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# A Tailored Approach for Incarcerated Boys: Q Study into the Needs of Incarcerated Boys in the Interaction with Group Workers in a Juvenile Correctional Institution

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## ABSTRACT

Behavioral change of incarcerated boys is influenced by the alliance with the group workers who support them. This alliance is partly determined by the extent to which both the needs of group workers and boys are being fulfilled. The objective of this research was to explore the views of incarcerated boys regarding their relationship with group workers. Q methodology was used, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Respondents ranked statements on behavior and treatment of group workers. Analysis of these individual Q sortings resulted in four preferences: (A) anxious and willing, (B) rebellious and defensive, (C) autonomous and indifferent, (D) dependent and approachable. Results show that needs regarding interaction with group workers are diverse and ask for different approaches. The understanding and awareness of these preferences offers tools for establishing a working alliance and stimulate the boys' readiness to change.

## KEYWORDS

Q methodology;  
incarcerated boys; group  
workers; alliance

## Introduction

Young people who break the law can be convicted to incarceration and treatment in a juvenile correctional institution. There are eight of these special facilities in the Netherlands where juvenile delinquents stay from a couple of days up to several years. They live in small groups (with eight to ten peers) supported and supervised by group workers. These workers are pedagogically trained professionals, who interact with the youngsters all day. The main goal of treatment in a juvenile correctional institution is stimulating behavioral change. Readiness to change can be affected by several factors. Burrowes and Needs (2009) argue that apart from the individual's internal context (demographic characteristics such as age and level of education as well as individual differences such as self-concept, social norms, expectations and attachment style) external factors can stimulate the change process of juvenile offenders. An event (for example, a friend who gets hurt at a robbery) or a relationship (regrets to parents) or participation in an intervention program and interaction with professionals can become a catalyst for

the change process. Also the environment in which the change process takes place, in this case the correctional institution (its regime, staff and peers) and the social and cultural context (policy, economy, media) will have impact on the change process. These four components – individual, catalyst, environment and social and cultural context – are interrelated and will influence each other. In this process, group workers in a correctional institution are key actors who may obstruct or facilitate the change process.

Group workers spend many hours a day with the youngsters. They sport, eat and communicate with them, connect with their families and work together on training programs focused on behavioral change. As their ‘primary caregivers’ with close and intense contact with the boys, they may contribute more to behavioral change than, for instance, therapists or other specialists (Knorth, Harder, Huyghen, Kalverboer, & Zandberg, 2010; Moses, 2000). What happens in the interaction between group workers and juveniles in youth care has long been regarded as a ‘Black Box’ (Knorth, 2003), but their relationship is considered core for a positive outcome (Karver, Handelsman, Fields, & Bickman, 2006). The same is true in the context of a correctional institution where the relationship between the juvenile and his caretaker is considered the heart of the intervention (Knorth et al., 2010), a catalyst for readiness to change during the stay and a predictor of behavioral change after detention (Gover, Mackenzie, & Armstrong, 2000; Kupchik & Snyder, 2009; Schubert, Mulvey, Loughran, & Losoya, 2012). Moreover, research shows an association between a positive relationship, and a positive living climate in forensic juvenile facilities (Van der Helm, Stams, & Van der Laan, 2011) and a positive living climate was indicated to increase readiness for change (Van der Helm, Klapwijk, Stams, & Van der Laan, 2009). Other research indicates that the quality juveniles in youth care experience in the relationship with group workers is associated with the way they are treated by them (Harder, 2011b) and the perceived connection with the group worker (De Swart, 2011).

There is much research done on the impact of the professional-client relationship in interventions with voluntary clients in a therapeutic setting (Horvath & Bedi, 2002). However, theory building on the working alliance between professionals and mandated clients is still in its infancy. Bordin (1979) developed a theory for the interpersonal relationship in a non-therapeutic context, applicable to change situations in different contexts (Horvath, 2001). The three elements Bordin (1979) introduced for the working alliance were agreement on tasks, agreement on goals, and a mutual bond. An alliance is not regarded as a static phenomenon, but as an ongoing process. Negotiations between professional and client about goals and tasks will be affecting the development of the alliance continuously. The way the professional attends to the needs of the clients and deals with possible disruptions in the relationship will determine the nature and strength of the alliance.

Ross, Polaschek, and Ward (2008) argue that Bordin's theory is useful for coercive relationships, but it needs some readjustments. Their main critique is that the theory gives little insight into the way in which an alliance develops or how it continues despite possible disruptions. Especially that latter point is crucial in a coerced or mandated alliance, in which reactance will be expressed. A second comment on Bordin's theory is that it does not pay much attention to the influence of the context. An environment characterized by hierarchy and power differences, where clients have little or no control over their living conditions, will influence the alliance. Ross et al. (2008) propose a new theoretical concept of the alliance, which is still based on the three pillars (bond, goals, and tasks), but takes more into account that the alliance will be influenced by external factors (such as the constraints of the criminal justice system) and the characteristics of the setting which contain sources of disruption or support. This theory of Ross and colleagues (2008) is slightly changed and translated for the working alliance with adolescents (Orsi, Lafortune, & Brochu, 2010). The main difference is that the social network of the youngster is included as crucial for development of an alliance. Furthermore, relying on a study of Zack, Castonguay, and Boswell (2007), the goal dimension of alliance is considered weak for adolescents, due to the fact the intervention is not initiated by the adolescent themselves (Orsi et al., 2010). Therefore two pillars are distinguished instead of three; cooperation and affection.

Altogether the basic assumption for the present study is that the change process of incarcerated boys is determined by contextual factors (the constraints of the criminal justice system), the network of the boy, the characteristics and skills of group workers and boys as well as what happens in the interaction between them. These factors can influence change processes either positively or negatively. A second assumption is that the development of the alliance is influenced by the way in which group workers and boys respond toward circumstances and to each other and the way in which the group workers react on disruptions. The third assumption is that the alliance has an affection dimension and a cooperation dimension. The last assumption is that the alliance is partly determined by the extent to which needs of both actors (group workers and boys) are fulfilled (Bordin, 1983).

What do we know of the perception of this alliance in the population of incarcerated boys? There appears a growing trust in the capability of youngsters to express themselves, and children and youth are increasingly involved in research and directly asked for their opinion or experience (Schelbe et al., 2015). Six studies in Dutch correctional facilities were published, in which young people were asked about their opinion on their interaction with group workers (Addink, Lekkerkerker, & Vermeij, 2010; Donker & De Bakker, 2012; Harder, Knorth, & Kalverboer, 2012; Loeff, 2012; Van der Helm et al., 2009; Van der Laan & Eichelsheim, 2013). These respondents expressed

that they value fairness, integrity, respect, righteousness, commitment and empathy in the interaction with group workers and that they want to feel safe and without stress. In summary, what incarcerated youngsters expect from group workers, can be categorized on the one hand as affection aspects such as genuineness, empathy and acceptance and on the other hand as cooperation aspects such as providing support, structure, safety, autonomy and recreation. Although the situation in Dutch correctional facilities differs from other countries (Hazel, 2008), these results are largely similar to results of studies in the U.S. (Abrams, 2006; Inderbitzin, 2006; Schubert et al., 2012; Shelton, 2004) and the UK (Biggam & Power, 1997; Harvey, 2007) and Australia (Ashkar & Kenny, 2008). Hence, the Dutch research shows that incarcerated youth are generally positive about their relationship with group workers (Looft, 2012; Van der Laan & Eichelsheim, 2013) and that they seem to value both affection and cooperation in the interaction. However, to improve the alliance and to be better able to customize management and support to individual youngsters, more knowledge about individual differences in perceptions is needed as well as about the significance and value these young offenders give to cooperation and affection. This type of information is important for being able to connect well to young people's needs, which can increase the quality of the relationship and support a working alliance (Harder, 2011b).

This study wants to fill this information gap by gathering opinions of incarcerated boys regarding their interaction with group workers in a correctional institution and the possible differences in these opinions. To stay as close as possible to the perception of the boys, Q methodology is used (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Q methodology reveals subjectivity: how people conceive and communicate their point of view about a subject (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). This subjectivity becomes operant by ranking statements (Stephenson, 1953). The aim of this study is to investigate preferences and needs of incarcerated boys regarding the interaction with group workers in order to get more insight into what can support the development of a working alliance.

## Methods

### *Research Participants*

Since ninety-six percent of the population in a juvenile correctional institution in The Netherlands are boys, the current study is exclusively focused on boys. In this particular Q study boys were recruited in two different correctional facilities in The Netherlands. The annual survey in all correctional youth institutions in The Netherlands showed that opinions about the interaction with group workers in boys from these two institutions did not differ from the opinions of boys in other institutions (Looft, 2012). The sample of

respondents was composed in such a way to achieve as much diversity as possible. After all, it is not relevant how often views prevail, but to find as many different views as possible (Brown, 1980). In order to find the greatest possible diversity in respondents, the selection was based on six variables, which - according to the mentioned Dutch studies - can affect views on group workers: a) age; b) ethnic origin; c) level of education; d) pre-trial detention, detention or Mandatory Treatment Order (PIJ)<sup>1</sup>; e) length of stay; f) newcomer or recidivist in a correctional institution. For a Q-study it is customary to have a sample of 40–60 participants (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 73). Respondents had been recruited with the snowball method in two facilities, until a sufficiently diverse group of an acceptable size of 47 respondents had been reached. All boys participated voluntarily in the Q study. Beforehand, they signed an informed consent declaration and were given the guarantee of anonymity. Each respondent completed the card sorting task in a one-to-one setting with the researcher.

### **Q Methodology**

Q methodology, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Ramlo, 2015), was used to examine differences and similarities in views of the incarcerated boys. It is an accessible and playful method for participants and experienced as attractive for young people (Tielen, Van Staa, Jedeloo, Van Exel, & Weimar, 2008). Cognitive ability and language skills are less important in this method than in other research approaches as participants respond to sorting cards.

Q methodology comprises the following steps (Watts & Stenner, 2012): statements about the topic are collected (in Q methodology it is called 'concourse'); a selection is made from this concourse (Q set); each respondent prioritizes the statements in a fixed template (Q sort); respondents are interviewed with respect to their rank ordering; similar rankings are clustered by factor analysis followed by interpretation of results (Q analysis).

This study started with selecting opinion statements on the topic of study. These were gathered in an inductive (unstructured) approach, that means no theoretical framework was used for selection (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). Statements from incarcerated boys on the interaction with group workers were collected from verbatim interviews with 39 incarcerated boys from an earlier project, field notes which had been made during observations in living groups in a correctional institution (Geenen, 2014) and the results of the earlier cited six Dutch studies. The searching process continued until a point of saturation had been reached and 150 statements were selected. This set of statements had been reduced by deleting double, unclear and multi-interpretable statements and by merging others. The words used in the statements were kept close to the vocabulary of the respondents and the statements were

short and clear, taking into account the poor language skills of some respondents. Experts were consulted on a preliminary Q set and it was tested in several pilots with boys. The final set of 43 statements can be considered to be a representative sample of the concourse and a subset of possible perceptions of incarcerated boys regarding their opinion on the relationship with group workers. A qualitative analysis of opinion statements in six Dutch studies yielded eight variables: genuineness, empathy, acceptance, support, structure, safety, autonomy and recreation (Addink et al., 2010; Donker & De Bakker, 2012; Harder et al., 2012; Loeff, 2012; Van der Helm et al., 2009; Van der Laan & Eichelsheim, 2013). These were all represented in the 43 statements. The statements were put on cards and the respondents were asked to sort the 43 cards in the grid, as shown in Figure 1, from least important to most important. This grid is bell-shaped assuming that fewer statements generate stronger engagement (Brown, 1980).

The boys were helped to do a Q sort step by step. After making a first selection in three piles (most important, least important, doubtful cases) they gradually divided all cards from most important statements on the right side of the grid (+4), to least important statements on the left (-4). After the 43 cards had been laid on the table, the respondents were asked to reflect on their rank-ordering of the statements and motivate their preferences. This information was used for the analysis of the Q sorts and the description of the preferences.

### Data Analysis

The different sortings were analyzed to identify distinct subgroups who share a similar pattern of responses and therefore share a similar perspective regarding the interaction with group workers. In order to establish these subgroups, a by-person factor analysis was conducted on the 47 Q sorts. That is, a factor analysis based on correlations between the rankings from -4 to +4 that the respondents made (the Q sorts) and not, as in a

Least important									Most important	
-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4		
2								2		
	3						3			
		5				5				
			7		7					
				9						

Figure 1. Sorting grid.



classical factor analysis, an analysis based on correlations between variables (the statements). For the statistical processing of the data from the 47 Q sorts the computer program PQMethod was used (Schmolck, 2011). A centroid method was used for extracting the factors and the varimax-method for rotating, which is most common in a Q study (Dziopa & Ahern, 2011). To determine the number of factors those with eigenvalues greater than 1.00 were selected and those on which at least two Q sorts loaded significantly (in this study 0.39 or more - based on the equation:  $2.58 \times (1 \div \sqrt{43})$  = the number of statements) (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 107). Four factors were extracted and rotated, which together explained 44% of the study variance. Thirty of the 47 Q sorts loaded significantly on one of these four factors. There are relatively many sorts that load non-significant or confounding (17 of 47). A likely explanation is that there are several statements on which there is consensus between most participants (see Table 1, statements marked with a # of ##).

The Q sorts that load significantly on the same factor are those that share a similar sorting pattern. The four identified factors represent each a group of correlated views that differ from the other views. For each factor, by measuring an idealized score for each statement, a factor array is constructed, that is “a single Q sort configured to present the viewpoint of a particular factor” (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 140). This shows how a respondent would have sorted the 43 statements when loaded for hundred percent on that factor (see Table 1).

## Results

The factor arrays (Table 1) provide the basis for the factor interpretations. The aim of this interpretation was to uncover, understand and explain the viewpoint captured by the factor and shared by the significantly loading participants. The comments by respondents after they had sorted the cards, were used to clarify the meaning of the sorting and the meaning of the statements for respondents. In the following descriptions, some of these clarifications are presented in italic; the numbers of the statements are given between brackets, followed by the idealized factor score for that statement (see Table 1). The four preferences have been characterized with two words; the first word expresses the boys' feelings toward group workers, the second how they (want to) relate to group workers: anxious & willing (A); rebellious & defensive (B); autonomous & indifferent (C); dependent & approachable (D).

### **Preference A: Anxious and Willing**

Boys with this preference fear the aggression of other inmates. It makes them feel unsafe if group workers are not able to protect them from that aggression. They



**Table 1.** Statements and Idealized Factor Scores of the Four Preferences.

	A group worker	A	B	C	D
1	has frequent contact with my family	-1	-3	-3	0
2	has humor	0	2**	0	-1
3	needs a lot of experience to do this kind of work	2	0	1	-1
4	makes exceptions to the rules	0	-1	2**	-1
5	is not afraid of me	3**	0*	-1	-1
6	forgives me when I've done something wrong	1	-1**	1	0
7	practices sports with us	-3	1**	0*	-2
8	is familiar with my case	0**	-2	-2	-2
9	is clear about the rules	0	2**	-1	-1
10##	asks how I'm doing	1	0	0	0
11	helps us with cleaning and doing the dishes	-2	-2	1**	-4**
12	joins us in playing a game or watching a movie	1	0	-2*	-1
13	occasionally does something extra for me	-2	-2	2**	0
14##	is of the same cultural background	-3	-3	-3	-4
15	makes time for me when I'm worrying about something	3	1	1	3
16	does not lie to me	2	4**	3	2
17	is a woman	-4*	-4*	-2	-2
18#	is a man	-4	-4	-4	-3
19	is honest about what he thinks of me	-1	4**	0	0
20	keeps his promises	2	3	3	1
21	does not do things behind my back	-1**	3	1	2
22##	does not act angry with me (for no reason)	1	0	1	0
23	is truly concerned about me	-2	-2	-1	1**
24	tells me what he writes about me	0	2**	-1**	0
25	does not accuse me unnecessarily	1	0	0	0
26	does not treat me as a child	0	1	4**	1
27	does not order me about	0	1	4**	1
28##	really listens to me	2	2	3	2
29	talks positively about me	1	1	0	0
30	has confidence in my future	3	-1**	2	3
31	treats every boy in the same way	4	3	-1*	-3*
32	shares personal information with me	-2	-1	-2	-1
33	often works in the group (is present most of the week)	0**	-2*	-3	-3
34	believes that I can change	4	0**	0**	4
35	understands my family life	-3	-3	-4	2**
36	considers what's important to me	1	0	-2**	4**
37	explains clearly what he means	-1*	2*	2	1
38	helps me to arrange important things	0	0	0	2**
39	does not give importance to the reason of my incarceration	-1	-1	2**	-2
40	understands what's important to me in life	-1	-1	1**	3**
41	helps when I'm having a difficult conversation with somebody	-2	-1	-1	1**
42	occasionally says "thank you" or "sorry" to me	2*	1	0	-2**
43	consults colleagues about arrangements made with me	-1	1	-1	1

Notes. This table indicates the ranking assigned to each statement within each of the factors. Statements with a statistically different rank-order on a factor when compared with all other factors (marked with \* or \*\*) are called distinguishing statements for this factor.

\*distinguishing statements for this factor:  $p < 0.01$

\*\*distinguishing statements for this factor:  $p < 0.05$

# consensus statements for this factor:  $p > 0.01$

## consensus statements for this factor:  $p > 0.05$

prefer to deal with group workers who are neither afraid of them nor of the other boys (5: +3).<sup>2</sup> It is important to them that group workers are experienced (3: + 2) so they can have a strong impact on the group. They do not long for much social

contact with a group worker (7: -3). In their opinion that would weaken his position as an authority. They expect the group worker to be firm and straight. But they also appreciate personal attention and one-on-one conversations with a group worker (15: +3). Clarity is essential for these boys. They want everyone to be treated in the same manner (31: +4). Just like the D-preference boys, they long for encouragement from group workers; that group workers believe they can change (34: +4) and that they have confidence in their future (30: +3).

One can hear self-reflection and remorse in their words. They say they belong in 'prison' because they have done something wrong and that they are convinced they can learn from this experience. Remorse is also heard in what they say about their families (1: -1): *'they have already a hard time because of me sitting here.'*

### **Preference B: Rebellious and Defensive**

These boys expect honesty, justice and clarity in their contacts with group workers. It is crucial to them that group workers do not lie (16: +4), are honest about what they think of them (19: +4), keep their promises (20: +3), do not go behind their backs (21: +3) and treat them like any other boy (31: +3). Clarity about rules is important (9: +2). Fairness and justice come along with reciprocity. *'If you expect me not to lie, then I expect that you won't lie either.'*

These boys do not want to be bossed around. *'If the group worker asks me "do you want to shut the door?" I will do it, but when he says "shut that door", I think "fuck you".'* These boys differ from the other three preferences by not valuing empowerment by group workers. In their opinion it does not mean much if group workers believe in their ability to change (34: 0) or have confidence in their future (30: -1). *'I got to have faith in my own future, that's important.'*

These boys want group workers not to come too close. They have trouble trusting group workers. *'They don't need to know what I feel, I don't believe they can understand. At the end of the day they close the door and go home.'* Although they act rebelliously, more than other boys they do appreciate humor in a group worker (2: +2) and like their company, for example by doing sports together (7: +1).

### **Preference C: Autonomous and Indifferent**

These boys argue that because of their age and length of stay, they should be treated as adults (26: +4) and not being ordered too much by group workers (27: +4). They judge most of the rules as childish and want group workers to make exceptions to the rules (4: +2) or occasionally do something extra (13: +2). Wanting to be treated as an adult is also expressed when it comes to contact with 'home.' They do not want group workers to maintain contact

with their families (1: -3) or understand what is going on at home (35: -4). *'It's me who stays here, not my family.'*

Just like the rebellious boys (preference B) these autonomous boys attach great importance to justice and fairness. Especially if it comes to not telling lies (16: +3) and acting as promised (20: +3). But whereas unfairness and injustice for the preference B-boys makes them rebellious, these boys become indifferent. *'We don't want to waste our energy on that kind of behavior.'*

These autonomous boys want to be seen as a unique person and expect that the committed crime does not influence the opinion or behavior of the group workers (39: +2). They expect reciprocity in their contact with group workers, for instance that they help them with doing the dishes and cleaning (11: +2). They do not expect group workers to watch a film with them (12: -2) or doing sports (7: 0). *'I don't have to be friends with them, they are just the people that open and close my door.'* These boys only respect professionals with a lot of experience (3: +1). Interns and new professionals must earn their respect. *'Too often they think that they know it all already.'*

### **Preference D: Dependent and Approachable**

This preference differs a lot from the other three preferences. In contrast to the other boys, for these boys fair treatment seems no big issue. For example, they find it less important than the other respondents that a group worker keeps his promises (20: +1), or that he treats every boy in the same way (31: -3) or that he helps them with doing the dishes or cleaning (11: -4). These boys have a strong need for individual attention and support from group workers. They want group workers to know what is important to them (36: +4 and 40: +3) and that a group worker takes time to talk with them if something is bothering them (15: +3). Contrary to the boys with the other three preferences, these boys appreciate it when group workers are concerned for their well-being (23: +1). These boys expect - more than the other boys - help and guidance of the group worker for instance when they have a difficult appointment coming up (41: +1) or if there is an important issue to be settled (38: +2). Just like the anxious boys (A) they want encouragement from group workers. Not, as the preference A boys, to feel safe, but because they feel uncertain about their own capabilities. They value it if group workers show that they believe in their possibility to change (34: +4) and have confidence in their future (30: +3). In contrast to the other three groups, for these boys it is important that group workers know what is going on in their families (35: +2).

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The current study shows divergent opinions on what incarcerated boys value in their relationship with group workers. They are clustered in four different

preferences. Based on personal characteristics, two preferences prevail in certain sub-groups of the population of incarcerated boys. Preference A is especially found amongst younger first offenders (average age of 17) and preference C in the group of older boys (21) who are detained for a longer period, sometimes even for several years. Preferences B and D cannot be associated with a particular characteristic. Longitudinal research may show a development path of incarcerated boys from being anxious to rebellious to indifferent in the course of time.

Results of this Q study advance knowledge on the alliance between group workers and incarcerated boys. For some (preference A and C) it is more important what the group worker does (cooperation dimension) and for others (preference B and D) how the group worker acts (affection dimension). Furthermore, the results suggest that affection (bond) is not a necessary condition for a good relationship between group workers and boys. That supports the findings of Harder et al. (2012) who found that incarcerated juveniles can build a good relationship with group workers without experiencing affection. Further research can gain more insight on the importance of these dimensions regarding the working alliance with incarcerated juveniles.

There are several behavioral aspects which are highly valued by most of the respondents, mostly concerning fairness and respect. For instance not lying (16), keeping promises (20) and genuine listening (28). That is in line with findings from other research which show that reliability, fair treatment and a 'good listening ear' are very important for juveniles in correctional facilities (Harder, 2011a; Van der Helm, 2011; Van der Laan & Eichelsheim, 2013). This study gives more information on the difference in meaning for participants of the four preference groups. The interviews, which were held after the sortings, suggest that the meaning of 'good listening' for anxious boys (A) is that it can give them a sense of security. The rebellious boys (B) experience it as an expression of respect. Autonomous boys (C) feel taken seriously if group workers listen to them and dependent boys (D) feel regarded as an individual. Reliability - not lying (16), keeping promises (20) - means being transparent in what you say and do for the anxious boys (A) and being honest in what you say and what you do for the rebellious boys (B). For the autonomous boys (C) reliability is being clear and fair in reports to the court, which play a role in decisions about continued incarceration and for the dependent boys (D) it means giving structure, clarity and guidance.

A strength of this study is that Q methodology was used. By using this method it was possible to remain close to the experiences of the incarcerated boys. It has proven to be a good method for young people with learning disabilities - a group that is often forgotten in research (Kelly, 2007). It overcomes the drawbacks of questionnaires and interviews that rely on language skills, which the majority of the population in correctional facilities lack due to psychiatric problems (Colins et al., 2010) or intellectual

disabilities (Piquero & White, 2003). The participants felt presently surprised by the active role they had been given. These boys are used to being questioned by social workers, police officers, judges and probation officers. The Q study appealed to their own story. This fits the knowledge tradition and value of social work, which emphasize active participation and involvement of respondents in research (Ellingsen, Størksen, & Stephens, 2010). The set of cards and the playful character of the sort task lowered the threshold in the contact with the respondents and inspired them to speak frankly about their interaction with group workers.

Some methodological limitations of this study need to be acknowledged. Although it is discouraged to use negatively expressed statements, since disagreement gives a double negative (Watts & Stenner, 2012), for some statements this was inevitable. For example, 'speaking the truth' has not the same connotation as 'not lying.' Where necessary, clarification had been given to respondents on these cards to make sure they were understood properly. Secondly, Q methodology uses a fairly tight structure that forces the respondents to make choices, which is criticized by some researchers (Kampen & Tamás, 2014). We agree with others (Brown, Danielson, & Van Exel, 2015) who suggest that making choices promotes good thinking about one's own point of view. The participants of this Q-study did not have any trouble with the tight structure, they actually experienced it as helpful and did not show difficulties to choose what was important for them. Finally, our study cannot provide data about the prevalence of the four identified preference clusters in the population of incarcerated boys, but this could be a next step in research.

The study has several implications for practice. The first is the indication that a tailored relational approach might support the working alliance in a correctional institution. Anxious and willing boys (often newcomers) are afraid of harassment, abuse, bullying by peers (see also Harvey, 2007). They seek protection by the group worker as well as security and support. For these boys it seems important that group workers do not hesitate to act when it comes to an escalation in the group. To that aim it is important that group workers can deal with their own fear when confronted with aggression in the group (Van der Helm, Boekee, Stams, & Van der Laan, 2011). Boys in the 'rebellious and defensive' cluster tend to rebel against group workers. There is a chance that group workers label these rebellious boys as being 'difficult' and avoid contact with them (see also Moses, 2000). This study suggests that under the surface these boys long for proximity. Group workers should be aware of this possible ambivalence and try not to be tempted into quarrelling with them, which probably will feed the boys' distrust and rebelliousness. Autonomous boys have learned to adapt to the conditions and try to stay beneath the radar as much as possible. To develop and

sustain an alliance with them it might be important to give them responsibility. Finally, while for the first three preferences some distance of the group worker may contribute to a working alliance, for the more dependent boys the results indicate that group workers should seek proximity, because these boys yearn for encouragement and support. Overall, the findings indicate that a personalized approach will contribute to the quality of interaction and the development of a working alliance. Insufficient time for one-on-one contact and group dynamic processes make it difficult to respond to these different individual needs (Moses, 2000). Furthermore the needs will not always be perceived by group workers. Moreover, the group process in a correctional institution appeals to “macho behavior” and putting on a mask, to avoid showing vulnerability to peers and group workers (Hanrath, 2013; Harvey, 2007). On the other hand group workers will probably have their preferences too. Some will prefer interaction with the more outgoing boys, while others tend to interact better with the more dependent boys. A mixed team, therefore, may be a necessity for tuning in on diversity in the characteristics and needs of the boys. Moreover it is important to train group workers to discern the needs of the boys behind that mask and to teach them how to react in order to create a working alliance. Research is recommended to get more insight into the interaction preferences of group workers in a correctional institution. Most likely, there will be different opinions on, for instance, the caring approach as Tait (2011) found in staff working with adult prisoners.

A second recommendation concerns the social network of the youngsters. An element for an alliance with youth is the contact with their social network, especially their family (Orsi et al., 2010). Although, a strong relationship between group workers and parents may encourage a strong alliance with juveniles (Geurts, Boddy, Noom, & Knorth, 2012; Karver & Caporino, 2010), the current study shows that most of the boys are ambivalent with respect to contact between the group workers and their families, saying that they appreciate the connection of group workers with their family, but at the same time showing reluctance if it comes to real contact. It is suggested to examine this discrepancy and develop tools to improve the triangular relationship between the group worker, the boy and his family.

Finally, it is obvious that the compulsory nature of the relationship, elements of security and the fact that the alliance is formed in the context of a group, may have impact on the development of the alliance. Although it may not always be apparent from the observable behavior of the youngsters, a finding reflected in the interviews was that these incarcerated boys have a general willingness to connect with group workers. That is an encouraging sign to the field to be garnered to strengthen the relationships with incarcerated boys and improve outcomes.



## Notes

1. PIJ stands for Placement in a judicial Institution for Juveniles and it is the most severe measure in Dutch Juvenile Criminal Law.
2. (5:+3) indicates that item 5 is ranked in the +3 position in the factor array of preference A, see Table 1.

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