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Deconstructing Stigma: Lessons from the ConTextos Rehabilitation Program at the Salvadoran Juvenile Detention Center of Tonacatepeque

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Abstract

With the second-highest rate of incarceration in the world, El Salvador's criminal justice system relies heavily on punitive policies to confront crime and gang violence. The focus of this paper is a case study of the Pionero Project—a rehabilitation initiative in the Salvadoran juvenile detention center of Tonacatepeque. This study is based on ethnographic field research methods, including field notes, a sequence of life history interviews with incarcerated youth, and semi-structured interviews with the Pionero Project designers and implementers, including the rehabilitation initiative and prison personnel. Given the punitive policies driving the country's criminal justice system, this study seeks to answer the following question: how does the ConTextos rehabilitation program at the Tonacatepeque-CIS juvenile detention center support youth to deconstruct their stigmatized identities? To answer this question, I apply the theories of Erving Goffman, Michel Foucault, Shadd Maruna, Michael Lipsky, and Angela Davis to fill a gap in the literature concerning how stigma challenges the efforts of Salvadoran rehabilitation programs. I found that stigma is a consequence of not only societal stereotypes towards the youth, but also the personnel's dependence on stigmatizing labels (“criminal,” “incompetent,” “*inquieto*”) as an adaptation to their working conditions. Ultimately, this paper contributes to the literature by providing a case study of specific rehabilitation services that simultaneously do the following: work to mitigate the factors driving stigma in the prison and encourage youth to express their individuality. By including the stories and voices of the youth, this study illustrates how Salvadoran incarcerated and gang-affiliated youth challenge their stigmatized identities, exert their own power over systems of social control, and craft their own narratives beyond stigmatized identities of “criminals.”

Introduction

“Before dawn on Sunday, March 27, just hours after congress approved a state of emergency, heavily armed police and soldiers entered the packed, gang-controlled neighborhood of San Jose El Pino.” NBC News, April 14th, 2022

In El Salvador, there has been a rise in homicides and affiliation to Salvadoran gangs (*maras, pandillas*), such as the *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13) and the *Barrio 18*. Indeed, as of 2020, there were approximately 60,000 gang members operating in at least 247 of the 265 Salvadoran municipalities (Human Rights Watch, 2022). Consequently, over the past two decades, there has been an overreliance on punitive justice measures. This was reflected in 2018 as the country held the world’s second largest prison population rate (World Prison Brief, 2018) as well as in the excerpt above, which was taken from a news article describing the punitive measures of Salvadoran president Nayib Bukele. As a result of this policy, the military arrested more than 10,000 suspected gang members in a period of less than two weeks.

However, the root causes for the crime and gang affiliation can be traced to an inefficiency in the provision of services by the Salvadoran government. For instance, about half of gang members include adolescents and young adults, and the average age of these younger members is 20 years old while their mean entry age is 15 years old (OECD, 2020). This can be partly attributed to the historically low school enrollment rate in the country. For example, as of 2014, secondary-school enrolment rate was 37.9% while the average was 74% in Latin American countries, and tertiary-education enrolment rate was 30.9% while the average was 42% in Latin American countries (MINEC/DIGESTYC, 2015). Furthermore, the recidivism rate in the country is over 90 percent for gang affiliated persons in the prison system (Lessing, 2014), which points to a lack of quality rehabilitation and reintegration services. This context suggests that increased punitive measures may not be the necessary approach. For instance, a study conducted by

Blattman et. al describes that in areas impacted by gangs, “[Police] crackdowns and denunciations could actually increase incentives for the gang to govern and foster legitimacy, especially in the most valuable neighborhoods” (Blattman et. al, 2022). Studies such as these showcase the urgency of shifting away from punitive policies and reconceptualizing how to support youth involved with the punitive justice system.

However, El Salvador responds with increased incarceration rates and a lack of interest in investing in tertiary prevention programs despite also exhibiting a high recidivism rate (NYTimes, 2022). In this study, I seek to discuss how these conditions impact incarcerated persons. To do so, in this paper, I will present a case study of the ConTextos rehabilitation program at the Tonacatepeque *Centro de Inserción* (CIS) juvenile detention center. By doing so, I aim to answer the following question: how does the ConTextos rehabilitation program at the Tonacatepeque-CIS juvenile detention center support youth to deconstruct their stigma? Although more research must be done to explore the effectiveness of this program outside of the CIS, I aim to discuss how the program works within the CIS. As such, I will discuss the responses of several of the actors involved in the implementation of the Pionero Project at the Tonacatepeque-CIS. The aim of this analysis is to fill the gap in the existing literature by providing an example of a rehabilitation program that deconstructs the prison’s frameworks of discipline and punishment and supports incarcerated youth to move beyond their stigmatized identities of “criminals.” This paper will contribute to the literature specific examples of rehabilitation services that simultaneously mitigate the factors driving stigma in the prison and encourage youth to express their individuality. Ultimately, this context challenges the reliance on discipline and punishment.

In this study, I will first provide context as to how the Pionero Project is structured, and I will discuss how the prison context motivates the personnel to propagate stereotypes of the youth. Second, I will delve into a deeper discussion on the creation of the youth's stigmatized identities and include the voices of the youth to discuss the consequences of stigma. Lastly, I will illustrate how the ConTextos rehabilitation program works against the oppressive conditions of the CIS to support the youth in deconstructing their stigmatized identities.

History and Background

Before entering a discussion of conditions within Salvadoran juvenile detention centers, it is important to understand the context of the criminal justice system in El Salvador more generally. This includes understanding the origins of the current "gang crisis" and the factors motivating the government's response to the increases in crime. The emergence of the Salvadoran gangs such as MS-13 and Barrio 18 is attributable to the United States 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act, which resulted in the deportation of many Salvadoran migrants who had immigrated during the Salvadoran Civil War, settled in low-income neighborhoods, and became affiliated with American gangs. Once deported, they introduced American gang culture (tattoos and piercings) and led the consolidation and expansion efforts of Salvadoran gangs. Consequently, by 1996, 85% of gang members were either part of 18th Street or MS 13 (Wolf, 2017). In response, there was a rise in civilian insecurity and citizens demanded the government to address the gang problem. This led to politicians using a political tactic known as "punitive populism," which consisted of promoting "tough on crime" policies to gain votes during their campaigns (Wolf, 2017).

In 2003, the country's leading party, the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) introduced the first *Mano Dura* (Iron Fist) set of policies, and in the following year, they

introduced the Super Manos Duras campaign. These campaigns included the following policies: increasing prison sentences, arresting suspected gang members with minimal due process, and decreasing the age of arrest to twelve years old (Wolf, 2017). The campaigns also ratified the Anti-Gang Law (LAM), which called for joint police and military anti-gang squads and street patrols to arrest youth *suspected* of being affiliated with a gang. However, these policies were criticized because the arrests were typically made solely on the person's appearance (Wolf, 2017). In response to the critics, in 2004, ARENA passed policies that were aimed at supporting rehabilitation and prevention initiatives, such as organizations like the Salvadoran Institute for the Integral Development of Children and Adolescents (ISNA). Still, these programs were highly underfunded and limited to only three of the country's fourteen departments. After years of these policies, the country's root problems remain the same: high unemployment rates and an underfunded education system.

With the current political party in power, we again see the rise in Mano Dura campaigns as a form of addressing crime and propagating "punitive populism." After President Nayib Bukele rose to power in 2019 under the "New Ideas" party, he introduced more punitive measures, such as the use of lethal force by security officers and an increase in the Ministry of Defense budget. This caused an increase in military recruitment as well as in the presence of police and military (Wolf, 2017). Furthermore, Bukele has explicitly targeted incarcerated persons when there is a rise in homicides. For example, in April 2020, Bukele ordered prisons to allow rival gang members in the same cells and implement a cell lockdown (Human Rights Watch, 2020). These policies portray that the current government responds to gangs with punitive measures as opposed to rehabilitation services. This historical and political context is important to keep in mind throughout this study since it provides information about how the

youth are perceived by Salvadoran society and where they fit in the Salvadoran criminal justice system. This historical context also portrays the urgency in addressing prison conditions.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

A. The Panopticon: An Introduction to the Modern-Day Prison

Prior to analyzing the experiences of incarcerated persons, it is important to discuss how “criminal” identities come to being and what role they are assigned. Departing from Giorgio Agamben’s theories regarding the relationship between the state and the citizen, a helpful framework arises for analyzing the experiences of incarcerated persons. Agamben argues that citizens are separated based on whether the state includes or excludes them. That is to say that although people are able to become a part of a community, this does not imply they are able to participate in it (Agamben, 2003). He theorizes that there exists a “paradox of sovereignty” through which those entrusted with exercising power are able to exclude certain individuals by “suspending” certain laws for them (Agamben, 2003), such as through the enactment of punitive justice law. This is considered the “state of exception,” where the state is able to violate laws or norms in response to a “serious crisis threatening the state,” (Agamben, 2003) such as the gang crisis in El Salvador. In this specific study, the state exercises its sovereignty primarily through the Tonacatepeque-CIS institution, a juvenile detention center (i.e., a prison). This study seeks to apply Agamben’s theories to analyze the role of the Tonacatepeque-CIS personnel (the state) and their impact on the gang-affiliated incarcerated adolescents (the citizens).

Given that this study focuses on a juvenile detention center, I will offer context on the function of a prison. I turn to Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon project, which authors such as Michel Foucault depict as seeking to control and maintain structured social norms (Foucault, 1977). What started out as a theoretical project, Bentham’s panopticon has become the

framework for various institutions including the contemporary prison. Using the concept of utilitarianism, Bentham argues that “punishment” and “offense” (Bentham, 1787) are necessary tools to respond to individuals who, by disobeying the law, act against the interests of the community. Under this theory, Bentham assumes that the state is capable of creating laws meant to serve the needs of the majority of the population. However, this theory does not explain how the state seeks to meet the needs of those who are imprisoned. Indeed, Bentham explains that the panopticon is an institution meant to “punish the incorrigible” (Bentham). This implies that the criminal justice system envisioned by Bentham was primarily meant as a means for serving the needs of those who are not involved in the criminal justice system. According to Bentham’s analysis, punishments would only be prescribed to individuals when the outcome is “profitable” for the community (Bentham). This theory showcases the foundations of a punitive justice system.

Where do incarcerated persons fit into Bentham’s theoretical framework? The construction of their identity is exhibited throughout the design of the panopticon, which predominantly targets their humaneness. For example, in the panopticon, each individual is reminded of their deprived liberty as they are placed inside a small cell with a singular window and a door through which only the prison inspector can enter. Moreover, recreational activities that would allow them to express their interests and individuality are not allowed. For Bentham, recreational activities are meant to be a luxury for those who are incarcerated. However, a major emphasis of the design is to provide multiple measures that ensure the guard is connected with the outside world (Bentham). According to Bentham, the guards (“sovereign actors”) and the incarcerated persons are meant to be characterized by an imbalanced power dynamic as the inspector has more privileges and authority. As Bentham describes, the purpose of the

inspector's authority is to motivate the incarcerated persons to believe they are "constantly under inspection" even when they are not (Bentham). Due to this design, there are no measures in place to ensure transparency and accountability in the actions of the inspector. Bentham's design of the panopticon has influenced the creation of the American prison, which resembles that of El Salvador.

B. Challenging the Role of Rehabilitation Programs in Prisons

Critically pertinent to the discussion are the key perspectives offered by abolitionist theorists, who provide context on the goals of "rehabilitation." These include Michel Foucault, Angela Davis, and Victoria Law. They argue that prison conditions are not at all conducive to "restorative" practices or "healing" (Davis, 2003). Davis explains that in a prison, "There is no pretense that rights are respected, there is no concern for the individual" (Davis, 2003). Aligned with this sentiment, Victoria Law writes, "There's the question of whether rehabilitation can take place in an environment rife with violence, drugs, and chaos" (Law, 2021). In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault provides historical background for the function of a prison and discusses whether it can be viewed as a site of rehabilitation. According to Foucault's writing, the restrictive and often inhumane environment of a prison negates any objective of rehabilitation programs. Instead, prison conditions enforce the re-discipline, re-education, "correction," or "transformation" of the incarcerated person (Foucault, 1975). He explains this further in the excerpt provided below as incarcerated persons are "transformed" to conform to social order. Foucault describes how prisons enforce discipline by acting in the following oppressive ways:

"One can imagine the power of the education which, not only in a day, but in the succession of days and even years, may regulate for man the time of waking and sleeping, of activity and rest... the use of speech... of thought... the movements of the body, and

even in moments of rest, determines the use of time... this education, which, in short, takes possession of man as a whole, of all the physical and moral faculties... This complete 'reformatory' lays down a recoding of existence very different from the mere judicial deprivation of liberty." Foucault, 1975

In the excerpt above, it becomes clear that prisons control every aspect of the individual's existence. First, this is done to deprive them of liberty as a punishment in response to the misconduct that merited their incarceration. Second, it is a way to discipline, or "recode," them until they fit the norms of the state. Other scholars note that promises of rehabilitation are what drive punitive juvenile justice systems, and they critique how policymakers frame programs as a means to "cure young offenders of their criminal propensities" (Steingberg and Scott, 2008). However, why are punishment and discipline associated with rehabilitation programs? Is there room for non-oppressive forms of rehabilitation? According to Foucault, prisons place persons in imbalanced power relationships that allow for oppression (Foucault, 1995). He argues that in this power dynamic, the incarcerated population is taught to accept their "responsibility" in their own subjugation. This means that they have accepted their need to be disciplined—in other words, they accept their treatment (Foucault, 1995). This is described in the following passage:

"He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power... he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection." Foucault, 1975

This imbalance of power explains that in prisons, incarcerated persons are made to believe they need to be punished, disciplined, and corrected—that there is something wrong with them. The consequences of this notion will be discussed in more detail in the following section through Goffman's conceptualization of stigma (Goffman, 1963). However, Foucault is not the only scholar who does not believe prisons are conducive to rehabilitation. For instance, scholars also critique the manner by which prisons can determine how they treat persons based on who is

and is not “curable” (Steinberg and Scott, 2008). This means that rehabilitation programs have the potential to set the terms for deciding who is rehabilitated and who will never be.

Given that this paper presents a case study of a rehabilitation program initiative at the Tonacatepeque-CIS juvenile detention center in El Salvador, it is critical to consider theories offering insights on the oppressive conditions of prisons. Such theories provide insights on the limitations and implications of rehabilitation efforts. Informed by these theories, I apply Foucault’s writings to fill a gap in the literature regarding how rehabilitation programs can function without reliance on frameworks of discipline and punishment. What do rehabilitation programs need in order to support youth as opposed to supporting the prison’s oppression? In this study, I will contribute to the literature by providing evidence of rehabilitation services that result in youth exerting their own power over systems of social control, crafting their own narrative, and expressing their individuality.

C. Rehabilitation Programs as Mechanisms to Destigmatize Incarcerated Persons and Support the Expression of Their Individuality

In attempts to move beyond a punitive model of incarceration and center the discussion on the experiences of incarcerated persons, I turn to the authors of labeling, stigma, and deviance theories. These theories are pertinent to this study because they explain why certain people are subjected to oppressive conditions in prisons. More specifically, by discussing these theories, I explore how the state’s mechanisms of control stigmatize incarcerated populations both prior to entering the prison, while incarcerated, and post-incarceration. Authors of deviance and labeling theory explain that when there is deviation from societal norms, the state acts forcefully to correct it (Becker, 1963; Erikson, 1962; Platt, 1969; and Lemert, 2000). However, it is important to note that societal norms are dependent on socio-historical and geographical specificity

(Becker, 1963). For example, in this study, within the Salvadoran context, a gang affiliation is among the greatest motivations for labeling a person as deviant, and the response of the state is manifested in the Mano Dura (Iron First) tough-on-crime policies (Wolf, 2017).

According to Goffman, an individual is stigmatized when they are set apart from society for having an “identity discrepancy” in their appearance or behavior, otherwise known as a “sign.” He also explains that stigmatized identities tend to create new relationships with one another based on their stigmatized characteristics (Goffman, 1963). Through the process of stigmatization, non-stigmatized or “normal” members of society perceive the individual as “reduced” to a “tainted, discounted” person, which results in the limitation of the stigmatized person’s actions and self-expression (Goffman, 1963). Due to the stigma, “The stigmatized individual alienates himself from the community, or refrains from developing an attachment to the community in the first place” (Goffman, 1963). Throughout this study, I will apply Goffman’s theories on stigma to analyze the youth’s experiences in the Tonacatepeque-CIS and to answer the main question of this paper: how does the ConTextos rehabilitation program in the Tonacatepeque-CIS juvenile detention center support youth to deconstruct their stigma? However, prior to answering this question, I aim to address the following fundamental questions. First, why and how does the juvenile detention center stigmatize the youth? Second, how are they impacted by their stigmatized identities? In this study, I seek to use Goffman’s theories of stigma as a theoretical framework to guide my discussion on the case study of the Tonacatepeque-CIS. I aim to fill a gap in the literature by presenting an example of a rehabilitation service that works with a highly stigmatized society and supports the deconstruction of their stigmatized identities.

In seeking to re-envision rehabilitation programs and push back against punishment and discipline as norms in prisons, I turn to current literature similarly working to fulfill these ends. As previously discussed, rehabilitation programs have been misused as social control mechanisms, and because of this, scholars caution researchers to define their exact purpose and for the programs to focus on the particularities of the incarcerated population. Firstly, Martin 2017 explains that in creating prison policies, we must listen to the voices of those who were formerly incarcerated since “those closest to the problem are closest to the solution” (Martin, 2017). In this paper, I will contribute to the literature a case study that centers the voices of the youth who were interviewed. Secondly, Shedd Maruna adds that there must be a “de-labeling and [de-]stigmatizing” process that specifically seeks to reinforce the person’s “positive self-identity” prior to implementing any initiative aimed at preparing the individual for reintegration post-incarceration (Maruna et al., 2004). This point is particularly significant to this study as I will fill the gap in the literature regarding this need to “delabel” and “destigmatize” prior to implementing rehabilitation programs. In this study, I will describe how the ConTextos rehabilitation program specifically supports the youth’s ability to deconstruct their stigmatized identities, and, as a result, encourages them to embrace their individuality. Thirdly, authors such as Le Bel 2009 argue that to begin destigmatizing, we must change the rhetoric we use towards incarcerated people (Le Bel, 2009). This is also a critical consideration of this study throughout the discussion of how stigma is manifested in the CIS. Lastly, Law highlights the importance of understanding the background and needs of incarcerated persons. She does so by explaining the almost ironic reality of the individuals’ lack of services and governmental attention prior to their incarceration. She writes the following:

“Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines rehabilitation as the act of restoring something (or in this case, someone) to their former capacity... What does it mean to rehabilitate a

person to their former state if that state involves poverty, racism, unemployment, unstable housing, and/or violence? Can a person be rehabilitated if they have never been habilitated (or made fit or capable for society)?” (Law, 2021)

Law brings our attention to the failure of the criminal justice system to address the specific needs of the populations with which it interacts. For instance, taking the United States criminal justice system as an example, Angela Davis critiques the state’s inability to provide educational services. She explains that policymakers created a “pattern of dismantling educational programs behind bars” by withdrawing funding for 350 college-in-prison programs for incarcerated persons (Davis, 2003; Law, 2021). However, Angela Davis explains that these programs allow individuals to “discover the emancipatory potential of writing” and to address the challenges they face while incarcerated and in their home communities (Davis, 2003). She argues that policies to defund prison education and rehabilitation programs are “indicative of the official disregard today for rehabilitation strategies, particularly those that encourage individual prisoners to acquire autonomy of the mind” (Davis, 2003). This resembles the theory presented by the 2004 Maruna et. al study concluding that rehabilitation programs must destigmatize and ultimately reinforce the “positive self-identity” of incarcerated persons. These specific theories suggest that there is a consensus amongst scholars that education and rehabilitation programs are effective so long as they encourage the “autonomy of mind” or “positive self-identity” of incarcerated persons. In this study, I will refer to this optimal result by describing it as an expression of their individuality—free from labels, stigma, punishment, and discipline.

Throughout this study, I aim to fill a gap in the existing literature on rehabilitation programs by presenting a case study that confirms Maruna and Davis’s theory that non-oppressive rehabilitation programs are those that deconstruct stigma and aim to support youth in exhibiting their individuality.

C. Michael Lipsky and the Role of the Service Provider

Before analyzing the programming at the CIS-Tonacatepeque, it is necessary to consider the role of the prison personnel as “service providers.” In order to do this, it is particularly helpful to consider the work of Michael Lipsky, who writes about the “street level bureaucrat” (SLB), otherwise known as the “service provider” (Lipsky, 1980). Lipsky explains the various challenges encountered from delivering services to clients and how the service providers adapt their roles based on these difficulties. In the case of the Tonacatepeque-CIS, the street level bureaucrats include the psychologists, social workers, judicial representative, and teachers. Meanwhile, the incarcerated youth are their clients.

According to Lipsky, there exists a highly imbalanced relationship between the clients and the SLBs. Indeed, Lipsky explains that in order to gain client compliance, SLBs seek to “control” the resources the client desires or use the threat of force (Lipsky, 1980). This is particularly true for El Salvador, where it is common for incarcerated youth to lack access to education services. For context, as of 2014, the secondary-school enrolment rate was 37.9% compared to the average of 74% in Latin American countries (MINEC/DIGESTYC, 2015). This is troubling due to the fact that, according to Lipsky, under-resourced communities are more likely to accept the low-quality-services because “they have nothing with which to compare their experiences and have no basis for thinking that they deserve any better” (Lipsky, 1980). Lipsky provides critical context on the role of prisons—both from a more interpersonal and structural point of view. In the following sections, I will discuss the relationship between the SLB and client in order to better understand the conditions of the Tonacatepeque-CIS and to analyze whether rehabilitation programs support the adolescents in “deconstructing” their stigmatized identities.

i. Goal Ambiguity

In order to understand the relationship between the SLB and the client, we must consider the institutional directors of the organization, who have a vested interest in the development of service provision. On the one hand, the SLBs are preoccupied with “minimiz[ing] the danger and discomforts of the job” and “maximiz[ing] income and personal gratification” (Lipsky, 1980). On the other hand, directors’ goals are “result-oriented” because they are concerned with “productivity and effectiveness” (Lipsky, 1980). Where does this “ambiguity” of goals stem from? Lipsky presents two theories. Firstly, there is the problem of strategy regarding the “social-engineering goals,” i.e., the higher-level goals to enact change on a wider scale. According to Lipsky, at this level, goal ambiguity is possible because “conflicts that existed when programs were originally developed were submerged,” including the directors’ and the community’s expectations for the social change (Lipsky, 1980). For example, rehabilitation techniques in detention centers are typically seen in conflict with the “isolation of convicted criminals from the rest of society” (Lipsky, 1980). Secondly, there is the problem of “uncertainties” regarding the functionality of the SLB’s use of “technologies” (Lipsky, 1980). Lipsky claims that this leads to the “modification of objectives to suit the techniques” (Lipsky, 1980). This theoretical foundation concerning the role of directors is relevant to this study as it will help inform an analysis of the CIS directors’ interview responses.

ii. Discretionary Practices: An Unequal Distribution of Resources and Its Influence on Client Identity-Formation

According to Lipsky, the SLBs exercise discretion to determine how they will distribute resources and who will receive them. SLBs refer to a “criteria of worthiness” which is based on who is most likely to “respond to treatment” (Lipsky, 1980). This decision is “supported by the

racism and prejudices that permeate the society” (Lipsky, 1980), which relates directly to the previously mentioned theory on stigma (Goffman, 1963). For example, in the education setting, teachers will refer to a student’s race and income to determine which students are “expected to achieve” (Lipsky, 1980). This practice is referred to as “tracking” children, and it influences the student’s “self-image, self-expectations, and actual achievement” (Lipsky, 1980). Another example is that of students who are sent to solitary confinement and deemed “unworthy” of help (Lipsky, 1980). Similar to Goffman’s theory on stigma, Lipsky makes the connection that this form of treatment creates “self-fulfilling prophecies” (Lipsky, 1980), whereby the clients “conform” to the bureaucratic expectations of their behavior, such as those of “deviants.” In this way, SLBs impact the identity-formation—or “social construction”—of clients.

How is this phenomenon possible? Lipsky posits that the stigmatized identity is a product not only of societal stereotypes, but primarily, of the SLB’s work environment. He explains that to carry out their work, SLBs “process people in terms of routines, stereotypes, and other mechanisms that facilitate work tasks” (Lipsky, 1980). They adapt to performing their job in ways that allow them to “cope” (Lipsky, 1980) with heavy caseloads, limited time, and misinformation (Lipsky, 1980). According to Lipsky, resource deficit is a consistent challenge for SLBs, and they respond to it through “client differentiation” (Lipsky, 1980). For example, those teachers who track their students based on a criterion of worthiness do so in response to the school’s resource limitations.

In this way, differentiation between clients becomes a “bureaucratically functional” strategy for their work—rather, a “form of simplification” (Lipsky, 1980). The longer this practice goes unaddressed, the more it constructs stigmatized identities. That is, Lipsky argues that SLBs grow prone to resisting change “because it threatens the existence of coping routines and

orientations that serve to rationalize the work” (Lipsky, 1980). Another cause of this phenomenon concerns the previously mentioned goal ambiguity. Indeed, SLBs are expected to handle clients with the sole purpose of completing work efficiently. However, this introduces the possibility of “rubber stamping,” which refers to the practice amongst SLBs of sharing with one another labels they’ve created for other clients that allows them to assume the needs of those individuals. For instance, Lipsky mentions the label of “trouble-maker” in a school (Lipsky, 1980).

Lipsky’s descriptions of client differentiation are particularly significant for understanding how the prison personnel contribute to constructing the youth’s stigmatized identities. Throughout this paper, I will contribute to the literature a case study of how rehabilitation programs can simultaneously counteract stigma-inducing prison conditions by addressing the SLBs’ coping routines.

iii. Accountability and Measurement of Services

With such ambiguous organizational goals, another issue arises: the measurement and evaluation of performance. For example, Lipsky notes that organizations grow to “expect” SLBs to use their discretion, and therefore, it is a challenge to measure their performance without a standard of comparison. This leads to three trends. Firstly, teachers are “rarely” visited in classrooms. Secondly, performance evaluations become highly quantitative despite Lipsky’s assertion that quantitative measures such as the youth’s participation in the CIS programs “have nothing to do with the appropriateness of workers’ actions, or the fairness with which they were made” (Lipsky). Lastly, when the SLB feels unable to meet the goals, Lipsky explains, they are likely to resort to “absenteeism, high turnover... [and] general psychological withdrawal” as a coping mechanism (Lipsky).

Along with the previously mentioned authors, in this study, I will use Lipsky's theories to inform a theoretical framework. I aim to fill the gap in the literature concerning how the Salvadoran prison system allows stigma-inducing treatment to persist at the CIS through client differentiation, coping routines, and goal ambiguity. Furthermore, these theories will inform the policy recommendations at the end of this paper.

Methodology

A. Overview of Data Collection

For a period of seven weeks during the months of July and August, I conducted ethnographic field research in the field site of Santa Tecla, El Salvador. This study was conducted as part of a larger study to which I was contributing named "Trust After Betrayal: Organized Interventions in Contexts of Violence" conducted by the London School of Economics and Political Science Latin America and Caribbean Centre. This study centered on the Pionero Project being implemented by the Salvadoran non-profit organization named ConTextos. The Pionero Project is an educational initiative in El Salvador to improve the quality of conditions for youth at the Tonacatepeque *Centro de Integración* (CIS) juvenile detention center. By working for the ConTextos organization, I had the authority to enter the CIS and speak with the CIS personnel and youth.

Throughout this study, the researcher interviewed various actors involved in the design and implementation of the education component of Pionero. The Pionero Project is part of a larger project involving other NGOs and funded by donors such as UNICEF, PNUD, ISNA, and El Salvador's Ministry of Education (MinEd). ISNA is the country's committee designated to protect the rights of children and adolescents in contexts of detention. This included a total of approximately 50 interviews with the ConTextos employees, the project's donors, the personnel

at the Tonacatepeque CIS detention center, and the youth in detention. The personnel at the CIS are divided between the school staff, the judicial representative, the detention officers, and the *equipo técnico*. The *equipo técnico* refers to the team in charge of the psychosocial support of the youth including two psychologists, and three social workers. The school staff includes one school director and four teachers. Moreover, twelve of the total interviews were with four youth in detention who agreed to be a part of “life history interviews.” The rest of the interviews were semi-structured following an interview guide with questions that were validated by members of the ConTextos Monitoring and Evaluation team. Written or verbal permission from each respondent was collected, and the interviews were recorded and collected on a secure server. The information they provided was anonymized and they were given pseudonyms in this report, which are included in an interview chart in Appendix A.

B. Methodological considerations pertaining to interview structure and participant characteristics (see references in bibliography)

There were various methodological considerations involved in the developing the interview process of the youth. Firstly, for the youth participants, interviews were organized in a panel format and the question followed the “life history” model. The panel format allowed for the same participants to be interviewed multiple times. Meanwhile, the life history model allowed for questions pertaining to the following: their lives prior to entering the detention center, their experiences inside the center, and their plans following release. Secondly, the semi-structured method called for an interview guide through which ethical considerations could be taken into account, such as how to address certain childhood topics with language that will not retraumatize youth. Also, semi-structured interviews were utilized because the study has a specific motivating question, and they allow the interviewer to use a pre-written interview guide

and ask follow-up questions that are not pre-written. The interview guide can be accessed in Appendix B. Thirdly, prior to commencing the life history interviews, the researcher conducted an exercise entitled the “life history calendar.” This exercise primarily focused on the youth’s experiences with the ConTextos organization’s workshops. Its purpose was to create a timeline of events by prompting participants to remember their interactions with ConTextos and share vignettes of experiences from their perspective.

Lastly, a purposeful sampling model was utilized in order to select participants based on a criterion created by the researchers and the ConTextos NGO professionals’ judgment. This criterion was chosen based on the following: level of engagement during the ConTextos workshops, active/inactive status in the gang, and general participation at the detention center. For instance, there were four total youth participants. Two of them were from Sector 3 (the “Hexágono”) of the detention center, one of them was from Sector 2, and the fourth participant was from Sector 1. At the detention center, the Hexágono is for active gang members, Sector 2 is for youth who are no longer active and require protection, and Sector 1 is for youth who have not received their sentences yet and they can be either active or non-active. In this study, the participant from Sector 1 was active in the gang. Also, in this study, the four youth were described by ConTextos staff as participants who had originally struggled, but progressively became more engaged in workshops.

In regard to the interviews with non-youth participants, they were similarly conducted in a semi-structured format as opposed to a non-structured or a mixed structure. The interview guide can be accessed in Appendix C. The participants included all of the members of the ConTextos Pionero team. Of the CIS personnel, the study included responses from four of the six professors at the CIS detention center school, the school director, the judicial representative, and

the entirety of the *equipo técnico* (two psychologists and three social workers). Of the four professors at the CIS, two of them were women in order to understand the gendered dynamics of the CIS. Of the Pionero Project donors, the respondents included one UNICEF official, one PNUD official, one ISNA official, and three MinEd officials. This last category of participants was selected with the support of the ConTextos team, who recommended officials who have been the most involved with the design of the Pionero Project.

Also, important to note, due to the nature of the research taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic, various interviews were conducted virtually over Zoom or Google Meets.

C. Ethics and Interviewer Considerations

At the beginning of each interview, I provided each participant with a copy of a consent form and we read it together in its entirety. I answered each of their questions and asked them if they understood how the information would be used. Furthermore, I explained to them that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Specifically, with the youth, I explained that their information would be kept confidential, and their names would be anonymized and assigned a pseudonym. Interviews were conducted from a trauma-informed perspective as I made sure to not push youth to share unnecessary details about any past traumatic experiences. I constantly asked them if they felt comfortable, we took periodic breaks, and I encouraged them to speak with their psychologist or social worker after our meeting. These measures were taken as an acknowledgement to my position as researcher. I made sure the interview process was as least transactional as possible, and I sought to protect the trust we created in our relationship as researcher-interviewee.

During the initial process of organizing interviews, I was cautioned by ConTextos to avoid using certain language with the CIS personnel, such as “investigation” and “evaluation.”

This was done with the purpose of decreasing my presence as a person of authority. I was presented as a researcher attempting to systematize the Pionero Project and learn about its implementation as opposed to someone with any authority over evaluating the personnel's performance. In regard to the youth, my presence at the CIS ignited curiosity given that they are not used to frequent visits by non-CIS personnel. However, since the ConTextos personnel introduced me to them during one of their workshops, and the youth trusted them, I was generally accepted by the youth. When we began the interviews, the youth disclosed information about their personal lives although they also restricted their responses regarding matters of their involvement with the gang. This was particularly true for youth who were still active in the gang.

Furthermore, my presentation as a relatively young female interviewer was both an advantage and disadvantage. That is, in the CIS context, as well as in the Salvadoran context, young female workers are perceived as less professional than older male individuals. This was the case for "Ivy," who began her work at the CIS through ConTextos as the age of twenty-two. She explained that gaining legitimacy as a psychologist at the CIS was difficult due to her age and sex. This was true in my case as an interviewer; however, being perceived as less professional was beneficial because it made me appear more approachable and less likely to be conducting an evaluation that can have repercussions on the CIS personnel.

In addition, daily field notes were compiled, accounting for about forty entries each of an average of ten pages in length. Any notes written by the NGO personnel during team meetings were photographed. Lastly, two different workshops for the NGO's employees were administered and recorded for future reference. The first workshop served to provide the ConTextos personnel with the space to reflect on the mission of their organization and identify any points of disagreement amongst themselves on how to reach the team mission. The second

workshop was meant to provide the ConTextos team with the space to discuss the actors they must collaborate with in order to reach their mission and how these actors may challenge them along the way.

Results

In the following sections, I will discuss the responses of several of the actors involved in the implementation of the Pionero Project at the Tonacatepeque-CIS. The evidence serves to provide context on how each actor's role in the project impacts the youth. The aim of this analysis is to contribute to the literature on rehabilitation programs by presenting an example of a case study where incarcerated youth deconstruct their stigmatized identities and, as a result, express their individuality. This is motivated by the urgency for improved conditions in Salvadoran juvenile detention centers.

Part I: Introduction to Proyecto Pionero

In the following sections, I will first provide background on the population with which the Pionero Project works and discuss moments in their lives prior to incarceration when they could express their individuality. Second, I will discuss the context of Salvadoran tertiary prevention programs that create challenging working conditions. Third, I will contextualize the CIS working culture by providing a discussion on how the CIS personnel adapt to prison conditions and how this results in the construction of the youth's stigmatized identities.

A. The Context of the Tonacatepeque Youth Prior to Their Incarceration

i. Lack of Accommodation and Counseling Opportunities in Schools

During the life history interviews, the four youth respondents shared their experiences with schooling prior to entering the Tonacatepeque-CIS. They provided insights into the teaching techniques and school environments that contributed most to their learning and development and

the most challenging aspects of their experiences. Based on the interviews, it is evident that the youths' schools were unable to adapt to their needs.

For instance, I found that educational experiences are cut short for students who require special education. This was the case for David, who explained that on multiple occasions, he was denied access to schooling due to his medical condition of epilepsy. He said the following:

"I only attended the first and second grade in school. I got sick with epilepsy. I would begin shaking. Then, the school told my mom that we needed to find a special education school because they could not take on the responsibility of my epilepsy. We went to the special education principal, and he rejected us because they lacked resources. My mom told me we would need to try again next year. I was sad because they told me I was not going to school anymore." "David," 19 years old, Sector 2

From a young age, David was denied his right to schooling despite his desire to attend. Based on David's response, it is apparent that he believed his epilepsy was a burden that governmental institutions were not willing or prepared to take on. He and his family were left bouncing between service providers. In response to this governmental insufficiency, David's brother became his tutor, but they met infrequently. Without the structure of school, David explained that he did not feel any motivation to do his homework. Instead, at thirteen years old, he began to work a job. After work, he would "leave the house a lot" to go find members of the neighborhood *pandilla*. He explained the following:

"Whatever I made at work was for marijuana, cigarettes, and my vices. After work, I would go to the mountains with los bichos (the boys). I couldn't sleep because I was on guard duty, watching out for any police. When the police would come, everyone had to run away. Even when I slept at home, I couldn't sleep because I was on guard duty. No, I only had one thing in my mind. From the start until the end, my dream was to be a good pandillero. I wanted the respect of others." "David," 19 years old, Sector 2

In the *pandilla*, David was given a job to help his peers, and his sole goal was to fulfill this task, climb the ranks, and receive the same respect he gave to his superiors. Feeling rejected and looking for a space to belong, David resorted to the *pandilla* for a community. This

trajectory helps inform a discussion on what characteristics rehabilitation programs need. For David, in order to feel a part of a community, it is important for him to have the ability to express his identity and his interests.

The need for a community becomes more apparent through the stories of Cristian, Brandon, and Alex. That is, both Cristian and Brandon experienced traumatic moments in their childhoods as both of their brothers were murdered during gang warfare. Brandon explained that he continued to be affected by this event, and that he was still processing his loss. According to Brandon, although he had a big family, he lacked a supportive environment at home, and his school similarly did not act as a support system. He expressed that he could not feel comfortable in his own community. He said:

“I did not like that where I live, there are so many places selling beer. Everyone would make so much noise, especially if it was the weekend. I would put on my earphones to not hear anything. I would listen to electronic music. Music relaxes me. It helps me forget where I am.” “Brandon,” 19 years old, Sector 1

For Brandon, “escaping” was a coping mechanism for his uncomfortable home environment. However, “escape” can be embodied in various forms since it is dependent on the person’s interests. For instance, youth in the CIS described the ConTextos workshops as allowing them to escape their context of incarceration and remember their interests prior to being detained.

Unlike the other youth, Cristian explained that he was able to find adults he could trust at school as a support system. He explained the following:

“I would visit my science teacher and she would counsel me. I would reflect. She would see the best in me. She was like family. I could share my problems and talk to her about things I couldn't talk to my own family about. She treated me well. She would tell me, ‘We all have problems, but we do not need to become those problems.’ Her words stay with me. I do the best that I can to find the way out of a problem.” “Cristian,” 19 years old, Sector 3 “El Hexágono”

From this example, it becomes clear that counseling opportunities at school provide students with coping strategies to overcome challenging situations. However, none of the interviewees mentioned any guidance counselors as support systems, and Cristian was the only adolescent who described having any form of trusting relationship with an adult at school. Instead of acting as counselors, instructors served as disciplinarians who relied heavily on punishments. In Alex's experience, he and his friends were frequently singled out by the instructor for misbehaving. However, the instructors were not concerned with following-up on the causes of the adolescent's behaviors, and Alex did not regard his behavior as misconduct. Ultimately, Alex dropped out of school since he lacked a connection to the school environment and could not express motivation to learn. He explained the following:

"We would throw paper at the teacher and then act like it wasn't us," he said laughing. "There were a lot of punishments for this, but I would still act freely. The teachers always threatened to call my parents, but I wasn't scared. They would end up sending me downstairs to clean the school. I felt absolute. I did not think about my parents. I stopped going to school, and I did not tell my parents. I would pretend I went, but no, I was going somewhere else to do my things. I'd have a friend bring me the work, and I would send back the notebook." "Alex," 20 years old, Sector 3 "El Hexágono"

Through Alex's life history, it is possible to gain insights into the lack of support his school provided. His teachers considered him a trouble-maker and would send him to clean the school as a punishment as opposed to discussing his conduct. Notably, after having dropped out of school, he continued to submit his work, and neither his teachers nor his parents followed up on his absence.

In all four adolescents' experiences with their education systems, there was a lack of adjustment on the part of the instructors and school personnel to accommodate external factors impacting the youth. This is important to keep in mind as the study explores whether the CIS

personnel was able and willing to adapt to the particularities of the incarcerated and gang-affiliated youth.

ii. Individuality and the Destigmatized Adolescent Prior to Incarceration

Throughout the conversations with the youth, there were also significant moments during which they each described hobbies or skills they practiced prior to their incarceration. When they described these experiences, the excitement came across as their eyes widened, their voices became higher, and they spoke a bit faster. It is particularly significant to discuss these elements of their lives in order to paint a more authentic life history of the youth—one that is not solely centered on their label of “problem children” at school or “prisoners” at the CIS. These moments in their life histories are examples of when they were able to invoke their decision-making power and autonomy to craft their lives how they wished to craft them regardless of any challenges they faced at home or school. In sharing these experiences, the youth vocally express their interests and passions; they demonstrate their individuality or “autonomy of the mind” (Davis, 2003).

For instance, Cristian described that at a young age, he lived in the countryside and enjoyed the activities available to him, such as riding his horses and farming. He explained the following:

“We had five horses. One was yellow and the other dark-colored. I sowed beans with my father. For this reason, it feels good to do agricultural workshops here. I lived with my grandparents for five years, but I had to seguir adelante (persevere) for my mother. I had this obligation...due to the path I took.” He shook his head. “I had to remember the counsel my family gave me.” “Cristian,” 19 years old, Sector 3 “Hexágono”

In this example, riding horses and farming were Cristian’s means for finding ways to enjoy his childhood and adolescence. Despite the familial and *pandilla*-related obligations confronting him, he recognized that his identity was not solely determined by the challenges he faced during his adolescence or by his gang membership.

In a similar manner, when discussing his experiences at school, Alex shared that his favorite activities included making and flying kites. Recall that Alex stopped attending school and was considered a “troublemaker” by his instructors. By sharing his interest in kites, Alex revealed other elements of his identity that may have been overlooked by individuals and institutions ascribing labels to him. Alex described a kite-flying contest that he won after he entered it spontaneously. He shared the following:

“There was a piscucha (kite) contest to see who could fly it the highest, and I did not sign up, but I won it. I just wanted to fly; ni modo (whatever). People were mad at me because I won! This was the gym teacher’s class that did it and I was about 12 or 13 years old.” He talks fast and moves in his chair. The metal on his handcuffs clinks together. “When I was younger, I would fly them in the fields in rural regions. I would make kites of suns and dresses. It involved science and engineering and creativity. I like to do this and I would do it again. Fue un gran desmadre, un vergazo (it was a great mess, it was awesome).” “Alex,” 20 years old, Sector 3 “Hexágono”

Through this experience, Alex had the opportunity to develop his creativity and engineering skills despite not engaging with his education through traditional schooling. This showcases the youth’s ability to act as autonomous agents, discover their interests, and explore them. Especially due to his current context of incarceration where his autonomy is constantly challenged, it is important to include elements of Alex’s adolescent trajectory during which a stigmatized identity did not inhibit his ability to participate in activities he found meaningful. While analyzing the programming at the Tonacatepeque-CIS, I will utilize the theories of scholars like Davis and Law to gain insight into whether the youth can deconstruct their stigmatized identities and embrace their individuality—the “autonomy of the mind” (Davis, 2003).

B. Stigma and Goal Ambiguity at the Tonacatepeque-CIS

As evidenced by the above experiences of the four adolescents, the youth entering the Tonacatepeque-CIS are not the stereotypical “criminals” unwilling to engage in non-criminal activities. However, they are likely to lack trust in the Salvadoran educational systems given their history of poor relationships with governmental institutions. Under this context, how does the Pionero Project effectively engage the incarcerated youth? To answer this question, in this following section, I will describe the intended goals of the Pionero Project, discuss how each governmental institution plays a role in the lives of the youth, and ultimately, question the project’s implementation on the field given the limitations of the Tonacatepeque-CIS.

i. ConTextos Goals for the Pionero Project

During various interviews, the ConTextos employees explained that the project’s main intention was to equip incarcerated youth with socioemotional abilities, vocational skills, and the capacity to imagine their lives beyond the CIS. One of the team’s social workers, whose pseudonym is “Silvia,” explained that with every lesson learned, the students must question how they intend to use those newly acquired skills to support their communities. Silvia referred to this as a “transcendence.” To enact this, the ConTextos team designed a socio-emotional tool called the “*Proyecto Ético de Vida*” (Ethical Project of Life) which was a lesson plan that challenged youth to envision themselves outside of the prison. Over a period of three months, the youth were asked to consider the following: their childhood dreams, the challenges they faced in reaching them, their present-day dreams, and how they would overcome current challenges to reach their goals in the future. Through this process, the adolescent was meant to “resignify” their lives by imagining themselves post-incarceration. For more clarity on the goals of the project, consider the following description by ConTextos’ Pionero Project Designer:

“When I started at ConTextos, I looked at the whole picture. Educación para que? (Education for what?) Our model is centered on the individual and its aims to see them transcend. The técnico (technical) and the ético (ethical) are at work together. The youth is meant to recognize that this is a moment in their lives for which they are responsible. It is a transcendence with a consequence. Their decisions have consequences. This leads to the Proyecto Ético de Vida.” “Patricia,” ConTextos Pionero Project Designer

This type of programming proposes a mode of rehabilitation that encourages the youth to embrace their individuality by developing decision-making skills and moving beyond their stigmatized identities. The effectiveness of this project is the focus of this study. At least in the theory of the project, the ConTextos team attempts to avoid stigmatizing the youth as “criminals” who cannot change their life course. Throughout this study, I will consider how ConTextos’ theory fares as it is put to the test by actors implementing the project.

ii. The Role of Governmental Institutions in the Pionero Project: A Disregard for Tertiary Prevention Projects

Although ConTextos acted as the design directors of the project, they reported to the donors and operation directors, including the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Ministry of Education, Science, and Industry (MINEDUCYT or “MinEd”), and the Salvadoran Institute for the Integral Development of Children and Adolescents (ISNA). The UN agencies served as the main donors while the MinEd and ISNA served as the operational directors given that the Tonacatepeque-CIS was legally under their purview. This meant that ConTextos could not technically implement any part of the project without the formal approval of the MinEd and ISNA. In order to better understand ConTextos’ rehabilitation project, in this section, I will discuss how members from each organization perceived their roles and the project’s goals. The main takeaway from conversations

with these actors is that, historically, project emphasis has been on primary prevention as opposed to tertiary.

As ConTextos employee Martin noted, “The MinEd was originally considering closing the centers, removing teachers, subcontracting from other firms, and finding new teachers... Instead, it looked for a project like Pionero to improve the CIS centers.” This lack of interest in tertiary prevention was exhibited throughout interviews with MinEd officers who explained that the MinEd’s priority was to “make sure fewer people come into the CIS.” lack of confidence in the Pionero Project altogether. MinEd project Director of Inclusive Education “Daniel” added that “We [the MinEd] should develop projects that are more preventative.” His response provides evidence of the Salvadoran government’s dedication to primary prevention models. Because of this, according to the Director of Social Integration at ISNA “Alan,” it is difficult to receive funding for projects to help adolescents at the CIS because “not many people care about this population.” Alan’s response signals the stigma held towards tertiary models.

The result is that governmental institutions are left inexperienced at addressing the needs of the CIS. As Daniel explained, prior to the project, the MinEd did not provide educational or rehabilitation programming that was specific to the adolescent populations in any of the nation’s four juvenile detention centers. Ironically, the director of inclusive education explained the for the past two decades, the MinEd has been incapable of including specifically tailored curriculums for the CIS population. He said the following:

“We have to say this with all honesty, at the educational level, we are not prepared to give a realistic or dynamic attention to the CIS because as teachers, we prepare to go to regular schools in the community that have a relationship and communication with the youth’s families. But in the Centers, the communication is with ISNA and with the authorities and CIS personnel.” “Daniel,” Director of Inclusive Education

The consequences of this lack of attention are evidenced by the fact that, according to the UNICEF representative “Maria,” the MinED “could not implement the Pionero Project on their own.” She explained that it was “very rare” for UNICEF to “implement projects” since it would typically only provide support to government institutions like the MinEd or ISNA. However, as Maria explained, due to the MinEd’s lack of experience working with the CIS population, UNICEF “had to find ConTextos, or some partner organization to implement it *with* us or *for* us.” Ultimately, the PNUD representative “Esteban” confirmed that it was not the UN’s goal to ensure the sustainability of the Pionero Project. Esteban explained that it was meant to serve as a trial, and, if successful, he hoped it would be taken on by the CIS more permanently, but this depended on the MinEd and ISNA, too.

Furthermore, the MinEd’s disregard for the CIS has resulted in underresourced spaces, which, as Lipsky notes, influences the work of the CIS personnel. As CIS professor “Cindy” explains, without any classroom space, the CIS cannot hold any vocational or educational workshops. The following list provides the personnel’s grievances: there are only two psychologists, there is only one bathroom, there are only three classrooms, electricity and water are scarce, and teachers cannot access computers or the internet. She also added that when the personnel begin work at the CIS, they are given on training and instead, they are expected to train each other and learn from first-hand experience. She raised the following question: “How is it helpful to have so many institutions yet still have no resources and insufficient support for teachers to hold lessons?” The ConTextos team similarly expressed that teachers at the CIS had been using the same lessons from ten to fifteen years ago. This failure to respond to the needs of the CIS is explained by instances when, according to MinEd Director of Basic Education “Jackie,” the CIS personnel are invited to meetings where the instructions are not applicable to

their work. “The teachers feel they are called to these meetings for no reason. We need to change this,” she said. Indeed, professor Cindy criticized the MinEd for its ignorance of the needs of the incarcerated youth. In response to “what would you change about the CIS curriculum?” she described the following:

“I would change the books. If only the people who designed the books were with them... one thing is what a project brings and what it asks of us, but another is what the youth need. It would be very different. The youth tell me, ‘Here it says we have to look it up online.’ So I take it home since we don’t have access to the internet. I would like the MinEd to get to know the needs of the youth, so that they can develop better themes within the books.” “Cindy,” CIS Professor

Given the MinEd’s lack of experience working with tertiary prevention projects, how could they design an educational and rehabilitation project? During the design process of the Pionero Project, according to UNICEF representative Maria, a big challenge was convincing each institution to agree upon the project’s model. UNICEF agreed with ConTextos that the project needed to include “psychosocial, vocational, and explicitly educational skills, as well as life skills, art skills, and recreation.” However, it became clear that the MinEd, ISNA, and UN organizations differed in priorities. Using Lipsky’s theories, it is possible to understand MinEd’s goals as “result-oriented” and concerned with “productivity and effectiveness” (Lipsky, 1980). For instance, according to Jackie, the MinEd was less preoccupied with non-educational goals of the project, and according to Daniel, “concrete discipline” is the priority. They explained that the MinEd felt “frustrated” at the project’s emphasis on socioemotional workshops. However, socioemotional support has been one of ConTextos’ top priorities. Given that Lipsky cautions against goal ambiguity as harmful to the implementation of a project, the consequences of a lack of consensus regarding ConTextos’ goals will be analyzed in this study.

iii. The Role of Governmental Institutions in the Pionero Project: The Makings of an “Isla Abandonada”

As a result of the lack of investment in the CIS and tertiary prevention projects, the CIS staff have developed a sense of “abandonment.” This is particularly significant when considering how it will affect the youth, who have past negative experiences with governmental institutions.

ConTextos employee “Betty” explained that the MinEd employs an “education evaluator,” who is in charge of observing and evaluating whether the CIS personnel are teaching the youth. This representative is also meant to offer technical advice. However, according to Betty, “She never visits the CIS,” and Betty hypothesized that it was “because she is afraid of the youth.” This claim is possible given that the youth are stigmatized, but it is also possible that the evaluator never visits due to the more general lack of concern for tertiary prevention programs.

Betty expressed the following:

“The director and one of the teachers sends her the grades, documents, and administrative work. She does not visit the CIS. ConTextos is the one who does the role of the MinEd by giving accompaniment to the CIS personnel.” “Betty,” ConTextos Teacher Liaison

As a result of this abandonment, there is a lack of accountability in the CIS personnel’s performance and implementation of the Pionero Project goals. Consequently, the youth will be deprived of quality services. Primarily, CIS professor Cindy explained that teachers become “*acostumbrados*” or “too comfortable” with their jobs because “the idea of change scares many of us.” Betty explained that because “MinEd has left them forgotten, they are afraid of adapting.” She added that the CIS personnel often argue they cannot complete their work “because of the context of the CIS.” As Lipsky explains, SLBs resist change because it would threaten the “coping routines and orientations” they created to handle clients and do their work efficiently

(Lipsky, 1980). Evidence of this includes professor Leslie's account of her unwillingness to complete certain aspects of the project. She said the following:

"They gave us a new format after we finished implementing the first format. I did not work that second format, maybe only with the eighth grade. I got frustrated by the change." "Leslie," CIS Professor

A second consequence of the sense of abandonment is a fear and hostility towards evaluations and a lack of trust in external organizations. This fear and distrust makes it more difficult to hold the CIS accountable of meeting the goals of the Pionero Project. This was most evident during my first few days on site: I was told to avoid using any language that could cause personnel to think they are being evaluated. I was told to avoid using rhetoric such as "investigator." Betty added context by noting that the personnel were afraid of the MinEd firing workers.

A major goal of ConTextos is to create programming that will be adapted by the CIS personnel and offered to future generations of incarcerated youth. This means that it is important for the project to convince personnel that the support of the Pionero Project is beneficial for the youth. Accordingly, as professor Cindy claims, the youth are able to interact and converse with new people who come from different experiences. She also expresses that it helps her to no longer feel unsupported. However, during one particular interview, CIS professor "Gabriel" expressed his animosity towards the project. He does so by using the point of view of the CIS youth. He said the following:

"If something happens to us, they [the CIS youth] are there on the defensive. They do not like it when people from outside come in to mandarnos (command us). One time, this person came to evaluate the classes, and the adolescents did not like this. They asked, 'How is it possible that someone from outside can come in and inspect how the teachers do the classes?'" "Gabriel," CIS professor

This response showcases how certain CIS personnel will use the voice of the youth to their advantage. Throughout his response, he used a threatening tone as if to paint the youth as the teachers' defensive guards. He also highlighted his indignation when he shared how an adolescent would respond to a teacher evaluating his class. Given the CIS personnel's fear of evaluations, could it be possible that this professor is using the youth inauthentically to advocate against external evaluators? Answering this question may be beyond the scope of this study; however, it is important to take away from this vignette the animosity of certain CIS personnel.

Furthermore, CIS personnel are hesitant to believe that the project will be sustainable. It is possible that this is due to the personnel understanding that there is a lack of interest in tertiary prevention programs. For instance, physical education professor "Eddie" recalled his experience in 2011 when he worked with an external NGO that visited the CIS to offer art and music workshops. Frustrated, he explained that ISNA "lets projects go to waste." He said the following:

"You should ask our Director to show you the pianos and keyboards from 2011. They're saved away. Rotting... ConTextos brought us four computers. How many are at the CIS? None. ISNA has always been and will be an obstacle for the academic environment. They cannot administer the workshops on their own." "Eddie," CIS professor

Does this lack of confidence in external organizations' projects impact the work of the SLBs? CIS psychologist "Mateo" argued that the lack of sustainable projects could be owed in part to the existing goal ambiguity between higher-level directors. He argues that neither the MinEd nor ISNA would be able to produce the same results as ConTextos because "different organizations have different visions and different goals." Following this notion, the rehabilitation and educational programming created by ConTextos would cease to exist.

However, offering a silver lining, CIS psychologist "Moises" explained that there is a difference between working for ISNA and working for the adolescents. He said, "If Pionero is just another program that happened and ends, I will continue doing my work with the

adolescents.” The implications of adapting to the context of the CIS will be further discussed below.

iv. An Introduction to the CIS

At the Tonacatepeque-CIS, the personnel include an *equipo técnico* (psychologists, social workers, and the judicial representative) and the school faculty. The majority of the personnel has worked at the CIS for a period between ten and fifteen years with the exception of a few workers who have been there for less than five years. As the street-level bureaucrats (SLB), their interpretation of the Pionero Project’s goals and the way they navigate their work at the CIS is significant to the outcomes of the project. Following Lipsky’s theories regarding the SLB, it is critical to understand the context and culture of the CIS prior to understanding how the SLBs implement their roles in the Pionero Project and adapt to the limitations of the CIS.

To paint a picture of the CIS, I begin by describing my experience visiting the Tonacatepeque-CIS for the first time with the ConTextos staff. The CIS is kept hidden away in a corner of Tonacatepeque—a small town with pebble roads, diverse vegetation, and colorful buildings—where the roads are much rockier and it is difficult to pass through. The CIS is kept locked away behind a massive metal gate that is about twenty feet tall. When we approached it, a security guard dressed in the PNC uniform and holding a rifle approached us to ask for our identification. Once inside, there is a small rocky parking lot that leads to an open area with picnic tables where CIS personnel eat their lunches. The CIS appears small since it is a single-storey building and the only part visible to outsiders is the entrance, where a security guard stands next to a metal detector. However, once past the metal detector, it becomes clear that the CIS is a large and highly fragmented space as the youth, teachers, and *equipo técnico* operate separate from one another. We first entered an office space, where the *equipo técnico*’s offices

are located. There is constant traffic in this area as CIS directors, psychologists, and social workers move about. However, only one or two adolescents are allowed in this area at a time for counseling, and they are handcuffed and accompanied by a guard at all times. Moreover, it is uncommon for teachers to spend time in this office space. Straight ahead, there is another door where another guard stands. Past the door, there is a long path that leads to an open space where there is a small outdoor auditorium. To the side of this space, there are two doors: one leads to the classrooms and the teacher's lounge, and the other that leads to the living spaces of youth from the *Hexágono* (Sector 3).

v. The Challenges of Working with Gang-Affiliated Youth; Managing Trauma; and Working in a Gendered Environment

Across all facets of the CIS, the implications of working with gang-affiliated youth is prevalent. For instance, due to safety reasons, the living spaces of the Sector 2 and Sector 1 youth are separated from the gang-affiliated *Hexágono* population. In fact, Sector 2 youth who have disaffiliated from the gang and Sector 1 youth who are awaiting their sentences “must never come into contact with one another,” according to ConTextos employee Martin, who serves as the CIS liaison. This is a safety precaution for Sector 2 members, who typically only disaffiliated from the gang upon beginning their time at the CIS and faced threats by *Hexágono* members. In the case of the Sector 1 youth, the main concern is that the *Hexágono* adolescents, including gang superiors, will take the opportunity to exchange information and give orders that will impact individuals outside of the CIS. On one occasion, the youth were brought to the auditorium to participate in a high-profile pastor's service. During the event, they were meant to be kept separated by the guards; however, students from all three sectors moved around to speak

with each other. After the event, the UNICEF Pionero Project coordinator who had been asked to attend the religious service expressed his frustration and remarked the following:

“I told them [the CIS personnel] this needed more logistics. How come the kids got up and talked to each other? So much information was just transferred between them. That is why I got up to go sit between them. I thought that could keep them from talking to each other. But no, they did not care,” he says.

This sequence of events demonstrates the complexity of working with gang-affiliated youth and a necessity to design strategies that address the particular needs of each sector. That is, the CIS personnel must be equipped to adapt to the complexities of the youth in order to fulfill the goals of any educational or rehabilitation project. However, as was discussed in the previous section, the personnel exhibit an unwillingness to change from the “coping routines” they depend on to complete their work tasks (Lipsky, 1980).

Moreover, throughout the history of the CIS, working with gang-affiliated youth has resulted in traumatic experiences for the CIS-personnel. At the time of the interviews, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were only 55 youth incarcerated at the CIS: 34 in Sector 3—the *Hexágono*, 11 in Sector 1, and 10 in Sector 2. However, this number was larger prior to the pandemic, and it was still much larger between 2000 and 2013 when the population included young adults. For example, in 2013, there were 500 incarcerated youth and the same number, if not less, of CIS personnel. During interviews, the CIS personnel referred to these individuals as “*los mayores*,” and actors across all organizations expressed how challenging that period of time was for the CIS personnel. CIS Psychologist Moises explained that the youth were “unhygienic,” wore tattoos on their faces, had “dominating” personalities, and acted in “threatening” ways. During the interview with professor Cindy, she mentioned that if support for tertiary prevention had started much earlier, the context of the CIS and country could have been much more different.

The young adults have since been moved to the “*Centro Intermedio*,” which is a detention center for youth displaying significant misconduct at the CIS and youth who age out of the CIS. However, to this day, the more seasoned personnel remember this period as traumatic. For instance, the *equipo técnico* director “Vicente” shared that this period is characterized by innumerable instances of death threats to both the personnel and their family members, physical violence, and verbal abuse. He added that in 2004, one of the CIS directors was murdered. To offer context on this period, Vicente explained that the youth were trained to follow the orders of the *mayores*, who in turn challenged the personnel’s authority. He said, “Those of us who have been here the longest know that the youth move not on their own accords, but according to rules they must follow.” This particular history of the CIS is critical to our understanding of how stereotypes form in the workplace (Lipsky, 1980).

Although the gang-affiliated youth at the CIS continue to have a “superior,” the difference is that the student allows the CIS personnel to adapt their own roles as service-providers and negotiate with him. When comparing the two CIS cultures, the personnel express that there has been an “evolution” and the current culture exhibits a “new type of generation.” Another example of this change in culture is seen in the recently accepting attitudes of the youth towards psychosocial support. As CIS psychologist Mateo explains, previous generations believed that psychology processes were for “crazy” people. He continues, “It has been difficult for the youth to comprehend the function of a psychologist, but the population has become easier to work with.”

Yet, despite the cultural changes at the CIS, the context of working with gang-affiliated youth continues to trigger old and new traumatic experiences for the personnel. This working environment makes it challenging for the personnel to create a step-by-step set of norms they

abide by since the context is highly unstable. For instance, in 2016, four youth were murdered at the CIS. CIS Psychologist “Moises” explained his frustration at this event in his response during our interview:

“I thought the equipo técnico was working well. This incident unmotivated the CIS personnel who was doing their work and seeing no results. And the ISNA authorities couldn’t understand the emotional impact. There was no follow-up on the CIS personnel’s well-being. ISNA acted as if nothing happened, but there was lots of insecurity in the CIS. Especially for the youth who could not talk openly about it.”
“Moises,” CIS Psychologist

According to Moises, ISNA’s sole response to this sequence of events was to handle the legal proceedings associated with it. As a psychologist, Moises offered services to his peers at the CIS, but he explained that offering support further impacted his own mental health. Given no support, the CIS personnel are left without the tools to process such traumatic experiences. This is also the case for female personnel at the CIS who have been targets of sexual assault and physical violence. They have yet to receive any useful support from the ISNA directors. As a consequence, CIS teachers have created strategies to protect themselves. For instance, professor Cindy trains new female personnel to neither “provoke” nor give men any “motive” for assault or unwanted attention. Cindy instructs the female teachers to follow a dress code that prohibits accessories and clothing that is either too tight or too loose. Still, however, these negotiations are a response to traumatic experiences and they are evidence of the way the CIS personnel are left on their own to create “coping routines” (Lipsky, 1980) for their work. Considering Lipsky’s theories on the work of the SLB, I will describe how such accumulated traumatic experiences have resulted in furthering stigma towards the gang-affiliated CIS youth and creating stereotypes.

Part II: Stigma Towards the Incarcerated Youth and the Impact of Stigma on Rehabilitation and Educational Programming

In the previous part, I have discussed how the quality of services provided to the youth has been threatened by the stigma surrounding tertiary prevention programs, which consequently created challenging working environments for the CIS personnel. First, this part aims to provide insight into the roots of this stigma. Second, using Maruna, Davis, and Lipsky's theories regarding how the SLB depends on coping routines and stereotypes to facilitate work tasks, I will explore how prison conditions impact the effectiveness of the Pionero Projects' rehabilitation program. Third, I will bring in the voices of the youth to present the implications of imposing stigmatized identities on them.

A. Stigma Towards the Incarcerated and Gang-Affiliated Youth

Especially due to the high level of stigma surrounding work on tertiary prevention programs, it is important to consider how actors involved in the Pionero Project perceive the youth. In the majority of interviews, responses described an initial stigmatized perspective—even amongst the ConTextos project designers. In line with Goffman's and Lipsky's theories, this stigma is rooted in the "prejudices that permeate the society" (Goffman, 1963; Lipsky, 1980). For instance, ConTextos social worker Silvia shared that during her first experience at the CIS, she was terrified of the youth. She described the following:

"It was a challenge for me at first." Her eyes were wide open and she nodded her head with her mouth curved down. "I had an encounter with a pandillero once. I didn't know what I'd do if I had to work with this community. Probably stop working. And I remember right before I went to the Center for the first time, I told everyone that I needed help. That day, it was a bit hard for me because there was a time during the session that I was left locked inside with just the youth, and I was... knocking and knocking, and they were not opening. Yes, it was ugly, but I could talk with different people. I didn't feel that my

emotions were invalidated, and I felt respected. And I started seeing them from a different perspective. Not from fear, but the contrary.” “Silvia,” ConTextos Social Worker

Prior to starting work at the CIS, Silvia had a personal encounter with a gang member, which caused her to create a stigmatizing perspective of incarcerated and gang-affiliated youth. As she explained, this impacted her initial interactions with them. However, throughout her experience, she felt sufficiently supported by the ConTextos team. She was able to reach out, talk about her anxieties, and feel respected all throughout. The result of this process is that Silvia changed her stigmatized perspective to one that is willing to listen to the youth and attempt to understand their point of view. This experience is very different from those of the CIS personnel who have experienced traumatizing situations with the youth and built further stigmatized perspectives towards them.

Although I have previously mentioned that societal stigma towards incarcerated and gang-affiliated youth is manifested in the lack of support for tertiary prevention models, it is also prevalent throughout interpersonal relationships. A major area of concern brought up by all respondents was the phenomenon of being stigmatized for working with a stigmatized group. The majority said that they were afraid of telling their families where they worked. This resonates with Goffman’s theory that “in certain circumstances the social identity of those an individual is with can be used as a source of information concerning his own social identity, the assumption being that he is what the others are” (Goffman, 1963). For example, CIS professor Leslie explained that upon beginning her work at the CIS, her family warned her of being extorted and raped: “My family asked me, ‘Why are you there? You are in the middle of persons who have murdered, raped, kidnapped, extorted.’ They think you are crazy for working with the population.” There are multiple responses across a variety of interviews that resonate with Goffman’s theory of transferable stigma. Consider Silvia’s account:

“The other day, there was a big shooting in a town. And people came to me to say, ‘This is the doing de tus niños (your kids).’ And I’m like, ‘What?’” She shakes her head and scoffs. “There is too much of a culture of physical punishment and humiliation. It is not restorative.” “Silvia,” ConTextos Social Worker

She explained that the Salvadoran society is not as concerned with rehabilitating the youth as they are with punishing them. To hear that there are people working to help the incarcerated and gang-affiliated adolescents is baffling to these individuals. ConTextos Project Designer Patricia explained offered a reason for this stigma towards the youth. According to Patricia, “No one asks for equality when they do not think there is inequality, so that means we need to first show there is inequality.” This means that the Salvadoran society agrees with the inadequate quality of services the incarcerated and gang-affiliated youth receive.

B. Manifestation of the Stigma Through Client Differentiation Practices

In Part I and in the first section of Part II, I discuss the context under which the Pionero Project is implemented. A primary focus has been the lack of support for tertiary prevention models, which has translated into the CIS personnel receiving no support from the MinEd and learning to adapt on their own to the limited resources and conditions of working with gang-affiliated youth. According to Lipsky, these conditions fit the criteria that results in unequal quality of service since he argues that it is a product not only of societal stereotypes but also of SLBs creating strategies to “cope with caseloads, limited time, and misinformation” (Lipsky, 1980). At this point, I have yet to discuss the specific adaptations made by CIS personnel and how they impact the youth’s potential to receive rehabilitation and education programs. As part of this discussion, I will refer to Lipsky’s theories regarding “client differentiation,” whereby SLBs categorize, i.e., label, clients based on “coping routines,” “criteria of worthiness,” and social stereotypes (Lipsky, 1980). According to Lipsky’s theory, the SLBs use these labels to determine which clients are more deserving of services than others.

Given that the CIS youth are stigmatized due to their identities as incarcerated individuals who have criminal records and are affiliated with gangs, the most immediate and influential label they receive is that of “criminal.” In this section, I will explore the manifestation of such a label and how it affects the youth’s potential to receive educational and rehabilitation services. To begin, it is important to note that Lipsky’s theory of the “criteria of worthiness” cannot help SLBs decide which clients to give more attention to. This is because all clients at the CIS fall under the label of “criminal.” Thus, the label impacts the entire population. Furthermore, this label is exacerbated by two other factors: the traumatically violent and insecure historical context of the CIS and the gang affiliation of the youth.

The manifestation of the “criminal” label is particularly evident in the response of the judicial representative “Walter.” At the CIS, Walter is in charge of presenting the court with the finalized report of the youth’s conduct. This report determines whether their sentences will be reduced. Given that Walter is the only liaison between the court and the CIS, and the youth rely on him to guide them in their legal cases, the impact of Walter labeling the youth as “criminal” and deeming them unworthy of services has the potential to be particularly detrimental. During our interview, Walter provided evidence of how he used the “client differentiation” of “criminal” to facilitate his work as judicial representative. Notably, Walter said he could not allow himself to “get sentimental” about the youth or to talk to them with any “*adorno*” (fluff). According to Walter, showing empathy would contradict his legal role and the youth would “disrespect judicial procedures.” He specifically critiqued the female personnel at the CIS for being “too maternalistic” by showing empathy towards the youth, which was also a sexist remark. This type of client-service provider relationship is motivated by what Lipsky refers to as “result-oriented” service-provision (Lipsky, 1980). However, in the manner that Walter implements it, this

practice is highly dehumanizing towards the youth, who is being categorized and treated in a detached way—solely as a criminal in court proceedings. Based on this treatment, the youth is taught that they are unworthy of empathy or humaneness due to the crimes they have committed. The following vignette provides more evidence of how the youth’s stigmatized identities inform Walter’s routine behaviors as judicial representative:

“I have learned to not be surprised because I know what kind of person comes in. If they’re here, they have committed a homicide or participated in it. Sometimes, people say, ‘The youth is behaving well.’ But this is while he is detained. Outside, when I have the opportunity to see him in the hearings, when the youth get excited, when they are reading his case, that is when he acts differently. The CIS staff only see that he is going to school, the motorcycle workshops, etc. In the CIS, every youth is worried about their mother, but before that, they did not even remember Doñita. They would go home and hit the woman because she did not have dinner for them yet. My perspective is more legal.”
“Walter,” CIS Judicial Representative

Based on this response, Walter showcases a variety of stereotypes held towards youth undergoing criminal proceedings. If we apply Lipsky’s theory on client differentiation techniques, it is possible to explain Walter’s behavior as following the “criteria of worthiness” (Lipsky, 1980). As Lipsky explains, this criterion is used to determine who is most likely to “respond to treatment” and it is influenced by existing prejudices in society (Lipsky, 1980). In Walter’s perspective, the youth are unlikely to “respond to treatment” (Lipsky, 1980) and thus, they are “unworthy” of quality services. Primarily, his response highlights his distrust in the youth. According to Walter, the incarcerated youth purposefully exhibit an inauthentic version of themselves that they manipulate to help them exit the CIS, and once released, they revert to their “criminal” identities. This ultimately subverts various aspects of the youth’s life and identity, which explicitly negates their “autonomy of mind” (Davis, 2003). That is, even if the youth exhibited legitimate interest in changing the course of their lives and engaged in rehabilitation or education activities, personnel like Walter would not trust this to be authentic since he already

assigned the youth the label of “criminal.” Why is this label of “criminal” capable of subverting so many aspects of the identity of the CIS youth? This type of distrust in the youth’s willingness to change is evident throughout other interviews, including the one with the *equipo técnico* director Vicente. He said the following:

“We cannot see what their real conduct is like within the group. Their real way of thinking and feeling. Is what they are showing us accurate? They are wrapped up in their culture, which makes it hard for them to identify themselves and show the changes we wished they had.” “Vicente,” CIS Director of the Equipo Técnico

This sentiment of distrust is rooted in a lack of confidence that the youth are able to be autonomous actors while being involved in the gang. Even when the youth show genuine interest in the Pionero Project, the personnel do not find it authentic since they believe the youth are gang members first and foremost. This is particularly evident when Vicente shows his distrust in the youth’s education and rehabilitation progress by stating that the youth change their conduct once they are with their gang. Through this statement, Vicente not only displays distrust in the youth, but also in the potential of the educational and rehabilitation tools at the CIS.

Departing from this initial label of “criminal,” other labels ensue that build off of these criteria of worthiness and are byproducts of the conditions at the CIS. A second label, or client differentiation strategy, that arises is that of the *inquieto* or “hyperactive” student. Personnel create this label as a response, or a “coping routine,” to compensate for the fact that, due to the lack of resources and support from the MinEd, they were neither trained to work with the CIS youth nor had CIS-specific curriculums. The coping routines consisted of improvising their lesson plans and failing to support the specific needs of the CIS youth. Consequently, as reported by the ConTextos Teacher Liaison Betty and based on her classroom observations: “the teachers never planned activities; the topics were not relevant to the class material; and youth left and entered the room at all points.” This trend was corroborated by the CIS instructors during

interviews. According to Professor Cindy, she could not follow the MinEd's classroom guide because it was not applicable to the CIS, and instead, she would structure her lessons depending on the questions the youth asked. She considered these questions to be learning opportunities despite being irrelevant to the class.

Similarly, Professor Gabriel explained that he would not "waste" time making lesson plans if the youth would "lose their interest in the class and act *inquieto* (hyperactive)." Additionally, Professor Leslie explained that she stopped testing youth because the tests were a "waste of time" since during the test, the youth talked to each other, cheated, and asked the instructor "too many" questions. These three examples provide evidence of the way that teachers create coping routines to facilitate their jobs. By removing tests altogether and improvising lessons, the personnel created a remedy to the problem of lacking evaluation and teaching tools specifically designed for the CIS population. However, more significantly, these examples highlight how teachers excuse lower educational quality when serving *inquieto* students. In this way, the teachers create a label that deems the youth worthy of learning new skills and receiving services. While the teachers find the means to complete their jobs more effectively, they become more ineffective at providing youth with education and rehabilitation programs.

Lastly, the third coping routine employed by the CIS personnel is that of labeling youth as "incompetent." During interviews, teachers cited that the youth were incapable of learning such challenging material, and for that reason, they could not make the changes required by the Pionero Project. For example, Professor Gabriel explained that the new content was "too extensive" for the youth who were accustomed to "everything being given to them *ya masticado* (already chewed up)." He added that "Success is difficult with the youth because it is hard for them to understand our vocabulary. We need to lower ourselves to reach the level of language

they use.” Similar to the service *inquieto* students received, the CIS personnel hold “incompetent” students to a low standard. The personnel identify the youth as “unworthy” of quality services because of a belief that they will be unlikely to produce results. In another example, the judicial representative Walter shared that he instructs the youth to “use their right to remain silent because they talk poorly, and they will probably *meter la pata* (say something wrong).” By instructing them to keep quiet, Walter simultaneously denies the youth quality services, and teaches the youth they should not stand up for themselves or use their voices.

i. Impact of Stigmatizing the Identities of the Youth

According to Maruna et al. 2004, there must be a “de-labeling and [de-]stigmatizing” process that specifically seeks to reinforce the person’s “positive self-identity” prior to implementing any form of rehabilitation initiative (Maruna et al., 2004). In this section, I seek to explore this theory and contribute to existing literature by providing evidence of how the stigmatized identities of the youth could be halting the implementation of rehabilitation initiatives like that of ConTextos.

While speaking with four of the youth at the CIS and conducting a sequence of life history interviews with them, the theme of stigma came up in various forms. For example, while interviewing Alex, he compared the work of ConTextos to other organizations, and explained that they are “different” from other organizations because they “do not turn their backs” on the CIS youth and they “give support in classes.” This means that he has come to believe that other organizations and actors refuse to provide quality services and treatment to the CIS. Youth like Alex are accustomed to the stigmatizing narrative of gang-members in El Salvador. For instance, despite recognizing the support of ConTextos, Alex exhibits persistent distrust towards other organizations and individuals that are interested in working with them. This distrust is

specifically influenced by the previously discussed process of client differentiation, which teaches incarcerated and gang-affiliated youth to believe they are not worthy of services. Due to this process, CIS youth have become hyper-aware of their stigmatized identities. This is evident in the conversation with Alex. His response was as follows:

“ConTextos does a lot for me. They have trust in us. They do not demonstrate fear when they are with us. Conviven (they coexist with us). They enter the CIS. Other people come, see us, close the door, and leave ... They don’t talk about us as if we are monsters, como la gente siempre te trata de pandillero (since people always treat us like gang members)... I’m sure you have heard about us outside, on the news?” He pauses with a stern expression. “Did you hear about us? What have you heard about the pandillas?”
“Alex,” 20 years old, Sector 3 “El Hexágono”

Based on Alex’s response, we gain insight into the consequences of being stigmatized: the youth have come to believe that they are to be feared and dangerous members of Salvadoran society– “monsters.” This was most prominent when he paused to ask me how I perceived him and awaited my reaction. However, since he mentioned the news reference, he already had an assumption about what I would say. In this moment, if I had explicitly shown fear in my response, I would have reaffirmed his stigmatized identity. Moreover, Alex’s response portrays how stigma is manifested throughout interpersonal interactions. In particular, *who* enters (or who does *not*) and *how* do they act around him are significant as they can further ingrain the notion of being unworthy of support, stigmatized, and isolated. His reference to rare visits illustrates the consequences of “abandoning” the CIS and not dedicating resources to tertiary prevention programs. The way their stigmatized identities are ingrained in the youth can harm the effectiveness of projects like Pionero that seek to provide rehabilitation and educational services.

What can be done to reduce the impact of the stigma on the youth? According to another youth, Brandon, in order to address the stigma, he and his peers face, there must be a change in the “thinking of society.” He expressed the following:

“No se trata de cambiarnos, o el estilo de vida (it is not about changing our way of life). It is about giving us opportunities. It is not about changing how the youth think. We do not have their same lives. We have more inquietud (unrest, instability). I need to look out for the team. It is about changing the thinking of society. We need to start doing something so that they can see that we are not monsters. They see us that way.”
“Brandon,” 19 years old, Sector 1

To add more context, at the time of the interview, Brandon had been incarcerated in the CIS once before. He was unfortunately only released for a period of about a month before returning. This experience with recidivism allowed him to reflect on various manifestations of stigma—both inside and outside the CIS. Brandon emphasized that in El Salvador, people tell him to change his lifestyle (i.e., gang affiliation), but he criticized those individuals because they did not understand his choices since they do not have the “same lives.” For instance, he referred to his “inquietud” as a way of explaining the reasons he is incarcerated, which could be tied to socioeconomic conditions. This portrays how CIS personnel labeling the youth as only “criminals” miss the context of the human behind the label. Brandon also criticized the lack of opportunities accessible to individuals like himself who have been involved with the criminal justice system. Again, this is relevant to the practice of the CIS who do not consider the youth worthy of services, and further ingrained in the youth these stigmatized identities.

Throughout his response, Brandon expressed a sense of solidarity with his peers in the gang though he did so more explicitly by prescribing a great value to the duty of “looking out for the team.” Alex similarly displayed his strong affiliation with both the incarcerated youth and the other members of the gang. As Goffman states, stigmatized identities tend to create relationships with one another based on their stigmatized characteristics. Thus, the youth are taught to be stigmatized, but they depend on one another to not be isolated on their own. This signals that despite the stigma he has faced for being incarcerated or affiliated with a gang, he continues to prioritize the needs of his peers, who, unlike the Salvadoran society, have not labeled him a

“monster.” Ironically, because of society’s stigma against him, Brandon has grown more isolated and non-conformist, which, once again, has resulted in an even more stigmatized gang identity (Goffman, 1963). In a way, Brandon opposed the stigmatizing narrative of society by directing the responsibility on the Salvadoran government to support its youth. From Brandon’s point of view, it is society that must change its stereotypes and undo the labels it has created. Otherwise, the stigma will continue to isolate this population farther away. The necessary work to reduce stigma will be further discussed in the next part.

Part III: The Deconstruction of Stigmatized Identities

Part III will discuss the different strategies and tools ConTextos has implemented at the CIS to reduce stigma and counteract its impacts on the youth. I will focus on counteracting two consequences of stigma: reducing subjectivity in the reports submitted to the judge and developing socioemotional and skills-building workshops to provoke youth to challenge their stigmatized identities. At the end of this discussion, I will return to the question of this study regarding how the ConTextos rehabilitation program supports the deconstruction of stigma at the Tonacatepeque-CIS juvenile detention center. Furthermore, I will discuss the byproduct of deconstructing stigma: the youth exhibit a willingness and ability to express their individuality.

A. Evaluación Colaborativa (Collaborative Evaluation)

At the CIS, psychologists are in charge of compiling a report for the judicial representative to submit to the judge. During interviews, the CIS personnel explained that these reports are not very informative and too quantitative. For example, to discuss the youth’s class participation and behavior, the teachers submit grades, attendance records, and whether students are missing any assignments. Meanwhile, psychologists and social workers add information about any involvement in vocational workshops, health history, and whether they are engaged

during their counseling sessions. At the end of the report, there are recommended actions for the court. In total, the report is two pages long. However, as discussed in the previous section, the CIS personnel have various degrees of stigmatized points of view towards the youth, which could have consequences on the reports written about the youth. For instance, Professor Leslie acknowledged that “sometimes, the youth behave better in other classes.” Similarly, Professor Cindy explained that it is important to discover more about the youth to see him from different perspectives. She shared an anecdote of a time she was surprised by a youth who seemed “so apathetic” to work on any of the subjects offered at the CIS, but when there was an opportunity to be artistic, she described the youth in the following way:

“When the professor implemented theater. When we saw him act, it was the surprise of the century. We were stunned. He acted lovely. The professor brought records, and the youth sang beautifully. He never felt that this was his space or ever felt comfortable. And it was so great to see him acting and singing. He truly let out his emotions. If people do not spend time with them, they will not discover the truth about them.” “Cindy,” CIS Professor

Prior to seeing how this youth expressed himself in a more artistic medium, she had considered him unmotivated and uninterested in her class. As explained in the previous section, this is a common stereotype for the youth. Cindy also expressed her dissatisfaction with the members of the *equipo técnico* who never visit the classrooms to “observe the youth in their environment.” She said this would result in more “holistic” reports.

To motivate more moments like this, ConTextos implemented the *evaluación colaborativa* (collaborative evaluation) tool for the CIS personnel to use. The *evaluación colaborativa* is a meeting between the *equipo técnico* and faculty to hold every month before reports are written up and sent to the judge. According to the ConTextos team, this tool is meant to “create a profile with qualitative and quantitative evaluations of the youth.” During my time working with ConTextos, I had the ability to observe this meeting in practice. The CIS personnel

broke up into multidisciplinary groups composed of teachers, psychologists, and social workers to discuss each youth as a case. The judicial representative was not present, but he was meant to split his time between both groups. To start, they were each given a copy of the youth's grades, attendance record, the activities he was involved in, and their results in psychological assessments they took at the start of the Pionero Project and halfway through it. Throughout the evaluation, each actor asked many questions that challenged the report. Primarily, teachers challenged whether the grades were genuine. For example, when teachers expressed a lack of confidence or distrust in the youth's abilities, they were able to listen to other teacher's perspectives who could confirm that the student is capable of learning. The interaction occurred as follows:

Professor 1: *“This grade does not match up with the participation. I see a seven as a grade, but he has only participated in class once. We are not lying to ourselves, or to the judge. We are lying to the youth. We can't be regalando notas (gifting grades).”*

Professor 2: *“They might be better at math than science. They won't be good at all subjects. Grades will vary.”*

A cautionary note on this interaction is that professors would dispute with one another as they disagreed on whose construction of the youth is correct. In another example, it became clear that having the additional perspective of the *equipo técnico* worked to reduce the personnel's reliance on stigmatized labels. Consider another interaction during the meeting:

Professor: *“I am doubtful of these psychological tests. He has a history of being manipulative.”*

Psychologist: *“The test of course does not say everything about their behavior. We need to ask and consult the student. But the test shows that this youth has empathetic comprehension and social action. The first shows he recognizes it and perceives it, and the second shows that he acts on it.”*

Including a multidisciplinary perspective in the creation of these reports is particularly significant given that the professors distrust the psychological tests introduced by ConTextos.

Plus, the affirmation of the psychologist helps to counteract any unwillingness to adapt to new strategies, which, as previously mentioned, has been a recurring sentiment in the CIS. Through the *evaluación colaborativa*, ConTextos provides a strategy to mitigate the consequences of stigma and potentially reduce stigma by providing diverse perspectives of the youth. As evidenced in the earlier parts of this study, combating the stigmatized identities of incarcerated and gang-affiliated youth is an essential first step to ensuring the youth have access to education and rehabilitation programs.

B. Socioemotional Tools: The IKIGAI and KIT

After a long discussion on the context of incarceration and how it limits the youth's ability to access educational and rehabilitation services, I return to the question at hand: how does the ConTextos rehabilitation program in the Tonacatepeque-CIS juvenile detention center support youth in deconstructing their stigma? Aside from the psychological assessment and the *evaluación colaborativa*, the ConTextos team has created two additional instruments and given them to the CIS to continue using with future incarcerated youth. These include the KIT workbook and the "IKIGAI" instrument, which comes from a Japanese concept referring to the search for one's purpose in life. Both tools are manifestations of ConTextos' goal to have the youth create a *Proyecto Ético de Vida* (Ethical Project of Life) for themselves where they discuss how they will use their skills to contribute to their communities. These tools prompt youth to reflect on their lives prior to incarceration, their goals for the future, and any challenges they are currently facing.

For the IKIGAI instrument, each of the youth completed a workshop during which they answered questions about their passions in life, the skills they have acquired, and the contributions they would like to make in the world. This workshop encouraged the youth to

envision themselves beyond the labels of “gang member” and “criminal” that were used by the CIS personnel and their home communities to stigmatize them. On the IKIGAI itself, the youth were asked to list a few “opportunities” accessible to them if they follow a certain path, and a few “limitations” they are either currently facing or predict they will encounter while attempting to reach their goals. Furthermore, the youth are also asked to include a short-term and long-term plan with steps for how they will reach their goal. An example of a completed IKIGAI can be found in Appendix C. Overall, the intention of this tool was to provide youth with the opportunity to actively brainstorm which skills they want to learn and which professions they want to explore. It is also important to note that this tool was not intended to stigmatize the youth for their current paths or to ask them to disaffiliate from their gangs.

Through the KIT instrument, youth are similarly asked to undergo a process of self-reflection to complete the tasks inside the book. Each youth is given their own workbook and they work to complete it during particular socioemotional workshops with ConTextos facilitators. One limitation of this workshop is that it is done in a group setting with questions asked aloud, which can make participation intimidating or difficult for the youth. However, there are particular exercises that are specifically effective for provoking youth to reflect. During an interview with the ConTextos psychologist, she discussed an example of one of these effective exercises:

“There was this one super hyperactive student. He entered and left the room a ton. He did not pay attention. But when we were going over the IKIGAI lesson, we had everyone draw in their KIT how they envisioned their dream for the future. And he added so much detail. He really internalized things. I thought he did this assignment well because he was coherent between his ideas for vocation, vision, goal, and dream. I liked that he paid attention to his dream. They have these metaphors in their IKIGAI, and he was drawing his metaphor. His was something like ‘I am the sunshine that wakes you in the morning.’ When we started drawing, he was saying, ‘Oh, but I don’t know how to draw. I can’t do

it. But then, I tell him to just try, to animarlo (encourage him), 'It is your picture.' ”
“Ivy,” ConTextos Psychologist

While discussing this instrument with the ConTextos team, it became clear that this type of instrument allowed youth to reflect on pertinent issues in their lives in a serious and immersive way. This was true for moments such as the one above when the youth reflected on their dreams, but it was also true for moments when the youth were confronted with the stigmatized identities they were given. Similar to an earlier example of Alex, the following example illustrates a youth who exhibited a high degree of distrust. The difference in this example is that the youth was confronting his stigmatized identity in a context where he could discuss it and gain the tools to deconstruct it. Consider ConTextos Pionero Project Designer Jillian’s account from another workshop:

“I remember one youth who did not want to write because he thought he would die at a young age. He lacked esperanza (hope) in his future. He was frustrated. The entire classroom started asking me questions like, ‘What do you think is the future of a pandillero? And why do you think that I will have any opportunities outside the CIS?’ Very difficult questions charged with lots of tension. Even like, ‘Why are you here? Why do you do this work? Why do you work with us if you know that we are pandilleros? These are questions that they need us to reaffirm and tell them why we believe in them.”
“Jillian,” ConTextos Pionero Project Designer

As evidenced by this interaction, for this youth, the impact of being stigmatized by their communities or by the CIS personnel has inhibited the youth’s ability to envision any kind of future for himself. Furthermore, he has lost trust in any kind of initiative aimed at supporting his development and socioemotional rehabilitation. Following Goffman’s theory on stigma, the youth have come to believe it as part of their identities and “alienated” themselves (Goffman, 1963). However, through these socioemotional workshops, ConTextos has created a space where youth can explicitly address the stigma they feel, reflect on their identities beyond those imposed on them by the CIS personnel, and vocalize how stigma affects them. Most significantly is their

ability to discuss their insecurities with the ConTextos team through open communication. Jillian continued by explaining that in this specific scenario, the service provider needs to “exhibit confidence, honesty, and authenticity” to answer the youth’s questions. Through these workshops, ConTextos works on reaffirming the youth that they are more than “criminals” or “*pandilleros*.”

i. Impact of Socioemotional Rehabilitation Programs on the Youth

Returning to Maruna et al. 2004, I seek to discuss how effective Pionero Project’s efforts have been at deconstructing the stigmatizing labels the youth have grown up with and internalized during their context of incarceration. To address this, I will put into perspective the experiences of the youth with the Pionero Project and specifically, with ConTextos.

During an interview with Cristian, the youth discussed his experiences with the socioemotional workshops and instruments brought by ConTextos. He shared that it had been difficult for him to “verbalize” his dreams for the *Proyecto Ético de Vida* workshops. He explained that he was glad to have the opportunity to reflect, and that the workshops challenged him to think about why he struggled. He described the following:

“I feel that it is por gusto (for no reason). I feel that I can’t accomplish my dream. I can’t figure out how to get past the limits... It was good to go back in my memory to see what I did and who I am now. I remembered things I didn’t think about before. The problems. But the workshop Somos Historia (We Are Stories) helped me think about what I am going to do. I hadn’t done this before.” “Cristian,” 19 years old, Sector 3 “El Hexágono”

Based on Cristian’s account, it is evident that the workshops work to counteract the stigmatizing narratives imposed on youth by challenging them to think about their futures and aspirations for themselves. They do so by prompting the youth to think about and confront past hardships and traumas that continue to act as limitations to their development both inside and

outside the CIS. This was a particularly significant component of the workshop since Cristian expressed that he had never done it before. It was also an opportunity for them to step outside of the stigmatizing identities casted on them by the CIS personnel. Overall, although youth found the workshop difficult, it allowed them to deconstruct their stigmatized identity by reflecting on their pasts and on their future aspirations without the label of “criminal.” They were able to answer the question of what they would like to do with their lives instead of being told that their lives were limited.

Furthermore, these workshops allowed the youth to feel supported. For youth like David, this is particularly significant because when he was younger, he lacked access to education services. He shared the following remarks about the project:

“I was able to discover myself and find propositos (purposes) with the Proyecto Ético de Vida. I feel better. I feel supported. Through ConTextos, I’ve started to conocerme (get to know myself). I have the goal of being an engineer. I think these workshops help me to accomplish this.” “David,” 19 years old, Sector 2

By expressing what they want to do with their futures, the youth both challenged and transcended their stigmatized identities. In his response above, David shared his dream of being an engineer. Meanwhile, Cristian shared that he wanted to be a lawyer, Brandon said he wanted to work with music, and Alex said he wanted to return to school and finish high school. Each of them shared aspirations that went beyond their gang affiliation and criminal record. This portrays how they each invoked their autonomy and decision-making abilities to refute the stigmatized narratives the CIS placed on them and take the additional step to voice their own narratives.

The positive impact of the socioemotional support was also corroborated by the ConTextos team, who explained that youth have displayed an improvement in their ability to express their emotions and demand quality education from their professors. ConTextos teacher

liaison, Betty, shared that the youth felt more comfortable expressing their opinions and “demanding an education.” She said the following:

“They said this workshop is good, this one not so much. During observations, I saw how they exclaimed to their teacher that they had already seen the movie he was showing. The teacher would justify himself. He would just reorient the conversation and tell the kid, ‘No, you are mistaken. This is a different movie, remember?’ But they demand a quality education. This shows me that we are on a good path.” “Betty,” ConTextos Teacher Liaison

In this response, Betty explained how the instructors would resort to playing movies for the youth instead of teaching them the necessary material. However, the youth recognized that they were not receiving the quality of services they deserved. This illustrates how the youth were able to break away from the stigmatized identities they had been assigned while incarcerated.

C. Pionero Project Workshops and the Deconstructed Stigmatized Identities

By offering skills-building and vocational workshops, the Pionero Project gave the youth the opportunity to learn new skills and discover new interests. Based on the youth’s responses, I conclude that the socioemotional workshops allowed the youth to deconstruct their narratives of being “unworthy” of services and merely “criminals.” Having deconstructed their stigmatized identities, through the skills-building workshops, the youth voiced their passions and interests for themselves. The youth’s responses illustrate their ability and willingness to express their individuality, “positive self-identity” (Maruna et. al, 2004), and “autonomy of the mind” (Davis, 2003).

Firstly, when asked about their favorite workshops, each participant responded excitedly and provided very detailed explanations of the skill they learned. This demonstrates that they were engaged during the workshops and they enjoyed learning how to do the particular skill. For example, during our interviews, the youth immediately smiled, talked faster, and showed more

action in their body language as they explained what they did in their favorite workshops. While speaking with Alex about a serigraphy class, he stood up fast from his seat to reach for a spray bottle to show me what they used to spray the shirts with water after they had placed the design on top. Similarly, while speaking with David, he rushed through his response and laughed as he listed all the different fruits, vegetables, herbs, and flowers he sowed during his agricultural workshop. To illustrate the youth's newfound deconstructed stigmatized identity, consider the following response from Brandon who offered advice to future generations of youth:

"I was more active and started doing things. I learned something new. I felt entusiasmo, alegre, satisfecho (excited, happy, satisfied). They need to esforzarse (strive). They need to elegir (choose) what they like and do not like. Hay que ser creativo (they need to be creative). It is easy to become depressed here. But you need to discover what you like por tu cuenta (for themselves). Little by little, se va descubriendo (it is discovered). And it is always changing. You never stop discovering." "Brandon," 19 years old, Sector 1

Brandon's response portrays how the workshops have allowed him to "discover" his interests, and, significantly, he has become aware of his choice in determining what he enjoyed and did not enjoy. This displays the youth's ability to choose how they wanted to dedicate their energy and time at the CIS, and what narrative they would build for themselves in the CIS and post-incarceration. Also, the youth explained that through a closure event, they had the opportunity to share their progress with their peers, the Pionero Project actors, and the CIS personnel. For instance, Cristian shared that during the closure event, he presented a motor of a small car. He said the following, "I exhibited what *I* did, what *I could* do, and the abilities I developed." Again, this displayed the youth's ability to transcend their stigmatized identities and choose for themselves what they wanted to do, and to feel proud of it.

Secondly, the youth expressed their appreciation for an opportunity to "*despegarse*" (distract themselves) from their context of incarceration. These workshops provided a space to

immerse themselves in the activity and deconstruct the notion that they were unworthy of receiving services and learning new skills. Consider the next couple of responses from the youth as Alex specifically described his experience with the urban music workshop and Cristian explained his overall perspectives of the workshops:

Alex: "The songs are what we have inside. I never complain and I don't think we are wasting time. My family is suffering, and I am missing them so writing about them is a good way to remember. When I am rapping, I feel my soul is free. I forget that I am in here. Seriously!" he smiles again, "I feel like I am not in jail anymore."

Cristian: "The workshops motivate me. I feel good about the shirt design class. It feels good. I feel despegado de la mente (my mind is detached). I like to participate, and I like the designs. I feel feliz y tranquilo (happy and calm) ... I think about who I am as a person. What I used to do. Who I wanted to be and what I wanted to do? My identity."

Based on these responses, the youth perceived the workshops as not only a distraction from their context of incarceration, but as a way to break away (or escape) from the stigmatized identity of "prisoner" and "criminal." This was similar to an earlier example when Brandon explained that he would listen to music to "escape" from the uncomfortable conditions at home. These act as coping mechanisms for the youth to endure certain conditions, such as incarceration, but they were also spaces where they could find comfort, reflect on their past, and build aspirations for the future. Cristian's response displays the capacity of the workshops to provoke the youth to reconsider and challenge their stigmatized identities. Cristian remembered who he was prior to incarceration as well as who he truly is in the present without the added stigma. This signals that the youth have found it possible to deconstruct their stigmatized identities, which, as Maruna et al. 2004 cautioned, is the prerequisite to effective rehabilitation initiatives. Furthermore, upon supporting the deconstruction of their stigmatized identities, these workshops also supported youth to express their individualities.

Recommendations

As evidenced by this study, in El Salvador, tertiary prevention programs are highly under-resourced. Instead of supporting incarcerated persons, the Salvadoran government relies on punitive measures that increase arrests and further stigmatize incarcerated persons and youth affiliated with gangs. In efforts to further abolitionist research, prior to presenting policy recommendations, it is important to credit abolitionist thinkers. According to Foucault, the restricting nature of social control within prison environments is not conducive to rehabilitation (Foucault, 1977). This refers to prisons that regulate every aspect of the incarcerated person's life with the sake of "correcting" and "punishing" wrong behavior (Foucault, 1977). Foucault cautions against rehabilitation when the prisons abuse their power. Although this theory is pertinent to rethinking juvenile justice policies and moving away from punitive responses to crime, I must explain why an abolitionist framework will not be the ultimate policy recommendation of this paper. This is mainly because, at this moment, the specific conditions of the Salvadoran sociopolitical context make it challenging to frame policy recommendations from an abolitionist perspective. The Salvadoran political history is composed of various instances of punitive populism, which have proven that voters respond positively to tough-on-crime policies (Wolf, 2017). Because of this overwhelming support for punitive measures, there is a sense of urgency in addressing prison conditions and advocating for tertiary prevention programs that support non-oppressive rehabilitation initiatives. As such, I present the following recommendations as a response to the urgent need to provide quality programs for incarcerated youth since the rate of arrests continues to increase (Habib and Avelar, 2022). Guiding the recommendations will be the results to the question at hand: how does the ConTextos

rehabilitation program at the Tonacatepeque juvenile detention center support youth to deconstruct their stigmatized identities?

A. Provide Support to Tertiary Prevention Programs

As Victoria Law and Angela Davis explained, tertiary prevention programs have been historically underfunded (Law, 2017; Davis, 2003). These include education programs, such as those that focus on increasing literacy amongst incarcerated persons. This is particularly important to prisons in El Salvador, where there are low rates of enrollment and high rates of school dropouts (MINEC/DIGESTYC, 2015). As evidenced by the MinEd's abandonment of the Tonacatepeque-CIS, it is clear that a failure to invest in resources and attention on tertiary prevention programs resulted in worsening working conditions for the CIS personnel. This resulted in further stigmatizing the youth.

One way in which the Salvadoran government can ensure tertiary prevention programs succeed is to institutionalize the programs. Although Lipsky cautions that institutionalization is difficult in contexts like the Tonacatepeque-CIS because of the SLBs' dependence on discretion, there are certain aspects of ConTextos' work that can be institutionalized. Lipsky states that SLBs are unable to create a "programmatically step-by-step of what to do in a given job" and they need "flexibility" (Lipsky, 1980). However, the CIS can institutionalize socioemotional tools, the *evaluación colaborativa*, and the end-of-year closure event. The socioemotional tools include the KIT (a workbook) and the IKIGAI (a series of questions), which can be introduced to the youth as soon as they enter the CIS and developed by the *equipo técnico*. Meanwhile, the teachers can receive training on using the *evaluación colaborativa* to help reduce stigma in their reports and move towards more qualitative evaluations. Also, they can receive training on organizing the closure event where youth have the opportunity to express their individuality by discussing the

content they learned for that year. On another note, Law cautioned that during socioemotional workshops, some youth find it difficult to participate in group settings (Law, 2017). The CIS personnel could speak with youth after the workshops and provide individualized attention.

B. Improve the Working Conditions of the Tonacatepeque-CIS Personnel

As previously discussed, apart from societal stereotypes, Lipsky explains that the root cause of client differentiation (i.e., labeling and the construction of stigmatized identities) is the lack of tolerable working conditions for the SLBs (Lipsky, 1980). SLBs create simplifications and coping routines for their jobs, which resulted in the labels discussed in the results section of this study (“criminal,” “hyperactive,” and “incompetent”). To mitigate the influence of the SLB on the identity-formation of the client, Lipsky argues for incentives and sanctions that aim to reduce the workers’ needs for “psychological coping mechanisms” and “undesirable simplifications” (Lipsky, 1980). Additionally, Lipsky contends that given that SLBs “pursue means instead of ends,” it is important to redirect their work towards the end-goal of the broader project (Lipsky, 1980). In this case, the end goal is to avoid constructing stigmatized identities and support youth to express their individuality.

Considering Lipsky’s theories, the second recommendation is to provide psychological attention to the CIS personnel on a monthly basis. As described in this paper, personnel and other actors involved with the Pionero Project have historically lacked mental health resources despite reporting traumatic experiences with the youth both inside and outside the CIS. Abandoned by the ISNA and the MinEd, the trauma built up and became a cause for stigmatizing the youth. Moreover, I suggest that the CIS personnel receive training from community and grassroots organizations on working with gang-affiliated youth. This will ensure that the personnel understand the background and context of the population they are responsible for serving. If this

topic were openly discussed, then any anxieties, fears, questions, or concerns would be addressed.

Furthermore, to improve the conditions of the CIS, the MinEd can offer more support by institutionalizing a curriculum that is specific to the context of incarceration and increasing the number of observations it conducts. As the personnel expressed during interviews, the MinEd is not involved in the functions of the CIS since it has no expertise on the particularities of the incarceration context. This could include training for working with hyperactive youth, youth with criminal records, and youth who are unfamiliar with the education system since they have a background of lacking access to it. Through observations, the MinEd would address the personnel's discretion and follow-up on the implementation of the curriculum by "imposing restrictions on the scope of their [the SLBs'] powers" (Lipsky, 1980).

C. Increase Accountability in the CIS

To further ensure the CIS avoids stigmatizing the youth, another recommendation is to reconfigure how teachers are hired. According to Lipsky, when the worker does not share the interests of the organization, it is possible that they were not "recruited with an affinity" for the organization's work and they do not consider their directors' orders as "legitimate" (Lipsky, 1980). Currently, according to the MinEd, there is no selection process for CIS teachers. This means that there is no requirement for the teachers to be specifically interested in working with incarcerated youth or for them to be qualified to work with this population. There is also no training program for new teachers, and very minimal training for current teachers. By restructuring their hiring process, the MinEd would ensure that each member of the personnel wants to work with the youth in the CIS.

Conclusion

As expressed in the recommendations, it is critical that Salvadoran institutions work to meet the needs of youth who have long been abandoned by government agencies, such as the four individuals who were interviewed in this study who had a history of lacking access to quality education and counseling support. Salvadoran government officials must address these gaps by providing support to tertiary prevention programs. However, it is critical to reconceptualize service provision in prisons. As such, in this study, I have sought to answer the following question: how does the ConTextos rehabilitation program at the Tonacatepeque-CIS juvenile detention center support youth to deconstruct their stigmatized identities? The main factor motivating this research study and question is the urgency to provide non-oppressive and non-stigmatized support to Salvadoran youth involved with the punitive justice system.

In this study, I create a theoretical framework combining abolitionist theories from authors like Foucault, Davis, and Law; stigma theories from Goffman; rehabilitation theories from Maruna; and street-level bureaucracy theories from Lipsky. First, I employ Foucault's theories to gain insights on the limitations of rehabilitation initiatives in prisons. Foucault cautions against the oppressive conditions of the Tonacatepeque-CIS as non-conducive to rehabilitation. However, authors Davis and Maruna explain that rehabilitation initiatives are effective only if they firstly de-label and de-stigmatize prison conditions, and secondly support youth to "acquire autonomy of the mind" (Maruna et. al, 2004; Davis, 2003). In this paper, I contribute to the literature a case study of how challenging stigma is a prerequisite to providing support to youth since it ultimately builds the youth's ability to express their individuality.

Furthermore, Lipsky's theories provide context on the working conditions of the CIS personnel, which helps to explain the construction of the youth's stigma (Lipsky, 1980). By

applying this theory to the case study, I contribute to the literature critical evidence of client differentiation as a cause for oppressive and stigmatized youth identities, such as those of “criminal,” “hyperactive,” and “incompetent.” In the first and second part of the results section, I delve into a deeper discussion of the construction of the youth’s stigmatized identities and its consequences on the youth. In the recommendations section of this paper, I conclude that in order to deconstruct stigma, there is a need to not only institutionalize ConTextos’ socioemotional services, but also reduce the CIS personnel’s dependence on coping routines like client differentiation.

Most importantly, throughout this study, I provide the direct perspective of the youth participating in the rehabilitation program. By including their experiences, I am able to contribute to the literature the often-silenced voices of incarcerated and gang-affiliated Salvadoran youth. As a result, in this study, I fill a gap in the literature by providing evidence of rehabilitation services that result in youth exerting their own power over systems of social control, crafting their own narrative, and expressing their individuality. That is, these results directly respond to Foucault’s caution against rehabilitation programs that rely on frameworks of discipline and punishment.

Throughout this study, I contextualize Goffman’s writings on stigma (Goffman, 1963) to offer insights on the existing social stereotypes towards the youth and the construction of their stigmatized identities in the CIS. This theoretical framework is necessary to illustrate how the ConTextos rehabilitation program mitigate the consequences of stigma by introducing various tools to the CIS that encourage youth to challenge their stigmatized identities and express their individuality by moving beyond their label of “criminal.”

A few limitations to this research study include the following: time constraints, a lack of opportunities to build trust with interviewees, lack of a diverse sample of youth, and a lack of access to youth who had been released from the CIS. Given the various COVID-19 outbreaks in the CIS, it was difficult to build trusting relationships with the youth and CIS personnel since there were only a few occasions to participate in their workshops and speak with them outside of the interview setting. Furthermore, given that this study's sample size primarily includes the actors involved in the Pionero Project, I was unable to include information about the long-term results of the rehabilitation program. Further research is necessary to evaluate the consequences of these services. Also, further research is needed to discuss the impact of different services on non-male identifying youth. Since this study took place at an all-male CIS, future studies will need to discuss the gendered component in depth. Lastly, as previously mentioned, future studies will need to be conducted to address El Salvador's dependence on punitive policies and discuss abolitionist perspectives. However, this current study concludes that the ConTextos rehabilitation program works to deconstruct stigma in the Tonacatepeque-CIS and supports youth to express their individuality beyond stigmatizing labels.

Appendix A: Interview Table

Detention Center	ConTextos Workers	Donors, Government Actors	Youth
“Cindy”	“Martin”	“Gladis”	“Alex”
“Leslie”	“Zoey”	“Maria”	“Brandon”
“Gabriel”	“Betty”	“Esteban C.”	“Cristian”
“Eddie”	“Ivy”	“Daniel T.”	“David”
“Mateo”	“Silvia”	“Jackie”	
“Moises”	“Andres”	“Alan”	
“Caty”	“Jillian”		
“Jose S.”	“Patricia”		
“Vicente”	“Carla”		
“Jose D.”			
“Walter”			

Appendix B: Life History Interview Guide

Start with non-invasive questions such as the following:

1. What is a typical day like here?

Family:

1. Where and when were you born?
2. Where did you grow up? Describe your home and neighborhood (*barrio/ colonia*).
3. What are some characteristics (of your home and family) that are significant to you?
4. Who lived at your house? Describe them.
5. Were the boys and girls treated differently in your house? If so, how?

Education:

1. Did you go to school? Where?
2. What are some of the experiences you remember the most from school?
3. Describe your social life and the friends you encountered.
4. Describe some additional experiences outside of school that were important to you.
5. What was the last year of school that you completed?
6. If you left school before coming here, was this a decision you made? How did it make you feel?
7. Did you have a favorite mentor/counselor, or teacher? What impact did this person have in your life?

Identities:

1. How do you describe yourself?
2. What aspects of your identity are the most important for you?

Life Cycle events:

1. What are some of the most important events / moments of your life?
2. (if relevant): How did you celebrate these moments and with whom? How did this make you feel?

Neighborhood, community, and region:

1. In your community, where did your family and friends spend their time?
2. Were there any particular challenges in your community while you were growing up? How did these challenges affect you? How have these challenges affected the way you interpret the world?
3. What did you do in your free time?
4. Who did you socialize with?
5. What did you like to do? How have your friendships shaped your life?
6. Do you have any hobbies or special interests?
7. What role / significance did sports have in your life?

Pionero:

1. When was the first time you heard about Pionero?
2. Do you remember when exactly you began participating in Pionero?
 - a. Why/ how did you begin participating?
3. In what ways is Pionero what you expected/ hoped for?
4. In what ways did Pionero surprise you?
5. What was your favorite part of Pionero?
 - a. How does it make you feel?
6. What part of Pionero has been difficult for you?
 - a. How does it make you feel?

7. What are some of the things that you have learned by participating in Pionero?
8. If you could change one thing about Pionero, what would it be?
9. What tip would you give new participants of Pionero?

Reflections:

1. What words of wisdom would you offer to youth in your community?
2. Do you have any philosophy for life or particular values that you think are important to share with the next generations?
3. What else would like people to know about you?

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Guides for ConTextos and for Non-ConTextos Professionals

A. ConTextos Interview Guide

Personal History:

1. Tell me about some aspects outside of your professional life that have led to your decision of working for ConTextos.

Organization and Professional History:

1. Tell me about the roles and responsibilities that you've had since you've been here, and your current work with the Pionero Project.
 - a. To the extent to which you are familiar with the process, how did Pionero develop as a project? (i.e., what is the history of Pionero)
 - b. In one sentence, what would you say is the purpose / mission of Pionero?
 - c. Can you recall a specific moment in which you really felt like you were achieving that mission?
 - d. Can you recall a specific moment in which you felt great frustration with achieving that mission?

Measurement & Evaluation:

1. How do you know if and when you have reached your goals in your work?
 - a. What are some of the milestones or markers that you look for?
 - b. What are the measures that you use and how do you collect the data to support those measures?
 - c. To whom do you report?
 - i. What are their reporting requirements (in terms of timing, process, and content, and anything else that is relevant)?
 - d. If you did not have to report your work in that way, is there anything that you would do differently?
 - e. Based on your direct experiences, what do the current reporting measures that you employ miss in terms of how these “interventions” are experienced and implemented? Can you provide details of a specific instance in which this occurred?
 - f. Based on your direct experiences, what do the current reporting measures that you employ absolutely get right in terms of how these “interventions” are experienced and implemented? Can you provide details of a specific instance in which this occurred?

Interactions with youth:

1. Thinking back on the specific youth with whom you have worked:
 - a. Can you recall a time when one of them really embodied everything that you had hoped for in this project?
 - i. Tell me a bit about their personal story, your interactions with them, and what led to this sense of accomplishment?
 - b. Can you recall a time when one of them really frustrated you – either personally or in terms of their context – and how that made you feel about the project?
 - i. Tell me a bit about their personal story, your interactions with them, and what led to this sense of frustration?

Reflections on Pionero:

1. If you had to redesign this project again, what would you do differently?
2. What would you keep the same?

Closing Remarks:

1. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about these topics?
2. Contact information: (depending on consent form selection as to whether or not this individual is willing to be contacted for future communication)

B. Non-Contextos Professionals Interview Guide (CIS and donors)

Organization and Professional History:

1. Tell me about the roles and responsibilities that you've had since you've been here, and your current work with the Pionero Project.
 - a. What are the roles and responsibilities you must take on in your position?
 - b. What is your relationship with the Pionero Project?
 - c. In one sentence, what would you say is the purpose / mission of Pionero?
 - i. In what direct or indirect way do you contribute to achieving this mission?
 - d. How do you compare Pionero to other social reinsertion projects? Can you mention a few differences?
 - e. Can you recall a specific moment in which you really felt like you were achieving that mission?
 - f. Can you recall a specific moment in which you felt great frustration with achieving that mission?

Measurement & Evaluation:

1. How do you know if and when you have reached your goals in your work?
 - a. What are some of the milestones or markers that you look for?
 - b. What are the measures that you use and how do you collect the data to support those measures?
 - c. To whom do you report? (For UNICEF, MinEd, and ISNA: Who reports to you?)
 - i. What are their reporting requirements (in terms of timing, process, and content, and anything else that is relevant)?
 - d. If you did not have to report your work in that way, is there anything that you would do differently?
 - e. Based on your direct experiences, what do the current reporting measures that you employ miss in terms of how these "interventions" are experienced and implemented? Can you provide details of a specific instance in which this occurred?
 - f. Based on your direct experiences, what do the current reporting measures that you employ absolutely get right in terms of how these "interventions" are experienced and implemented? Can you provide details of a specific instance in which this occurred?

Interactions with youth:

1. Thinking back on the specific youth with whom you have worked:
 - a. Can you recall a time when one of them really embodied everything that you had hoped for in this project?
 - i. Tell me a bit about their personal story, your interactions with them, and what led to this sense of accomplishment?
 - b. Can you recall a time when one of them really frustrated you – either personally or in terms of their context – and how that made you feel about the project?
 - ii. Tell me a bit about their personal story, your interactions with them, and what led to this sense of frustration?

Reflections on Pionero:

1. What does the Pionero Project mean to you? (taking into consideration your job, roles, functions, etc.)

2. What has been something about Pionero that has challenged you personally and professionally? Why do you think this has been a challenge?
3. If you had to mention two or three things that you have liked about the process with Pionero, above all, the educational component, what would they be?
4. If you had to redesign this project again, what would you do differently?
 - a. What would you keep the same?
 - b. How do you envision the future of Pionero? What needs to change? With which actors?

Closing Remarks:

1. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about these topics?
2. Contact information: (depending on consent form selection as to whether or not this individual is willing to be contacted for future communication)

Appendix C: Example of the IKIGAI Socioemotional Tool



**Mi propósito es ser:
El árbol que brinda felicidad**

Mi sueño es: Ser agricultor

Oportunidades
-Aprender agricultura
-Aprender mecánica
-Ser un actor de teatro

Limitantes
-Falta de recursos
-Económico, libros
-No tener compu para estudiar

Tiempos de ejecución de mi proyecto



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