves are constituted." (15) From this point of view, one's own interests and experiences should always be viewed through the lens of social hierarchies. Since one's own point of view cannot be separated from how one is positioned within society, speaking at all can never take place without implicit reference to this positionality.

Although speaking itself may be problematic, in many cases speaking for others is the only option we may have in order to advocate for them. Withdrawal from speaking at all reflects privilege and enforces social positionality in much the same way that speaking for others has a tendency to do. As Alcoff observes, "a retreat from speaking for others will not result in an increase in receptive listening in all cases; it may result merely in a retreat into a narcissistic yuppie lifestyle in which a privileged person takes no responsibility for her society whatsoever." (12) While speaking for others carries with it concerns of erasing the experiences of marginalized people, not doing so at all in some

circumstances may lead to the very same dangers. The problem, therefore, is how to navigate speaking for others when doing so is a moral and political necessity.

Alcoff maintains that there is no easy solution to the problem of how we can advocate for others when they are unable to speak for themselves, although she suggests "constant interrogation and reflection." (15) Rather than speaking for others, we must attempt to speak "to" others, neither erasing their voice nor abnegating from engagement. She states that "we should strive to create wherever possible the conditions for dialogue and the practice of speaking with and to rather than speaking for others." (16) As I will later show, this practice of speaking with and to is embodied in the model of The Choice Program. Choice creates the environment wherein the dialogue Alcoff encourages can take place. Fellows working with The Choice Program are called to reflect on themselves and their experiences, and are trained to receive and respond to the speech of those for whom they advocate. This model creates ideal conditions in which relatively privileged individuals can not only hear the speech of at-risk youth and families, but react in meaningful ways by linking them to resources within their communities that can elevate and empower them.

Oftentimes, youth are silenced and consequently, their needs are not met within the school system, justice system, and other systems that they are expected to navigate. Through striving toward meaningful engagement with these young people and their families, Choice Fellows are able to act as a link between populations that are frequently unable to represent themselves for various reasons. Furthermore, as we will see, Choice creates a platform by which marginalized young people can speak for themselves and advocate for their own interests.

"World"-Travelling

In her article, "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception", María Lugones describes an exercise which she calls "world"-travelling that outsiders in the U.S. have been forced to perform in order to survive. According to Lugones,

> the outsider has necessarily acquired flexibility in shifting from the mainstream construction of life where she is constructed as an outsider to other constructions of life where she is more or less 'at home'. This flexibility is necessary for the outsider but it can also be willfully exercised by the outsider or those who are at ease in the mainstream. (Lugones, 3)

While this shifting from "mainstream life" to more comfortable constructions of life is a necessity for many marginalized people, Lugones also urges privileged individuals to consciously adopt this attitude. "World"-traveling, in one sense, means to take on the norms and practices of any given group. Lugones' definition of "world" is purposely vague, so as to allow for a multitude of "worlds" depending on the traveler. In one sense, a "world" can be "an actual society given its dominant culture's description and construction of life", but it can also be a "construction of a tiny portion of a particular society." (10) For example, a classroom may be considered a "world", a family may be considered a "world", and a nation may be considered a "world". Outsiders to mainstream culture, including women of color to whom Lugones is primarily speaking, have to "world"-travel constantly: in order to thrive in the dominant culture, such as in the workplace, they need to be able to fit in and take on the norms of that culture. However, with people to whom they are intimately connected, they may feel more of a sense of belonging.

"World"-traveling, as Lugones describes it, also implies a vision of the self wherein selves are shaped by their environment. Lugones uses an autobiographical example to make this point: in some "worlds" she feels that she is a playful person, while in others she does not. Rather than accepting that she is more or less "herself" in one of these worlds, she states that she is a "plurality of selves." (14) In this way, identity itself is influenced by the "worlds" that one occupies. Different "worlds" construct us differently, and we naturally feel more or less at ease in certain "worlds". If "worlds" themselves shape identity, the implications for social policy are profound. If we wish to strengthen and uplift people, we must work to change the environments that define them. The Choice Program takes an approach consistent with this idea by identifying and confronting the unique challenges within the worlds of at-risk youth and families.

While "world"-traveling can refer to the activity of working to fit into some social space, it can also refer to the act of envisioning ourselves in the circumstances of another person. "World"-travelling in this sense is closely connected to the notion of receptivity central to care ethics. It is not through *identifying* with the other in an intellectual way that we are able to care for them, but rather through accepting the irreducibility of their point of view and their "world" that we must *work* to inhabit. This is partly why Lugones celebrates the exercise of "world"-traveling: it provides a framework for embracing perspectives that are radically different from our own.

Fellows working with The Choice Program "world"-travel in both senses of "world"-traveling: they physically enter into the "worlds" where youth and families live, and also seek to understand how environmental factors work together to generate the perspectives of their clients. Both senses of "world"-traveling inform and connect to one

another. It is through the very act of physically appearing in the many social contexts in which youth exist, such as their workplace or school, that Fellows are able to gain a more thorough understanding of the challenges and struggles they face. Through this process, Fellows "world"-travel in the second sense, whereby they begin to imaginatively occupy the many social contexts in which youth appear.

Conclusion

As I have shown, the relational self can be applied to moral discourse in a number of ways. While care ethics focuses on the principles involved in forming and maintaining caring relationship as a basis for ethics, Alcoff applies the relational self to the moral and political problem of speaking for others. Finally, Lugones employs a relational identity in her development of the concept of "world"-travelling as a way for individuals connect across racial, social, or cultural differences. "The relational perspective" I will be using in the following chapter includes but is not limited to the concepts invoked by these thinkers. I have chosen their works specifically because their conceptual frameworks provide a theoretical context for the methodology used by The Choice Program to combat youth incarceration and further youth development. While The Choice Program does not explicitly appeal to these theories, it implicitly embodies them. The following analysis will illustrate how the Choice Program embraces the relational perspective I have outlined.

Chapter 2: Embodying The Relational Perspective

In this chapter, I first introduce The Choice Program at UMBC and provide some background about what the program is and does. Then, I explain how the concepts discussed in the previous chapter serve as theoretical underpinnings for Choice. Although Choice does not specifically invoke any of the material I have covered thus far in its mission statement, viewing the program through a relational lens offers us an understanding of how such a perspective can directly inform social programs.

What is Choice?

Choice is a non-profit organization operating through The Shriver Center at UMBC. The mission of The Shriver Center is to take the resources of the university and apply them to pressing social issues. As such, Choice is partially funded through UMBC, but also receives funding through AmeriCorps and has the designation of being a local AmeriCorps program. This means that "Community-Service Learning Fellows", as individuals serving within Choice are called, serve for exactly one year and are AmeriCorps members. Choice Fellows receive a modest living stipend during their "year of service," and an education award through AmeriCorps that can be used to pay off college debts or fund future educational endeavors. Important to note also is that The Choice Program has contracts with both the Department of Juvenile Services and the Department of Social Services within the state of Maryland. Many of the operations of Choice are only possible through these contracts, and Choice works closely with these branches of the state government to serve at-risk youth and families in Baltimore City, Baltimore County, and Prince George's County.

The amount of work put in by Choice Fellows can range from 55-65 hours a week, and relative to their modest living stipend, it would not be appropriate to describe the position as a "job". As Choice Director LaMar Davis states, "you can only do this for one year because of the time, energy, and commitment it takes." (Davis, LaMar. Personal Interview. 10 October 2016. All following quotes from Davis come from this interview.) While the program has a number of employees working in different managerial or administrative positions, Choice Fellows themselves are at the heart of the work being done. Concerning those individuals who become Fellows, the Choice website states that

> The Choice Program recruits college graduates from diverse backgrounds and fields to serve in a one-year position as a Community-Service Learning Fellow. The commitment provides Choice Fellows with extensive training, professional experience, and opportunities for personal and career development.

Choice is divided up into four separate branches that each function through different systems and serve different youth. Several teams of Choice Fellows serve youth involved in the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS), several other teams serve through the Department of Social Services (DSS), several Fellows serve in the Education Program embedded into three Baltimore schools, and some serve with the Choice Jobs Program. While each of these branches of Choice may serve different youth and have different goals and practices, they all share the same broader mission and are guided by the same philosophy.

During my time with Choice, I served as a Choice Fellow on a DJS team in Baltimore County. As the DJS teams are most directly focused on preventing youth incarceration, most of my discussion will center around the work being done there. Davis stated of the DJS program: "The primary goal of this program is to keep kids in the community, reduce disproportionate minority confinement, and prevent out-of-home

placement." Fellows serving on DJS teams work directly with youth, using a "case-management model" and strive to have "face-to-face contact" with them every day. Youth involved in the program range from ages 8-18, with the average age being 16.

The services provided by DJS teams are extremely comprehensive, with Choice Fellows being involved in many aspects of a youth's life. The teams themselves are composed of three Fellows and a Service Coordinator. The latter acts as a team organizer, helping to set the agenda for the team, screening youth for eligibility in the program, and sometimes providing direct service. Youth themselves are usually referred to the program by their probation officers, but are sometimes referred through the courts or other branches of the Department of Juvenile Services. When I was a Choice Fellow, we typically had between twenty and thirty youth on our caseload at a time. Each youth is in the program for 6 months, unless they are terminated from the program due to out-of-home-placement or other circumstances that make continuation impossible.

The Choice annual report lists several of the case-management services provided by the program, the first of which is "intensive supervision". Choice was originally envisioned to be an alternative to youth incarceration, and is often still seen this way by the courts and probation officers, so supervision is a key component to the program. Choice Fellows attempt to see every youth every day, with each Fellow taking a turn "tracking" every night. This means that each Fellow uses their own vehicle to drive to the home of every youth, knocking on each door in order to attempt to make contact with every youth and/or family. Oftentimes these visits are brief, but as trust is built and meaningful relationships begin to form, youth may begin to open up to Fellows and come to see them not as symbols of punishment but as mentors and helpers. Sometimes these

visits may only last a few minutes, with Fellows simply checking in and making sure things are stable with youth and/or families, but other times they could last an hour. There is no exact script for what a Fellow should say during visits, because every youth is different and may have different needs. Nightly home visits are critical to building positive and caring relationships with youth, a central goal of the program.

Along with nightly home visits, Fellows are expected to attempt to visit each youth either in school or at their place of employment at least a few times per week. Finally, Fellows will sometimes visit youth in the community, where they may be hanging out with their friends, visiting a relative, or doing any number of things. These visits throughout the week ensure that Choice Fellows become a regular, stable presence in the lives of youth and help to build rapport and trust. This further ensures services that are tailored to their individual needs.

Finally, one Fellow works every third weekend, attempting to visit every youth each day and taking them on recreational, cultural, or community service activities. Sometimes an activity may simply involve taking one youth out to eat, while other times it may include taking three to four of them to complete community service hours in order to fulfill their probation requirements. The weekends are purposely open-ended to allow for whichever activities may be appropriate for a young person. One youth I mentored when working with Choice, for example, really wanted to visit the Holocaust Museum. We planned a day one weekend where we drove to Washington D.C. and toured the Museum, an activity that I'm sure that youth will remember fondly. While working the weekends can be stressful for Fellows, weekends are often a lot of fun and create opportunities to get to know these youth in a more relaxed setting. Visits and activities

help to build relationships between youth and Fellows and provide opportunities for informal counseling, but they ultimately only lay the foundation for the rest of the work that Fellows do.

Choice Fellows provide 24 hours a day, 7 days a week crisis intervention. Each team receives a cell phone, which they take turns holding among their team members, and youth or families can reach out and call Fellows at any time at all. If a youth is in crisis and phones for help, Fellows can reach out to their superiors to determine the appropriate course of action. Fellows also provide legal advocacy and probation support. Fellows attempt to attend all court dates in order to support youth, and while they cannot make legal recommendations, they can report any successes that a youth is having with the program to a judge. Fellows also frequently meet with probation officers in order to discuss issues that a youth may be having and work toward developing solutions. Fellows attempt not only to maintain working relationships with probation officers, but also with school administrators, employers, and other professionals involved in the lives of youth and families. Fellows attempt to attend all meetings related to education or probation, advocating for youth and serving as a link between youth and families and the many systems through which they navigate. Finally, Fellows act as resource brokers, referring youth to community agencies involved in mental health, health care, or any other needs that youth identify.

While there isn't a great deal of information available about how successful Choice has been, what we have seen has been promising. According to the 2016 annual report for DJS teams, Choice served 606 youth this year, with "98% of youth not receiving a new formalized charge" during their tenure with Choice. 86% of youth

remained in the community when they completed the program. Of the 98% that did not receive a new formalized charge, 92% were not arrested at all. According to Davis, the average youth comes into the program with six or more charges. For the vast majority of youth, acquiring no new charges and avoiding arrest during this time frame is a huge accomplishment. Although the program is short-term, Davis states that the impact is "designed for stabilization".

Choice and the Relational Perspective

Although my discussion will mostly focus on the work being done by DJS teams, it is impossible to completely siphon off their work from the work being done by other programs. It is in this way that the relational perspective first becomes apparent. A central premise of Choice is that they can keep youth in the community and prevent incarceration by tackling various areas of youths' lives where they are struggling most rather than offering one absolute antidote. The education teams, for example, provide services in three Baltimore schools: they are embedded within the schools and act as supports for the 5% of youth facing the most serious disciplinary or academic challenges. The Jobs Program provides extensive employment training, and hires youth at their three fully functional businesses (one café and two fruit shake stands) throughout the Baltimore area. By working on multiple fronts, Choice affirms how a multiplicity of factors construct youth in ways that limit their chances for success.

While only the DJS teams work directly with youth on the basis of their being arrested, all teams ultimately help to reduce youth incarceration. For example, the education teams seek to reduce suspensions and expulsions, which greatly diminish a

student's chances of succeeding in school and eventually graduating. As Davis states, "If you don't have a high school degree and you've never worked, how do you break into the employment market?" Without a degree or the ability to get a job, youth are more prone to becoming involved in illegal activities. Thus, in helping youth in school, Choice helps them eventually achieve employment and avoid arrest and incarceration. Furthermore, the Jobs Program gives youth who may not be successful in school an employment reference and equips them with the skills necessary to enter the job market. Both the Education and the Jobs Program seek to engage youth in positive activities, and as Davis asserts, "when you're engaged in positive activities, it gives you less time to get engaged in negative ones."

Traveling to the "Worlds" of Youth

The idea that the success of youth is directly tied to how they fare in these different environments is reminiscent of Lugones' concept of "world"-traveling. Lugones articulated the notion that individual selves are at least in part defined by the ways in which they appear in or are fashioned by different "worlds". Fellows on education teams travel to the "worlds" of youth and act as positive forces within these worlds by going to the very schools where youth learn and study. Fellows not only have an office in schools where youth can come to vent if they are having problems, but also will sit with youth in classrooms, helping them with assignments or simply in staying on track. In a more abstract sense of the term "world", the job market is a "world" that constructs many youth in negative ways, particularly African-American youth and/or those who have criminal records. Choice teams attempt to reconstruct youth in positive ways by traveling

to this "world" and equipping youth with training and experience that may have been previously unavailable to them.

Furthermore, the fact that Fellows get to know youth and become involved in various aspects of their lives affirms the connectedness of *all* of those factors in a youth's life. Fellows on the education teams, for example, not only spend time in schools, but make home visits and meet with family members. Fellows on the jobs team may also visit a youth at home, and keep lines of communication open with DJS teams working with the same youth. With respect to how other factors in the life of a youth may prevent their success in the job market, Davis claims that

> Oftentimes people don't lose their jobs because of their behavior at work, they lose it because they're late coming to work, they lose it because they didn't communicate, they lose it because they have child care issues, or they have other challenges that are making their lives unstable.

Choice tackles these types of challenges and works toward stability through its holistic approach, embracing the idea that what happens at work is connected to what happens at home, which in turn might affect what happens in school and in court. It is by really getting to know youth, what their strengths and weaknesses are, how they fare in the different "worlds" that construct them, and how these pieces connect that Choice is able to be successful. The struggles facing Choice youth do not have one overarching solution.

Caring and the Bottom-Up Approach

While the relational perspective can be seen in the fact that Choice works across these various domains in the lives of their clients, it can also be seen in the stated philosophy of Choice. According to their website, Choice "empowers youth and engages

families through a multitude of services adapted to individual needs." The focus on

services *adapted to individual needs* evokes the relational perspective, particularly as it

shows up within care ethics. One of the central concerns of an ethic of care is responding

to the needs of particular other people. Rather than generalizing by saying something

like, "at-risk youth and families have X problems to which Y are solutions", Choice

leaves questions of what issues people may be facing open. The only ones who can

answer those questions are individuals themselves. In Davis' words, a central tenet of

The Choice Program is that "people are the experts of their own lives."

If Choice works to respond to particular needs, by what methodologies is it able

to do so? First, the organizational structure of the program itself is tailored to give youth

and families the greatest say in how things are run. Youth and families are seen as the

ultimate authorities within the organization, and the Director is seen as the lowest level

employee. Davis calls this a "bottom-up" approach, and explains that:

> The way I look at this is an inverted triangle [. . .] And the reason why I invert it
> this way is because we need to look at ourselves as stewards, and supports to
> everybody who is above us on this inverted chart. So a Director's responsibility is
> to give the Deputy Director and Associate Directors the tools, the funding, and the
> support that they need to be successful. And in turn they are passing these on to
> the Assistant Directors, who are doing so for the Service Coordinators, who are
> doing so for their teams of Fellows who are working with community youth and
> families, so they are really at the head of our community organization chart.

Within this "inverted triangle", the many youth and families with whom Choice works

are at the top as the highest level managers, while the Director is the tip of the triangle at

the bottom. This being the case, care is not only directed towards youth and families, but

flows upward to each member of the organization. By supporting Fellows as well as

youth, Choice creates the conditions by which Fellows can better care for their clients. In this way, the power of care to enact change serves as a foundational premise of Choice.

When I worked as a Choice Fellow, I directly experienced the support built into the bottom-up approach, and ultimately saw how it worked to meet the needs of the youth and families with whom we were working. At the beginning of every day, my team of three and the Service Coordinator would do what is called "Rundown", an exercise that every Choice team is expected to complete twice a day. Rundown is when the team discusses each youth, and everything that occurred tracking in the field that afternoon or the night before. This was a time for problem-solving, processing emotions, and supporting each other and our work. For example, if a youth had been threatening to hurt himself or another person the night before, the team could come together and figure out how to navigate the situation. Depending on how serious the threat was, solutions might range from seeking out mental health resources, contacting the youth's probation officer, planning a meeting with the youth's parents or other responsible adults in their life, or simply figuring out how to have a candid conversation with the youth about their words. The Service Coordinator would take on the responsibility of finding the appropriate resources with which to connect the youth, or guide the Fellows through what kinds of questions they should ask the youth that night in order to get more information. If Service Coordinators have further questions or concerns, they go up the ladder to their Assistant Director, and so on.

Specific policies work to directly support staff as well. Choice Fellows work extensive hours with individuals facing significant challenges in their lives. Naturally, this takes an emotional toll. Fellows periodically meet with their Service Coordinator,

every week during the first six weeks and every 2 weeks thereafter, in what is called "Supervision". During this time, Fellows have an opportunity to express any feelings they may be having about how their year is going, how they are dealing with the stress of the position, or whatever other concerns they may have. Service Coordinators find out where Fellows may need more support, where communication among the team might need improvement, and what tools they can provide to more effectively help Fellows succeed. As an example, during my time as a Fellow I often found myself very distracted when trying to complete paperwork. During one Supervision my Service Coordinator and I discussed this issue and came up with a solution. We decided that throughout the day, I would be allowed to periodically leave the office simply to take a walk outside and get some fresh air. My productivity greatly increased as a result. While this is a minor example, there are many times when Fellows are facing significant personal obstacles in working effectively or connecting with youth. Supervisions serve as a nonjudgmental atmosphere for dialogue and coming up with creative solutions to these obstacles. In some ways this is an opportunity for Service Coordinators, who are supervisors in a formal sense, to work *for* those who are below them. If issues are still unresolved, Service Coordinators can meet with Assistant Directors who can provide more supports to Fellows struggling in some way with their experience.

While Fellows provide 24 hours a day, 7 days a week support to youth and families by taking turns holding the team cell phone, they equally *receive* such support. In the field, problems often arise that are outside of the Fellow's expertise. There is always a Service Coordinator on "back-up" who Fellows are encouraged to call to talk through issues they may be having. At the end of the night, Fellows call whoever is on

back-up to let them know they are out of the field and home safe, and they often have a brief discussion about how the night went. There were many times during my Fellowship where I called back-up to ask for help, but one in particular stands out. I had a client who was a young girl who was in a very serious, heated argument with her parents and threatening to run away. The girl had locked herself in the bathroom and wouldn't come out to discuss the issue with her mother. I had stopped by for a visit in the middle of this argument, but didn't know exactly how I should navigate the situation. I stepped outside to call back-up, and they guided me through possible conversations I could have with the mother or daughter. I was able to talk to the daughter through the door, and she eventually came out of the bathroom and sat on the steps with me while we talked about the feelings she was having and why she wanted to run away. In case back-up doesn't know how to navigate a situation, there is also "back-up to back-up", an Assistant Director who is there to support whoever is on back-up. The implementation of "back-up" and "back-up to back-up" nearly perfectly encapsulates the bottom-up approach and the ethics of care contained within it. These are examples of how care and support act as a fundamental vehicle for the work being done within Choice.

Previously I discussed Noddings' distinction between empathy and receptivity, empathy being equated with projection and receptivity with actually meeting the needs of the "cared-for". Clearly receptivity is central to the pieces of the bottom-up approach I have described. It is not by empathy that Fellows help to meet the needs of their clients, but by *attentiveness* to what they say and do. Sticking with an earlier example, when a youth states that they want to hurt themselves or another, a Fellow is of no help in saying "I know just how you feel, I'm so sorry." In the first case, a Fellow may actually have no

idea how the youth is feeling, but in the second, whether or not they do is irrelevant. A commitment to receptivity instead demands paying close attention to the words, body language, or tone of the youth, among other factors, and communicating that information to others who can help to come up with solutions. During Rundown, the team of Fellows and the Service Coordinator are receptive and attentive to a particular Fellow's description of their encounter with the youth; the team as whole then performs the "motivational displacement" that Noddings describes, working to better understand the situation of the youth and figure out the best possible solutions.

While in this situation, the youth is the "cared-for", individuals working within the organization take on this role at times as well. During Supervisions, the Service Coordinator acts as the carer, paying close attention to the needs and concerns of the Fellow they are meeting with, and performing "motivational displacement" by working toward solutions. There are numerous opportunities for Fellows to act both as carers and "cared-for", as caring relationships among staff are purposely fostered. Four times during the year, everyone working for Choice meets as a team in events called "Reflections". During this time, Fellows and staff enjoy meals and games together, but also meet in smaller groups to discuss their experiences. Since Fellows work in different geographic areas, with different youth involved in different systems, specific experiences often vary greatly. However, Fellows also tend to find that they have a lot in common and deal with many of the same struggles. The practice of coming together in camaraderie and engaging in dialogue strengthens the bonds between Choice staff and creates less formalized chances to form caring relationships. Along with "Reflections", staff will often plan activities together with the youth, or will see each other at the many trainings

which take place throughout the year. In this way, care becomes a guiding force, strengthening those working in Choice at every level.

The Strength-Based Model

While Fellows work toward forming bonds with youth, the program is meant to be a short-term intervention, with each youth only spending 6 months in Choice. By forming close ties with youth and families, Fellows build trust and rapport so that they can more effectively help to meet their needs. However, Fellows ultimately serve as a link to untapped supports or tools for strengthening caring relationships that already exist. Davis states that Choice

> looks to identify who the natural supports in a young person's life are and make those connections- so that could be a teacher, that could be a coach, that could be a parent, an uncle . . . Who's the adult who's going to be championing for those young people? And then we want to work with them to really support this young person.

It is in this sense that Choice is "community-based" and "family-centered"; the underlying belief is that youth will most benefit if we can strengthen the deep-seated ties that youth have to their friends, families, and those who advocate for them in the community. Because we are fundamentally dependent beings, as I mentioned in my discussion of Held's work, our efforts must be geared toward accommodating the inescapable dependencies that constitute the everyday lives of youth. In light of these pre-existing dependencies, Fellows must recognize that although they act as mentors and advocates, they are also outsiders in the lives of these youth. Fellows must therefore reinforce those relationships which are already present in their lives. The belief that outsiders can come and "fix" people's lives is rejected in the community-based and

family-centered aspects of Choice. Furthermore, the belief that outside agents can calculate morally desirable ends is closely connected to the philosophical orientation of the "western self" I discussed earlier. Even if Fellows are attending to the particular needs of individuals, they must also accept that they do not have the answers to the problems facing youth and families. The goal is rather to ask the right questions. As Davis reiterates: "We aren't providing answers, but we're trying to ask the right questions that are going to connect and move the needle on the area that we believe, and [youth and families] believe, will have the most impact on their lives." Asking "the right questions" is not only encouraged by Choice, but is built into many of its standard practices.

One practice that Choice Fellows employ with each youth and family is the creation of a "Service Plan". During the first meeting with a youth and their family, Choice Fellows discuss and record some of the goals that youth and families might have, outlining concrete steps toward how those goals will be achieved. For example, a common goal a youth might have would be to get off of probation. Fellows might ask: what do you need to do to get off of probation? If a youth says that they need to pass their drug tests, attend victim's awareness classes, or complete community service hours, then Fellows can ask: how do we accomplish these more specific goals? What are some immediate steps that we could take to get there? The idea is always to ask questions about what it is that a youth wants for themselves, or what it is that a parent or guardian might want for them or their family. Fellows are then able to direct clients to the resources that they might need to accomplish these goals, are able to check in with youth regularly about their progress toward achieving them, and are able to provide informal counseling and simply act as a push for people to get where they want to be in their lives. While the

goals initially laid out in a Service Plan might not always be achieved, Service Plans act as a manifestation of the premise that "people are experts of their own lives".

All of the practices I have mentioned are integral components of the "strength-based model" that Choice adopts. Davis asserts that within this model, "we're focusing on what works and what has been successful in your life as opposed to the deficits and where you have failed." Teachers, psychologists, probation officers, and many other professionals tend to focus on what's wrong with a young person or their family, and try to fix those problems from the standpoint of the "expert". While these professionals do serve many legitimate purposes, in some ways they usurp the voices of youth and families. As examples, schools that are supposed to educate youth frequently expel and suspend them for minor infractions, and a justice system that is supposed to be rehabilitative frequently incarcerates youth at their expense. The crucial element that is missing in making these systems more effective is that the individuals primarily affected are never asked: is this what you want? Does this help you? What would work better for you?

Engaging in Dialogue and Raising Voices

Choice's model is centered around asking the kinds of questions that can empower people, and raising their voices in real ways. This connects closely to Alcoff's suggestion of engaging in "dialogue" rather than speaking for others: Choice attempts to speak "to" and "with" individuals, and wherever possible creates conditions in which their true interests can be advocated for. For example, many times youth have conflicts with their probation officers. Choice Fellows, by meeting with probation officers

regularly on their own and sitting in on meetings with probation officers and youth and families, are able to help to resolve these issues. Perhaps a probation officer expects a youth to meet with them once a week at a certain time, but the youth doesn't have a ride there, and is being penalized for failing to show up. The probation officer might believe the youth is simply shirking their responsibilities, but a Fellow, having close contact with the youth and their family, might know otherwise. The Fellow can discuss this issue with the probation officer when they have the chance, letting them know that the complaints of the youth are legitimate, and working to set up probation-related meetings that the youth will be able to attend.

As another example, Fellows frequently attend IEP (Individualized Education Program) meetings and disciplinary hearings at schools. IEP meetings are team efforts in which an array of adults involved in the life of a student come together to discuss whatever special educational needs they may have. During one IEP meeting, I was able to advocate for a youth who was frequently talking and acting up in class. From my personal encounters with this youth, I knew that he felt that his teacher was verbally abusing and mistreating him, and was acting out in response to this. I brought up the issue during the IEP meeting, and the youth was placed in a different class as a result. Youth are often ignored or mistrusted when they bring up these concerns by mere virtue of their age, among other factors. Fellows can bridge these gaps, advocating for youth and defending them against those who silence and misunderstand them. Encounters like the one I described are only possible through fostering the conditions by which true dialogue can occur between youth and Fellows. Experts, who attempt to speak for youth and make decisions on their behalf without consulting them, fail to account for the uniquely situated

position of each youth and family. The relational perspective calls for taking seriously these factors and centralizing the experiences of others. Alcoff's solution to the problem of speaking for others is manifested in the ways Choice leverages dialogue to help youth and families traverse the various systems in which they are involved.

Furthermore, Choice regularly hosts events in order to give young people a voice to express themselves and explore their interests. When I was a Fellow, there was an event called "Youth in Action" at a venue, The Graffiti Warehouse, in Baltimore. Youth showcased their artwork all throughout the building, and a stage was set up for Choice youth to read poetry, perform dance routines, and share any other talents they might have. Choice youth also have opportunities to help in planning events centered around their interests. One youth I worked with enjoyed writing poems, so we planned a poetry slam which several other Choice teams attended. I know that having the opportunity to use his voice and share his poetry with others was very meaningful to this particular youth.

Juvenile Justice within Choice

In a similar sense to the way Choice embodies the relational perspective, Choice occupies the standpoint of Benhabib's "concrete other". By getting to really know youth on a person-to-person level, Fellows affirm their "concrete history, identity, and affective-emotional constitution", as Benhabib states. Even though macro-level changes, like criminal justice and education reform, are necessary to improving the lives of youth more broadly, we must still always address the "concrete other" who is suffering under current conditions. Concerning the immediate importance of the projects Choice

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undertakes, Davis maintains that "young people who are coming into our program are on this precipice- and they can either really go deep into the system, or we can try to reconnect them to the supports that are available within the community." While movements that recommend sweeping reforms are important, it's unreasonable to expect that Choice will be the primary vehicle for such changes. In Davis' words, "you're not asking the emergency room doctor what they're doing to cure cancer." Still, I suggest that the work being done by Choice has greater implications for juvenile justice than one might initially expect.

As I mentioned, in Chapter 1, Benhabib suggests a philosophy called "interactive universalism", by which the needs of "concrete others" serve as guides in determining what a just society more broadly would look like. In many ways, the proxies by which Choice identifies its clients underpin an orientation toward justice. Youth who have been arrested and are struggling academically are statistically some of the most underprivileged within society at large, so by targeting these groups, Choice works towards undoing oppressive hierarchies. General objectives more closely connected with an ethic of justice, like guarding rights and promoting equality, serve as overarching goals of Choice. Racial justice is not only a by-product of the work done by Choice, as the vast majority of clients are African-American, but is directly evoked in Choice's mission to "reduce minority youth confinement". Unlike an ethic of justice, however, Choice does not reason from an abstract, detached point of view. Rather, Choice works toward justice by reasoning outwardly from the needs of concrete individuals. Although the sphere of influence is limited, Choice lays the groundwork for other justice initiatives.

Furthermore, Choice works toward justice by embracing "caring-about" as Noddings describes it. Noddings points out that the goal of "caring-about" is to provide the conditions under which caring relationships can flourish whenever possible. If we wish to create the greatest positive impact for at-risk youth, we cannot merely act as mentors and advocates, as institutional barriers prevent this from being a sustainable option. Due to limits imposed on the program by its funders, youth are only allowed to be involved with Choice for a relatively short time frame. As the scale and goal of the program is large, namely, attempting to reduce youth incarceration rates and create more positive outcomes for youth by strengthening communities, merely forming caring relationships is not enough. The caring relationships formed by youth and Fellows serve rather as vehicles by which other caring relationships are created, solidified, and imbued into youths lives.

To illustrate this, imagine a youth with a drug problem. The youth's parents and probation officer are unaware of this issue, but after spending time with this young person, a Choice Fellow begins to notice signs of drug abuse. The Fellow relays this information to their team, and the Service Coordinator prints the addresses and information of several rehabilitation facilities. The next night, in the field, a Fellow confronts the youth about the issue, and the youth denies using drugs. The Fellow nonetheless gives the youth the information provided by the Service Coordinator so that maybe the youth will consider these options if drug use really is a problem. Fellows continue to see signs of drug use by this youth, and the latter's grades begin to decline. At this point, the Service Coordinator calls the parent of the youth to inform them of what they've been noticing. The parent, now more vigilant that this might be a problem,

catches the youth using drugs. The parent contacts the Choice team, who provides the parent with information about the rehabilitation facilities. The Choice team meets with the youth and parent to discuss solutions, and the youth decides to attend one of the facilities. Of course, there is no guarantee of success, but through processes like these Choice teams leverage their caring relationship with a young person to connect them to what is (hopefully) another caring environment, in this case to get clean. Furthermore, here the Choice team will have built rapport with the parent, who will now be more inclined to work with the Choice team in addressing other issues the youth may have. In this way, the initial mentor/mentee relationship will have opened a door to another avenue by which a youth can receive care, and will indirectly open other doors by building rapport with that youth's family.

Creating Change Agents

Aside from encouraging caring relationships, Choice works toward justice through the services provided to Fellows and the training that they receive. Davis states that "the Fellowship is at the heart of what we do." Fellows receive over 40 hours of training during their year of service, on everything from the principles of resiliency, to how to enter into dialogue, to crisis and safety. Although Fellows are not experts and are frequently inexperienced in dealing with the crisis-level situations they are thrust into, they are given numerous supports to ensure effectiveness. The team model holds everyone accountable, and the bottom-up approach gives Fellows the tools needed to be successful.

According to Davis, Choice is "developing the next set of change agents through our Community-Service Learning Fellowship." He further states that "what we're trying to do is help recent college graduates who are doing a transition into career to do a year of service where they're exploring what the issues are, what the resources are, what the systems are, and what it means to be a leader with these contexts." The impact that the Fellowship has on the Fellows themselves is perhaps one of the most far-reaching aspects of the program, but it is also one of the most difficult to measure. As I mentioned earlier, Fellows "world"-travel by actively participating in the many environments that construct youth. One result of such "world"-traveling is to expand the way Fellows understand youth, allowing them to reach and impact the latter group more fully. However, this "world"-traveling also expands Fellows' understanding of themselves. When Fellows finish their year of service, they go into the world with a direct understanding of the challenging systems many under-privileged people confront while also gaining an understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses and how they want to create greater change in society.

The implications of the Fellowship for achieving justice within society cannot be understated. The Fellowship itself acts as the enduring demonstration of the benefits of embracing a relational perspective. Upon the completion of their Fellowship, Fellows continue their education and/or re-enter the workforce, hopefully with a greater commitment to social justice, and certainly with a greater understanding of issues that marginalized youth and families face. While Fellows may pursue teaching, social work, law, public policy, or a number of other fields after their Fellowship, they all go forward with a direct, concrete understanding of the people whose lives they aim to improve.

Fellows, as previously noted, also gain an understanding of the various systems their clients have to navigate, from courts to schools. By seeing how these systems operate internally as well as the real world impacts they have on people, Fellows gain a multi-dimensional understanding of some of the issues facing their clients. In this way, the model of Choice applies not just to how society should treat people facing institutional barriers to success, but how society should train young adults entering their careers. While Choice is far from a decisive means to ending youth incarceration, it lays the groundwork for a more just society by developing a generation that understands the distinct perspectives of individuals impacted by this issue. Underlying this entire process, moreover, is the relational perspective: the basic idea that people can only flourish in an through their relations with others.

Conclusion

The Choice Program offers a comprehensive model of how a social program can embrace a "relational perspective". This perspective is not limited to the thinkers I have discussed here, but is instead founded on the idea that individuals are constituted by social positionality and interpersonal networks. As such, social policy must address the many contextual factors that work together to situate people in unfortunate circumstances. Choice's efforts to reduce youth incarceration is but one example of how centralizing the experiences and listening to the unique perspectives of those individuals directly impacted by an issue creates the conditions for meaningful change. What I have highlighted here is not that Choice is by any means the most far-reaching strategy for reducing youth incarceration, but rather that the very nature of the services provided acts as a theoretical basis for more work that needs to be done. Through fostering caring relationships, Choice is able to identify the concrete needs of individuals. Through resource brokering and acting as a link between clients and the systems through which they navigate, Choice voices those needs and advocates for youth and families. Through working to maintain and reinforce the caring relationships that already exist within the lives of youth, Choice leaves a lasting mark on those with whom they work. Finally, through training Fellows and giving them consistent face-to-face contact with their clients, Choice prepares a generation of young adults for making an impact on their world that is informed by immersion in the lives of real people.

The need for a model like Choice is evident when we think about policies that are based on the conception of the autonomous, western self rather than the relational self.

Policy makers' embrace of the western self has been disastrous for marginalized people, particularly for African-American communities. The very conditions which created mass incarceration, like the "War on Drugs" and "tough on crime" policies, were founded on what seemed to be good intentions in the public eye. Public support for these initiatives was garnered through rhetoric that appealed to socially desirable ends: stopping rampant drug use and getting dangerous criminals off the street. However, the means by which this has been achieved has been through laws that unfairly target African-American communities, punish drug addicts, remove kids from school ("zero tolerance"), and generally exacerbate the problems that many impoverished communities are already facing. Furthermore, the language of "color-blindness" has created a veneer of fairness and equality despite the fact that African-American communities have been disproportionately impacted by these laws. Prescriptions for how to end drug use have not come from people affected, but from outside agents that believe that they can "solve" the issue through detached, rational decision-making. Finally, mass incarceration was born of an ethic that assumes that people make decisions in a vacuum; from this perspective, if someone commits a crime, they are held solely and personally responsible. Because within the relational perspective individuals are constituted by associations, this focus on personal responsibility is incoherent. The responsibility is rather on society to create conditions under which individuals are more likely to flourish.

When the autonomous, western self is taken as a basis for policy, the concrete conditions of individuals are ignored, and equality and sameness is assumed. A more just society is not one in which equality grounds policy. Rather, nuance and particularity must be embraced. Through direct service programs like Choice, we create a foundation on

which dialogue about the kinds of broader solutions to social issues can begin. If we do not start at the ground level, in the communities where people live, work, and go to school, we are thoroughly unqualified to make large-scale decisions that impact people's lives. Holistic programs like Choice, grounded in "the relational perspective" I have outlined, are therefore necessary elements in struggles for social justice like reducing youth incarceration.

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