

Developed by Meredith Martin, PhD for PSY400 Developmental Psychopathology

Defending Marissa

The purpose of this activity is to demonstrate your ability to apply developmental psychopathology principles to a real-life setting.

STEP #1: Read the Article

Read the following article, located on Blackboard:

Steinberg, L. & Scott, E. S. (2003). Less guilty by reason of adolescence: Developmental immaturity, diminished responsibility, and the juvenile death penalty. *American Psychologist*, 58, 1009-1018.

STEP #2: Read the Case Study: *Marissa, age 17*

Then, read the information about the case study of “Marissa” below.

Marissa, age 17 – convicted of theft

This is Marissa’s fourth conviction for theft. In each previous case, she was found guilty of petty theft for stealing items from local stores along with two other friends. Although the other two girls were present this time as well, only Marissa is being tried. She is being charged with taking a diamond bracelet from a local jeweler. The store security officer allegedly witnessed Marissa take a bracelet from the shelf, put it on her wrist, and attempt to walk out of the store. The testifying security officer went with his co-worker to approach Marissa, who was standing just outside the store. There is also video evidence of the incident, which appears to follow the security officers’ story. Marissa was also on probation for a previous petty theft conviction at the time. Unfortunately, for Marissa, the cost of the bracelet just exceeded state laws for a class C felony offense, which can come with a maximum penalty of several months incarceration for adult offenders.

Because of her repetitive theft behavior, the fact that Marissa is less than two months short of being 18, and the fact that she re-offended while on probation, the prosecutors are seeking a maximum sentence of 2 months jail-time and to have Marissa tried in adult court for this latest offense. At her preliminary hearing, the prosecution describes Marissa as a “career criminal,” who, despite receiving multiple chances to change her behavior, continues to break the law with impunity. The prosecution argues that only a very harsh penalty is likely to change what has become a pattern of persistent delinquency that is likely to persist throughout Marissa’s adulthood.

STEP #3: Write your Witness Testimony

Pretend that you have been called as an expert witness for the defense. The defendant is an adolescent female (age 17) convicted of theft. Your job is to write a statement on behalf of the defendant (Marissa), arguing for a reduced sentence. Don’t get too caught up in the legal specifics of the case. Your job is specifically to comment on the developmental implications of her behavior. Your argument should provide evidence (i.e., specific reference to the research in the Steinberg & Scott article) from adolescent psychology and development to help mitigate the likelihood that the defendants’ behavior is part of a



persistent and unchangeable pattern of delinquency.

Your statement must include at least 2 distinct facts about adolescent development. Each fact you provide should also include a brief explanation for why it applies in this case and a citation of a peer-reviewed source (i.e., the Steinberg & Scott article) if appropriate. Your entire statement should be 1-2 pages in length, double spaced and references for any cited research should be included in APA format at the end.

Upload your finished assignment in Blackboard. Please include your full first and last name at the top and submit it as a Word or PDF document.

