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A Phenomenological Inquiry into Identity Change on the Path to Long-Term Criminal Desistance

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Walden University
2016

Abstract

A Phenomenological Inquiry into Identity Change on the Path to Long-Term Criminal

Desistance

by

Leah Bustos Mazzola

BS, University of Phoenix, 2011

AA, University of Phoenix, 2009

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

November 2016

Abstract

Growing federal attention to addressing collateral damages of the era of mass conviction and mass incarceration has led to millions in funding allocated to support successful reentry for offenders in contact with the justice system. In line with this initiative, federal agencies have recently turned to criminal desistance research to build on earlier recidivism studies and to inform successful reentry programs. In an effort to contribute to opportunities for future research within the desistance paradigm, this study was designed to explore the identity change process of the offender from deviant to prosocial, a continuously emerging concept within the desistance literature that has received little specific attention to date. The identity theory of desistance was used as the theoretical framework for this study in an effort to advance existing theory while exploring the phenomena of interest. The key research questions guiding inquiry related to understanding the lived experience of identity change as a component of the criminal desistance process, identifying determinants that influence this identity change, and identifying behaviors that support the changing identity. Data were secured using a combination of semi-structured interviews with 6 ex-offenders reportedly 10 or more years beyond desistance, observation around interviewing, and document reviews. Data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive phenomenology approach. Results showed the essence of the experience of identity change through the criminal desistance process involves refining the internal and external world to fit the non-offending working identity. Results of this study advance existing knowledge and theory toward practical, transformative support for offenders on the road to positive reform.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to:

- Every young person with a history of offending who has ever doubted their potential. Research results indicate your past does not have to define your future. Positive change is within your grasp, but you must reach for it and you must work for it.

- Each of the six long-term desistor participants who took time out of their lives to share their stories of positive change to help other young people who may be struggling as they once did. Exemplars make all the difference. Thank you for your example.

- My brother, Ralph Jr., who was murdered by peers at 16 before he had an opportunity to commit to desistance and the positive change that may have saved his life. This study is for you.

- My brother, Stephen, who began serving a 25-year prison term for juvenile offending at 16. You have lived more life as an inmate than free. This study is for you. I look forward to helping you reintegrate when the time comes.

- My sister, Andrea, my mother, Rosa, and her social network who supported me through my own desistance. Thank you for your presence, encouragement, and support.

- Every employer who ever gave me an opportunity. Access is everything. Thank you.

- My children, Elijah, Lenny, Nico, and Avi. You are my world. This degree is for you. Find a way to use your talents to do the work that matters most to you. Make time to nourish the relationships that matter most to you. Always set new goals and dream new dreams. Your life will be what you make it. Make it beautiful.

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Your down-to-earth style made the process fun and engaging. I hope to support other students in the future as each of you have supported me and continue to support others.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Offender reentry has recently emerged as a key criminal justice reform initiative at the highest federal levels (National Institute of Justice [NIJ], 2015; The White House, n.d.a). In 2012, 413,400 adult offenders were released from state prisons (Carson, 2014). That equates to approximately 1,560 adults per day reentering communities from state custody, 71% of which were serving sentences for non-violent crimes (Carson, 2014). Reentry is often a hopeful time for offenders who believe they have paid their debt to society and set out to pursue goals in line with second chances. Unfortunately, collateral consequences of criminal convictions create tangible oppressive barriers to positive reform, only perpetuating cycles of criminality and poverty in the nation's poorest communities (Burton, Fisher, Jonson, & Cullen, 2014; Chin, 2012; Kennedy & Chance, 2011).

A criminal record impedes access to opportunities relevant to survivability and resource development. Individuals with criminal convictions face barriers to gainful employment in sectors offering living wages, limitations to financial aid, welfare and housing benefits, and various other sanctions and restrictions across jurisdictions (Berson, 2013). According to the American Bar Association's (ABA; 2013), National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction, 47,454 such formal barriers exist across the nation at the time of this writing. In 2007, Congress passed the Second Chance Act to address this issue by funding research and programs geared toward reducing recidivism and supporting successful reentry (NIJ, 2015).

In line with this initiative, the NIJ has since funded over $1.3 million in research grants for desistance studies to understand how successful desistors overcame these barriers to success (NIJ, n.d.). Criminal desistance, the transition from offending to non-offending, has been a growing focus of criminological research over several decades. Desistance studies offer a solution-focused approach to understanding transitions away from offending behavior in contrast to the more widely known problem-focused recidivism research.

Recidivism researchers investigate why offenders re-offend from a "what went wrong" perspective, and focus prevention efforts around intervening to mitigate those influences (NIJ, 2014). Desistance researchers, on the other hand, focus investigative efforts toward understanding why offenders stop offending from a "what went right" perspective, and focus intervention efforts to encourage or support those processes (Maruna & LeBel, 2012). Applying desistance research to offender reentry initiatives may inform tailored support services and resource allocation to ensure potential desistors are setup for success. A welcome change for a group often neglected while agencies expend resources toward prevention efforts for those most likely to recidivate.

Recognizing potential social change implications for potential desistors led me to a critical review of the current desistance literature for opportunities to advance study. This review revealed a need to understand identity change as a component of the criminal desistance process. In this chapter, I offer an expanded review of the background, problem statement, and purpose of this study, including research questions guiding inquiry. Discussion around the nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope,

delimitations, and significance are also included. The chapter concludes with a summary and transition to Chapter 2.

Background

The U.S. criminal justice system appears to be processing through a shift away from the punitive, problem-focused approach of the tough on crime movement, and toward more restorative, solution-focused approaches to law, policy, and intervention. This reform follows widespread concern over decades of rising correctional populations and related spending that paralleled the tough on crime movement and related minimum sentencing laws (The Sentencing Project, n.d.a; The White House, n.d.b). In 2007, the U.S. correctional population peaked with just over 7.3 million adults in contact with state and/or federal corrections, a 386% increase over the 1980 rate of 1.8 million (Glaze, 2011). The White House (n.d.b) reported an increase in state corrections spending from $12 billion per year in 1988, to $52 billion per year in 2009 to keep up with the offender population under some form of correctional supervision. In the same report, the White House noted that the more pressing issue is the number of offenders who recidivate after release from corrections.

A recent Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) report evidenced these high recidivism rates after following 404,638 offenders released from state prison in 2005 in 30 states (DuRose, Cooper, & Snyder, 2014). Findings indicated two-thirds of those offenders released experienced re-arrest within 3 years, and three-quarters did so within 5 years (Durose et al., 2014). Recidivism refers to a return to offending after formal intervention, and serves as a measure of intervention effectiveness (Bartol & Bartol, 2014b; Nakamura

& Bucklen, 2014). Recidivism is generally an indication of failure within the criminal

justice realm, as the discipline is structured around deterring criminal behavior through

punishment or rehabilitation (Nakamura & Bucklen, 2014; NIJ, 2014).

   The most recent BJS release showed a small yet encouraging 0.8% year over year

drop in the U. S. correctional population between 2013 and 2014 (Kaeble, Glaze, Tsoutis,

& Minton, 2015). The drop from just over 6.9 million adults in contact with state and/or

federal corrections in 2013 to 6.85 million in 2014 reportedly brought the U.S.

correctional population to the lowest observed rate since 1996 (Kaeble et al., 2015).

According to BJS figures included in the Kaeble et al. (2015) report, this positive

downward trend has progressed slowly yet consistently over the past 5 years since the

2007 peak. Humphreys (2016) described this trending drop as evidencing that the era of

mass incarceration is in the process of unwinding.

   This evident unwinding process follows decades of combined efforts by

policymakers, advocates, researchers, and others to revise the laws and policies

responsible for collateral damages of mass incarceration and mass conviction faced by

millions of non-violent offenders each year. At the macro-level, racial disparities in

minority contact with the law have resulted in disproportionate minority representation in

jails and prisons. For example, in 2013, African Americans represented 59% of the U.S.

federal and state prison population while only representing 13% of the U.S. population

the same year (Carson, 2014; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2013).

   Similarly, disproportionate minority contact (DMC) has been a longstanding issue

within the juvenile justice system, despite federal efforts to promote improvement

initiatives since the late 1980s when minorities accounted for 7 out of 10 juveniles in secure confinement (Hanes, 2012; Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2014). Today, minority youth, and Black youth in particular, remain more likely to be incarcerated and serve longer sentences than their White peers for the same crimes (Models for Change, 2016). According to most recent data from the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement (CJRP), 53,462 juveniles were detained or committed to juvenile facilities in 2013 (Sickmund, Sladky, Kang, & Puzzanchera, 2015). Forty percent of those juveniles were Black, 32% were White, and 23% were Hispanic (Sickmund et al., 2015). Considering White youth comprised 74% of the U.S. population of juveniles the same year and Blacks comprised only 15%, these numbers indicate that improvement initiatives focused on promoting a fair and equitable justice system have a long way to go (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

Of further concern, this ongoing disparity most sorely affects one of the most economically vulnerable racial groups in the United States (Western & Muller, 2013). According to U.S. Census Bureau reports, since 1967, African Americans consistently report the lowest median household income compared to all other races (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2014). At the micro-level, collateral consequences bar offenders from many of the most vital resources to meeting basic needs and working toward a brighter future (Burton, Jr., Fisher, Jonson, & Cullen, 2014; Chin, 2012; The Sentencing Project, n.d.b).

Federal attention has recently shifted toward criminal desistance research to address reentry concerns (NIJ, 2014). This is a promising step forward as desistance researchers seek to inform supportive interventions that facilitate and accelerate the

offender's transition through personal reform (Maruna & LeBel, 2012). In a thorough

review of the current desistance literature, I found a broad range of contributors to

successful desistance. These include structural factors, human agency factors, and

interactions between the two (Farrall, Sharpe, Hunter, & Calverley, 2011; Giordano,

2014; Laub, Sampson, & Sweeten, 2011). The most recent developments in research

have focused on the desistor's changing identity from deviant to prosocial--a consistently

emerging component of the desistance process noted throughout desistance research

(Bachman, Kerrison, Paternoster, O'Connell, & Smith, 2015; Liebregts, van der Pol, de

Graaf, van Laar, van den Brink, & Korf, 2014; Hallett & McCoy, 2015; Maruna &

LeBel, 2012; Maruna, LeBel, Naples, & Mitchell, 2011; Roque, Posick, & Paternoster,

2014; Sharpe, 2015). An in-depth review of these findings will follow in Chapter 2.

Researchers pursuing this line of study note an outstanding need to understand the

identity change process, and identify determinants of identity changes and supporting

behaviors (Bachman et al., 2015; Bushway & Paternoster, 2011; Gormally, 2014; Rajah,

Kramer, & Sung, 2014; Roque et al., 2014; Sogaard, Kolind, Thylstrup, & Deuchar,

2015).

     As a doctoral candidate with forensic psychology specialization, I recognized this

emerging desistance research interest in identity change as a niche opportunity to

contribute to the literature. Forensic psychology practitioners apply specialized

psychology knowledge to matters of the law and legal system (Bartol & Bartol, 2014).

Psychologists have studied identity and the self since the discipline emerged (Leary &

Tangney, 2012). A search for the term "identity change" through a leading psychology

database, PsycINFO, returns literature as far back as 1854. A search in the SAGE

Premier Criminology and Criminal Justice database returns earliest results near a century

later in 1979. A search for the same term in the ProQuest Criminal Justice database

returns earliest results in 1988. Hence, the psychology knowledgebase may offer mature

insight into an emerging phenomenon in criminology research and practice.

The large body of psychology research on identity, one's sense of self as they

relate to others and social contexts, provides insights into the ways identity develops and

changes in tandem with one's social world (Fiske, 2010; Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith,

2012). According to this body of knowledge, identity influences one's self-concept, self-

worth, decision-making, emotions, and behaviors relevant to social relationships and

contexts (Leary & Tangney, 2012). From this understanding, identity change would

emerge as a component of any process involving significant patterns of behavior change.

Thus, exploring identity change as a component of criminal desistance can provide

important understandings to guide successful re-entry and positive reform initiatives.

Problem Statement

Criminal justice reform efforts are shifting focus to address collateral damages of

the era of mass incarceration and mass conviction. Thousands of offenders are released

from incarceration each day in the United States, the majority of whom have served time

for non-violent crimes. Collateral consequences of criminal convictions create tangible

oppressive barriers to positive reform. These widespread barriers perpetuate a cycle of

criminality and poverty in many of the nation's poorest communities. To address this

issue, the federal government has allocated funding to improve reentry programming and

community assistance for the formally incarcerated. To inform effective support

services, federal agencies have recently turned to criminal desistance research to

understand how successful desistors overcame barriers to success. In a critical review of

the existing desistance literature, I found emerging interest in exploring identity change

as a component of the criminal desistance process. Researchers have noted the need for

specific attention to identifying determinants of identity change and supporting

behaviors. Several of these researchers have also noted population limitations,

suggesting future research should focus on women, ethnic minorities, and adolescents

(Barry, 2010; Lloyd & Serin, 2012; Lodewijks, Ruiter, & Doreleijers, 2010).

To highlight some of the most recent identity and desistance findings and

opportunities for future research, Roque and colleagues' quantitative investigation of

identity change and desistance over time found prosocial identity increases as criminal

offending decreases (Roque et al., 2014). Roque et al. (2014) noted future research

should investigate determinants of this prosocial identity change. Rajah et al.'s (2014)

qualitative investigation of male adolescents as they entered and exited incarceration and

six months into reintegration showed that identity narratives changed in a way responsive

to the context at the time. Rajah et al. noted future research could extend these findings

by examining identity change after a longer time period with emphasis on understanding

if non-offender identities are sustainable after disconnect from formal treatment

programs.

In a mixed method study of over 300 former offenders, Bachman, Kerrison,

Paternoster, O'Connell, and Smith (2015) found the majority of offenders shifted from an

offender to non-offender identity, and sustained this change by replacing social supports with prosocial people and contexts. Bachman et al. noted future research should focus on understanding how desistors sustain identity change when facing structural constraints to those prosocial people and places. Further discussion regarding supporting literature will follow in Chapter 2.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experience of identity change, from deviant to prosocial, as a component of the criminal desistance process. I focused inquiry efforts specifically on identifying determinants of identity change and supporting behaviors, using a diverse sample of successful long-term desistors, including women and ethnic minorities.

Research Questions

1. What is the lived experience of identity change as a component of the criminal desistance process?

2. What determinants influence identity change in the criminal desistance process?

3. What behaviors support the changing identity?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

Qualitative researchers may use a conceptual framework, theoretical framework, or neither to structure inquiry (Creswell, 2014). According to Creswell (2014), modern qualitative researchers are increasingly using theoretical frameworks as a lens to orient study questions and guide data collection and analysis. Maxwell (2013) discussed using

existing theory in qualitative research as a spotlight that illuminates on what you see.

Desistance researchers have already begun investigating identity change in the desistance

process, thus I used an existing theory to frame this study. Paternoster and Bushway

(2009) have led this line of inquiry by developing and introducing the identity theory of

desistance (ITD). This ITD served as the theoretical lens guiding this study, in

combination with what earlier researchers already revealed regarding identity change and

desistance.

The ITD contends that criminal desistance is a self-initiated process involving an

intentional change in identity and simultaneous behaviors to support that change

(Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). According to this theory, criminal desistors are

motivated by a desired, positive future self, and strive to avoid a feared, negative future

self (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Criminal offenders possess a "working self" that

encompasses a self-perception, preferences, and social connections consistent with that

identity (Bushway & Paternoster, 2011). Identity change begins when the offender

becomes dissatisfied with the present, working self, recognizes a possible, positive future

self, and commits to it (Bushway & Paternoster, 2011). Commitment to the desired

future self initiates preferences and social connections that support the new identity. An

in-depth review of ITD follows in Chapter 2.

I used this theoretical lens to determine the specific issues and population I would

examine (Creswell, 2014). Bushway and Paternoster (2011) and others exploring identity

change and desistance noted gaps in research that I designed this study to address

(Bachman et al., 2015; Gormally, 2014; Rajah et al., 2014; Roque et al., 2014; Sogaard,

Kolind, Thylstrup, & Deuchar, 2015). Thus, by using the existing ITD lens, this study may contribute to identity theory development while offering an expanded understanding of the identity change process of desistance.

Nature of the Study

Because the purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of identity change, a qualitative phenomenological approach was most appropriate. According to Patton (2015), the foundational purpose of phenomenological research is to understand the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of the phenomenon of interest for a person or group of people. Since identity change continuously emerges as a component of the desistance process, understanding the phenomenon may inform supportive interventions that work. Unfortunately, few researchers to date have focused research efforts to such in-depth exploration of this specific phenomenon with criminal desistors. In a review of those studies that have come close, I found sampling limitations, as the studies involved all male participants and/or a single offender type (Aresti, Eatough, & Brooks-Gordon, 2010; Blagden, Winder, Thorne, & Gregson, 2011). Therefore, this study contributes to the deeper understanding of the process of identity change as a sub-process of criminal desistance, and I designed it to inform theory development and derived interventions.

I recruited adult participants who met established long-term criminal desistor criteria, explained in detail in Chapter 3. I conducted semi-structured interviews with seven participants, considered a sufficient group for a phenomenological inquiry seeking data for breadth and depth (Creswell, 2013). Interviews were conducted by phone and in

person, and I noted my observations of participant appearance, language, behavior, and

context during in-person interviews. Document reviews supplemented narrative

responses. I used an audio recorder to capture participant responses verbatim while

taking written notes for follow-up questions. Participant responses were transcribed and

analyzed using Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological method with NVivo 11

software (QSR International, 2015). This analysis required careful attention to

bracketing, setting aside personal experiences or judgments about the phenomenon, for

objective analysis (Reiners, 2012). After analyzing and coding data to develop the

essential structure of the experience, I further analyzed the data to determine fit to

Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) ITD.

Definitions

Criminal desistance: Desistance researchers offer varying definitions of criminal

desistance and tend to diverge in their understandings of what qualifies as desistance

(Healy, 2010; Bushway & Paternoster, 2011; King, 2013). At the most basic level,

criminal desistance refers to a termination of criminal offending behavior (King, 2013).

To keep in line with the ITD lens and to ensure consistency, I used Bushway and

Paternoster's (2011) definition of criminal desistance for this study.

According to Bushway and Paternoster (2011), criminal desistance is a "decline in

offending from some nontrivial level to an observed rate that is not significantly different

from zero" (pg. 302). Bushway and Paternoster (2011) explained this definition captures

three implications relevant to measuring desistance: desistance is a process (i.e. offending

does not have to transition immediately from offending to non-offending); the prior level

of criminal offending is nontrivial; and the rate of criminal offending does not have to end up at zero, but needs to be near enough to zero that the offending behavior is not significant. Minor assaults, disturbing the peace, public intoxication, and traffic violations are examples of trivial offenses (MacLeod, Grove, & Farrington, 2012).

Long-term desistor: In this study, I explored criminal desistance experiences with a sample of long-term desistors. Long-term desistors, for the purposes of this study, refers to participants with a documented history of nontrivial delinquency or criminality over a period of 1 or more years who have since successfully maintained a pattern of non-offending or trivial offending "near enough to zero that the offending behavior is not significant" for 10 or more consecutive years. Kurlycheck, Bushway, and Brame (2012) noted the scarcity of criminal desistance studies investigating long-term desistors, even though such investigations have the potential to offer great value to the knowledgebase. Focusing this study on long-term desistors served to help address this population gap within the desistance literature.

Identity change: This study was designed to explore the process of identity change from deviant to prosocial. Again, to remain in line with ITD as a theoretical lens, identity change refers to the process of changing from an offender self to a non-offender self (Bushway & Paternoster, 2011; Roque et al., 2014). Identities capture one's sense of self as they relate to others and external contexts (Fiske, 2010; Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012; Swann, Jr. & Bosson, 2010). Because identities are social constructs, identities also encompass how others perceive the individual (Fisk, 2010).

Given that identity change is a construct relating to the self in relation to others and external contexts, the shift from offender self to non-offender self would be evidenced by a shift in associations from deviant to prosocial others and contexts in line with the changing identity (Bushway & Paternoster, 2011; Fiske, 2010; Oyserman et al., 2012; Roque et al., 2014; Swann, Jr. & Bosson, 2010). The result of this identity change process would be the desistor's established and sustained self-perception as a non-offender, verifiable by others' perception of the desistor as a non-offender.

Assumptions

Assumptions for this study related to the qualitative approach and methods. Creswell (2013) defined qualitative research as beginning with philosophical assumptions and beliefs deeply ingrained in the researcher unknowingly through education and related experience. Qualitative researchers should begin by identifying those assumptions and beliefs to understand how they will guide research inquiry and practice (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) described four philosophical assumptions that subtend qualitative research: ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological.

After considering detailed explanations of the four types, I found assumptions within the epistemological paradigm would guide this study. From this assumption, knowledge is known through the subjective experiences of individual participants (Creswell, 2013). In epistemology, and phenomenology as an epistemological method, the researcher relies on participant quotes as evidence (Creswell, 2013; Giorgi, 2009). As such, the subjective data obtained through participant explanations is assumed to be true

(Giorgi, 2009). However, the researcher makes no claim the lived experience as described by participants truly happened as described (Giorgi, 2009).

Scope and Delimitations

This study was designed to explore the lived experience of identity change as a component of the desistance process with a group of long-term criminal desistors. Data included narrative responses to semi-structured interview questions; observation of participant appearance, language, behavior, and context; and document reviews to supplement interviews. Participants confirmed they were 10 or more consecutive years beyond the desistance process, as dictated by long-term criminal desistance criteria. I used Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) ITD to frame the study in an effort to advance existing knowledge of identity and desistance within the desistance paradigm. Because this study was focused on a small but diverse group of criminal desistors, it may not be possible to transfer results to specific offender sub-populations. However, I have reported results in as detailed and specific a way as possible to enhance likelihood of transferability.

Limitations

Interviews served as the primary data source for this study. At any point during interviews, participants may have chosen to provide false responses for any number of reasons. This was mitigated by requesting honest, detailed explanations and explaining confidentiality protections. The potential for researcher bias and credibility issues were also inherent limitations of this qualitative study, given that qualitative researchers analyze data through subjective interpretation (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

Patton (2015) described reflexivity as a means to address researcher bias in qualitative research, and claimed that reflexivity requires constant examination of "what I know" and "how I know it" as the researcher. Reflexivity is the process of growing self-awareness, being attentive to and understanding how one's experience and perspective (bias) may influence interpretation and noted themes (Patton, 2015). Creswell (2013) indicated that contemporary qualitative researchers acknowledge that qualitative research cannot be separated from the researcher, thus they must accept the influence of personal experience and worldviews and be open about it in their writings. The qualitative researcher positions him- or herself in writing by making past experience with the phenomenon explicit, and then discussing how those experiences will influence interpretation (Creswell, 2013).

Reflexivity and positioning were important to this study as I have personal experience with long-term criminal desistance. I engaged in an array of trivial delinquencies through my teens and eventually completed a year of probation for a misdemeanor theft charge. At 17, I made a conscious decision to set and pursue goals to create a better life for myself. That decision led to immediate and ongoing desistance that continues to this day. Due to this experience, I understood the need to distance myself for objective analysis of participant responses. This understanding informed my selection of the descriptive phenomenology approach for this study, as it addressed the potential for researcher bias through bracketing, setting aside personal past experience and knowledge of the phenomena (Giorgi, 2009).

Significance

For too long, criminological practice has focused interventions on understandings of causes of crime and deviance, and given less attention to understanding transitions away from crime. Criminal desistance researchers are developing the knowledgebase to understand those transitions away from crime from desistors' perspectives. Desistance findings show that changing identity is a key factor of this process. Yet, to date, researchers have paid little dedicated attention to exploring the identity change process as a component of the desistance process, leaving vital questions unanswered. These questions relate to understanding how offenders construct new identities, what factors support this process despite obstacles, and what behaviors, if any, are necessary to initiate, sustain, and complete this process.

Answers to the questions above may contribute to advancing Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) identity theory of desistance, a framework that may inform offender reentry programs in communities and corrections. Results may help interested parties identify signs that offenders are ready for positive change. They may further highlight additional resources or levels of support most likely to contribute to successful reform. This knowledge can inform tailored programs and intervention efforts across systems, facilitating long-term criminal desistance and reducing recidivism.

Summary

The above review included insight regarding ways that growing attention to criminal justice reform has led to an opportunity for criminal desistance research to inform solution-focused practice. Applying desistance research to offender reentry

programming could be a key to reducing high recidivism rates related to widespread

collateral consequences of contact with the criminal justice system. My critical review of

the most recent desistance literature revealed a need to investigate the identity change

process as a component of the desistance process. This study addressed this gap in an

effort to advance Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) existing identity theory of

desistance. Results may offer a deeper understanding of a phenomenon relevant to

effective reentry support. As a doctoral candidate with specialization in forensic

psychology, I approached this gap as a niche opportunity to explore a psychological

phenomenon in the desistance process. In this chapter, I highlighted the research

questions that guided inquiry, the study's scope, and approach I took along with

limitations and delimitations. The literature review follows to provide an organized

understanding of criminal desistance and identity research relevant to this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Growing public and political attention to criminal justice reform in the United States has led to various initiatives along the continuum of contact with the justice system intended to address collateral damages of decades of mass conviction and mass incarceration. For instance, the Second Chance Act dedicated $165 million in federal funds to support research and programs geared toward reducing recidivism and facilitating successful reentry for millions of incarcerated people releasing back into communities (Bureau of Justice Assistance [BJA], 2015). In line with this initiative, the NIJ (2014) recently turned to desistance research to build on earlier recidivism studies. Desistance researchers focus investigative efforts on understanding why offenders stop offending in contrast to recidivism researchers' focus on why offenders reoffend. Desistance researchers work to inform interventions that support offenders' transition through positive reform.

In an effort to contribute to this line of study, I conducted a literature review to identify gaps in the desistance knowledgebase. To date, desistance researchers have identified numerous agency and structural factors desistors tend to leverage through successful transition. Identity change is one of these agency factors continuously echoed in the desistance literature (Bachman et al., 2014; King, 2013; Marsh, 2011; Roque, Posick, & Paternoster, 2014; Sogaard, Kolind, Thylstrup, & Deuchar, 2015). Desistance researchers have noted a need to understand determinants of identity change and supporting behaviors as a means to facilitating the offender's path to desistance

(Bushway & Paternoster, 2011; Roque et al., 2014; Maruna & LeBel, 2012; Porporino, 2010). Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the lived experience of identity change from deviant to prosocial in order to identify determinants and supporting behaviors. The following literature review includes insight into the desistance literature, the theoretical foundation framing the study, and the key concepts that provided direction for this study.

Literature Search Strategy

I limited the literature search for this review to research published within the last 5 years, accessible in the following databases: ProQuest Criminal Justice, SAGE Premier, Political Science Complete, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, ProQuest Central, and Google Scholar. I used the following key words to guide all literature searches: *criminal desistance*, *desistance from crime*, *desistance from delinquency*, *desistance of delinquency*, *pathways to desistance, desistance of deviant behavior, identity and criminal desistance, identity theory and criminal desistance, identity and self-concept, identity and emotions,* and *identity and behavior*. All terms were searched in each database listed above. While reviewing literature resulting from the initial search, if I identified earlier literature as germane to the topic, then I conducted specific searches in Google Scholar to retrieve those earlier publications, reviewed them, and included them where appropriate.

Theoretical Foundation

Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) ITD contends criminal desistance is a self-initiated process involving an intentional change in identity and simultaneous behavior

modifications to support that change. According to Paternoster and Bushway (2009),

criminal desistors are motivated by a desired, positive future self, and strive to avoid a

feared, negative future self. Criminal offenders possess a "working self" that

encompasses a self-perception, preferences, and social connections consistent with that

identity (Bushway & Paternoster, 2011). Identity change begins when the offender

becomes dissatisfied with the present, working self, recognizes a possible, positive future

self, and commits to it (Bushway & Paternoster, 2011). Commitment to the desired

future self initiates preferences and social connections that support the new identity.

Working Self and Possible Self

The "working self" and "possible self" are two primary components of this

identity theory (Bushway & Paternoster, 2011). According to Bushway and Paternoster

(2011), the working self is the present self, grounded in the individual's sense of self in

the here-and-now. The working self is aware of what the individual can and cannot do

presently. That sense of self, or self-identity, fuels and guides the individual's behavior.

The possible self is future-oriented and may be positive or negative. A positive possible

self conceptualizes a self who one could become, and may want to become, while a

negative possible self conceptualizes a self who one may fear becoming, or may not want

to become. The possible self encompasses the vision of what one could do in the future.

Identity Change

Bushway and Paternoster (2014) explained that offenders reach a point where the

costs of offending outweigh the benefits. Those costs may be criminal sanctions, danger

to self and/or loved ones, strained or broken relationships, and others. These costs or

experiences lead to mounting dissatisfaction and disappointment with the criminal identity. As the offender experiences dissatisfaction and/or disappointment, s/he begins to envision positive or negative possible selves that influence a decision to change.

The negative possible self may die young, go to prison, lose loved ones, become a drug addict, have trouble holding a job, have no financial security, or end up homeless. In contrast, the positive possible self could secure a good paying job, have a good marriage, own a nice home, and raise successful, law-abiding children. As the offender's desire shifts to the potential outcomes relating to the positive possible self, his- or her commitment to the working identity as an offender weakens and commitment to the positive possible self grows (Bushway & Paternoster, 2011).

Behavior

Although Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) ITD emphasizes an interest, intention, and commitment to change as pre-requisites to criminal desistance, the decision and motivation alone are insufficient. The positive possible self serves a self-regulating function informing preferences and behavior changes necessary to success (Bushway & Paternoster, 2011). That self-regulating function guides the individual toward structural supports (i.e. law-abiding friends, family members, conventional jobs, and education) consistent with the identity change toward the positive, possible self.

Prior ITD Applications Similar to This Study

My searches did not return results for a phenomenological inquiry into identity change on the path to long-term criminal desistance. Two recent studies offering the closest similarities were those of Bachman et al. (2015) and Hallett & McCoy (2015).

The Bachman et al. (2015) study involved analyzing narrative interviews with drug-involved offenders retrieved in long-term follow-ups after release from prison. Bachman et al. analyzed the narratives using the ITD framework to test the theory's utility. Hallett and McCoy (2015) analyzed life history narratives from ex-offenders professing Christianity using three desistance theories: making good, cognitive transformation, and identity theory. I will discuss both studies will in more detail when I address the key concepts later in this chapter. Paternoster and Bushway (2009) explained that the ITD was developed to build on earlier desistance theories while integrating understandings from cross-disciplinary research. While the literature supporting the theory's major propositions is rather extensive, research dedicated to advancing and testing the theory to date is limited. Because the purpose of this study was to investigate the process of identity change on the path to long-term criminal desistance, and ITD researchers have identified the gap that I designed this study to address, analyzing narrative responses for key concepts proposed by ITD was a means to build upon existing theory while exploring the phenomenon of interest.

Rationale for Selecting Identity Theory of Desistance

Paternoster and Bushway (2009) noted their proposed identity theory integrated the desistance knowledgebase with "a diverse body of literature in social psychology, behavioral economics, and collective movements in sociology" (pg. 1105). As mentioned in Chapter 1, my goal in this study was to bridge a gap between psychology and criminology. Paternoster and Bushway (2009) have begun this work through identity theory. Strengths of this theory are its attention to the offender's sense of self and human

agency in resulting offending behavior, as psychologists have well supported in over a century of literature (Bandura, 2006; Fiske, Gilbert, & Lindzey, 2010; King, 2012; Leary & Tangney, 2012). The following sections expand on the primary concepts underlying the present study: long-term criminal desistance and identity change.

<div align="center">**Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**</div>

Long-term Criminal Desistance

      Historical overview. Criminal desistance refers to a behavior change from offending to non-offending. Specific operational definitions vary within criminological research, but many of the strongest empirical findings support the idea that desistance is a process involving a progressive decline of criminal behavior over time (Bushway & Paternoster, 2011; King, 2014; Sampson & Laub, 2003). Criminologists initially observed the desistance phenomenon in longitudinal studies designed to investigate career criminals (King, 2014; Farrington, Piquero, & Jennings, 2013). These studies demonstrated a pattern of ceasing involvement in crime as participants aged through adulthood, the transition now known as the "age-crime curve" (Farrington et al., 2013; King, 2014).

      Age-crime curve. The "age-crime curve" is one of the most consistent and widely known findings in criminology research. The curve refers to the visual change in criminal behavior that tends to increase through adolescence, peak in late adolescence through young adulthood, and progressively decrease thereafter. This process is evident year after year in the FBI *Uniform Crime Reports* (see Figure 1), and is continuously supported in longitudinal studies that incorporate self-report data and criminal records

analysis (Bushway & Paternoster, 2011; Healy 2010; Sampson & Laub, 2003; Maruna 2001; Shulman, Steinberg, & Piquero, 2013).
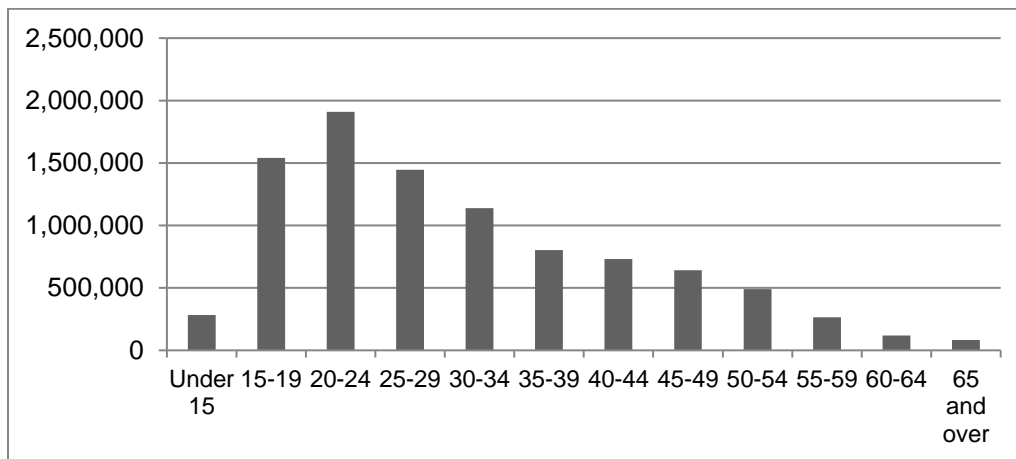
Figure 1. Arrest distribution by age in U.S. uniform crime reports 2012

Sampson and Laub's (2003) study is presently the most comprehensive of these longitudinal studies, beginning in the 1950s and including a participant group of 500 delinquent boys followed from age 7 to 70. Sampson and Laub (2003) analyzed official criminal records for a 35-year follow-up on 475 of the original participants and coded incidents into four offense types: alcohol/drug, property, violent, and other. The researchers sought to investigate whether individual differences or offender groups by type were viable predictors of long-term offending.

Overall offending evidenced an age-crime curve almost identical to that seen in the uniform crime report above. More importantly, a pattern of progressive desistance was present in every analysis regardless of crime type, chronicity, or risk (see Sampson & Laub, 2003, pg. 328, Figure 11). Even the most active and serious offenders eventually progressed through desistance at some point during middle adulthood (Sampson & Laub, 2003).

They also found no statistically significant differences in classic risk factors or offender groups leading the researchers to conclude that "aging out of crime is the norm" for all offenders and life-course-persistent offenders may be impossible to identify early (Sampson & Laub, 2003, pg. 315). Sampson and Laub (2003) suggested the term *life-course desistors* may be a more accurate way to describe criminal trajectories given the generality of desistance. The age-crime effect led researchers to begin investigating "why" and "how" offenders desisted and gave way to the present criminal desistance inquiry paradigm with increasing interest over the past 30 years.

Findings and models. Criminal desistance researchers have since identified numerous internal and external contributors consistently supported by ongoing study. These factors include, internal motivation to change, discontentment with present self, fear of possible future self, desired alternative future self, ownership of personal responsibility for outcomes, identification and implementation of strategies to change, and a shift toward prosocial identity (Bachman et al., 2015; Dufour, Brassard, & Martel, 2015; Giordano et al., 2002; 2007; Liebregts et al., 2015; Maruna, 2001; Roque, Posick, & Paternoster, 2014; Terry & Abrams, 2015); belief in ability to change (Bachman et al., 2015; Burnett & Maruna, 2004; Fox, 2015; Liebregts et al., 2015; Terry & Abrams, 2015), shifting away from criminal social networks toward conventional social networks (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Holland, 2003; Hallett & McCoy, 2015; Rodermond, Kruttschnitt, Slotboom, & Bijleveld, 2015); and conventional adult social bonds (strong marriages, parenthood, and quality employment) (Barr & Simons, 2015; Bosick, 2015; Kreager, Matsueda, & Erosheva, 2010; Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998; Laub &

Sampson, 2003; Rodermond et al., 2015), among various others. As a result, several

researchers have proposed desistance theories that tend to fall into one of three

categories: structural, agency, and integrated models.

The primary difference between the models is whether criminal desistance is

initiated and sustained by internal or external sources, or both. Structural models contend

outside contexts and influences are responsible (e.g. social or systemic contributors; Laub

& Sampson, 2003). Agency models contend internal factors are responsible (e.g. rational

choice, self-control, cognitive strategies, or cognitive transformations) (Giordano et al.,

2002; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Maruna, 2001). Integrated models contend

desistance is a result of internal and external factors working together (Giordano et al.,

2007; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009; Farrall, Sharpe, Hunter, & Calverley, 2011).

Most recent discussions in the criminal desistance literature evidence a growing

recognition that structural or agency models alone are too narrow to capture the

complexity of human experience that undoubtedly involves an ongoing person-

environment interaction (Bachman et al., 2015; Bosick, 2015; Carlsson, 2012; Farrall et

al., 2011; Fox, 2015; Giordano et al., 2007; Hallett & McCoy, 2015; Healy, 2013; Roque,

2015; Vaughan, 2007). With this in mind, integrated models offer a more comprehensive

means of capturing the complexity of experience unique to each person and his- or her

internal and external resources and limitations. Numerous newly released publications

within the desistance literature with special focus on understanding the desistance process

directly from offender and desistor perspectives evidence this idea. The following review

of literature relevant to long-term criminal desistance will begin with a compare and

contrast of leading desistance theories from structural and agency models, including

discussion around distinctions from ITD as an example of an integrated model. This step

is important to understanding where ITD fits among leading desistance theories. The

review will then orient this study to the present state of the desistance literature, with a

review of most recent desistance literature relevant to the key concepts.

Leading desistance theories: Age-graded theory of informal social control.

Laub and Sampson's (1993) age-graded theory of informal social control is the leading

theory within criminal desistance research and markedly different from identity theory.

Laub and Sampson (1993) focused on the ways external contexts and social controls

influence individual behavior. Of note, the most concerning limitation of Laub and

Sampson's (1993) theory is the fact that it was based on findings from a study following

1,000 all white, male participants in the 1940s (Glueck & Glueck, 1950). Laub and

Sampson (1993) analyzed 70 life histories from the Glueck sample for themes in

desistance behavior. Laub and Sampson (1993) found stable employment and good

marriages were the turning point for those men who refrained from crime as adults. Any

theory and suggested interventions generated from such a sampling should raise

generalizability concerns considering modern offender populations are largely comprised

of racial minorities and a growing population of females.

Laub and Sampson's (1993) theory was developed around a life-course

perspective framework integrating social control theory (Laub, Sampson, & Sweeten,

2011). Laub and colleagues (2011) defined the life course as "a pathway through the life

span, involving a sequence of culturally-defined, age-graded roles and social transitions

enacted throughout an individual's life" (pg. 314). According to the life-course

perspective, researchers may analyze lived experiences in two categories: trajectories

(long-term patterns of behavior) and transitions (short-term events) (Laub et al., 2011).

Transitions could initiate turning points in life trajectories in unexpected ways (Laub et

al., 2011). Life-course researchers are concerned with the potential to predict continuity

or change in behavior from childhood and adolescence into adulthood (Laub et al., 2011).

Social control theories link criminality and delinquency to weak conventional

social bonds (Hirschi, 2002). According to these theories, conventional behavior is the

result of strong conventional relationships, aspirations, and related accomplishments

(Hirschi, 2002). Deviant behavior is the result of weak social bonds, limited aspirations,

and accomplishments (Hirschi, 2002). The stronger a person's relationships with

families, teachers, employers, or other conventional social institutions, the greater the risk

associated with deviant behavior; in essence the individual has more to lose (Hirschi,

2002).

According to Laub and Sampson's (1993) theory, changes in external contexts

(e.g. environment, marriage, parenting, military, and/or employment) influence behavior

change in line with those new contexts. As offenders grow older they begin to take on

more conventional roles, opportunities for committing crime decrease, costs of

committing crimes increase, and criminal desistance is an adaptive behavioral transition

that does not require fundamental internal changes. Laub and Sampson (1993) suggested

criminal desistance is an internal behavioral response to external changes in direct

contrast to Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) theory contending an internal change that initiates external changes.

Leading desistance theories: Theory of cognitive transformation. Conversely, Giordano, Cernkovich, and Rudolph's (2002) theory of cognitive transformation is more similar than different from identity theory. Paternoster and Bushway (2009) noted their identity theory built upon and expanded this earlier work of Giordano and colleagues. Of note, the Giordano et al. (2002) study sought to test Laub and Sampson's (1993) theory by addressing population limitations.

Giordano and colleagues (2002) conducted a mixed method follow-up with a diverse group of 210 participants earlier investigated as chronically delinquent youth (Cernkovich, Giordano, & Push, 1986). Participants were 48% White and 37% nonwhite with 109 females and 101 males. The researchers originally interviewed participants in 1982 and interviewed again for the follow-up in the mid-90s. The quantitative analysis focused on testing the influence of marital attachment and job stability as key factors of desistance according to Laub and Sampson's (1993) informal social control theory (Giordano et al., 2002). The quantitative analysis did not demonstrate job stability or strong social bonds significantly predicted desistance for either gender (Giordano et al., 2002). Giordano et al. (2002) also conducted qualitative interviews for narrative accounts of participant's life histories that informed the provisional theory of cognitive transformation for future research.

According to Giordano et al. (2002), their findings demonstrated transformation occurs through a series of cognitive changes beginning with the offender's openness to

change. Transformation is contingent on exposure to and attitude toward hooks for change, described as prosocial environmental factors (e.g. conventional work, education, spouse, family, peer support, etc.). The offender envisions a positive, desireable "replacement self." This motivation to change and access to prosocial environmental resources to support this change leads to behaviors in line with the change. Eventually, the individual no longer sees deviant behavior as "positive, viable, or even personally relevant" (Giordano et al., 2002, pg. 1002).

Paternoster and Bushway (2009) noted the fundamental difference between identity theory of desistance and the theory of cognitive transformation relates to generality. Giordano and colleagues asserted their theory is only relevant to offenders who fall in the middle of the continuum of advantage and disadvantage. According to Giordano et al. (2002), the cognitive transformations and agency moves described in the theory "are hardly necessary" in "relatively advantaged circumstances" and "unlikely to be nearly enough" in "extreme disadvantage" (pg. 1026). Paternoster and Bushway (2009) contended the identity change process from offender to non-offender is a necessary component of successful desistance in all cases regardless of circumstance.

Leading desistance theories: A neo-Meadian theory of emotions and crime. More recently, Giordano, Cernkovich, and Schroeder (2007), steered away from the earlier individualist theory of cognitive transformation to an approach with greater emphasis on social experiences and emotions. This neo-Meadian theory of emotions and crime emphasizes the influence of the social environment and social experiences on the self, supporting emotions, coping strategies, and behavioral outcomes (Giordano et al.,

2007). The self develops through a role-taking process over time with repeated exposure to that role. For instance, negative, aversive childhood experiences may induce anger, associated responses, and resulting delinquency. The role in this example is an anger persona with a heightened risk of delinquent behavior. Because the anger persona is socially induced and reinforced, it is also malleable as social experiences change. As the offender's social contexts change, the anger persona is less necessary and eventually phased out by personas more fitting to the present context (Giordano et al., 2007). While cognitive transformations are still present, they play a subsequent, supportive role to social contexts in the criminal desistance process here. Identity theory suggests the opposite.

   Leading theories of desistance: Discussion. Each of the theories involves a person-environment interaction contributing to a criminal desistance outcome. They differ in the relevance of cognitive changes to outcomes and generality. Laub and Sampson (1993) contend cognitive changes are not necessary, while Giordano and colleagues (2002; 2007) and Paternoster and Bushway (2009) diverge around the necessity of identity change for every would-be desistor. Because each theory captures the importance of social connections to support successful desistance (e.g. prosocial relationships, jobs, etc.), Giordano et al. (2002) may have identified a significant intervention consideration in the potential differences between those with more access to resources than others. The idea that those with access to more resources may not be as dependent on cognitive changes as those with less is an interesting notion for further

research. The literature review will now shift to the most recent desistance research

relevant to the key concepts for this study.

      Recent studies relevant to key concepts. Rodermond et al. (2015) analyzed 44

quantitative and qualitative studies of female desistance to identify contributing factors to

success for adult female offenders. The researchers selected studies that investigated

reductions in crime and those that investigated achieved states of non-offending to

encompass desistance as a process (Rodermond et al., 2015). The 44 studies included in

the analysis were comprised of 32 employing quantitative approaches and 12 employing

qualitative approaches (Rodermond et al., 2015). Sample sizes in the quantitative studies

ranged from 210 to 208,296 while sample sizes in the qualitative studies ranged from 20

to 276 (Rodermond et al., 2015). Rodermond and colleagues found the following factors

contributed to reduction and termination of offending: marriage, a high quality

relationship with a partner, having children the offender felt equipped to support, positive

relationships with family and prosocial peers, employment, education, motivation to

avoid certainty of punishment, a sense of agency to change outcomes, a sense of self-

efficacy to make the change, religiosity, stable mental health, having no need for drug

interventions, and economic independence.

      Dufour et al. (2015) conducted semi-structured interviews with 29 adult male

desistors in Canada between 21- and 70-years-old. Each participant served an earlier

sentence between 1 to 3 years for crimes against people, property, or drug crimes, and

terminated criminal behavior between 2 to 7 years prior to interviews (Dufour et al.,

2015). The researchers identified the following themes through coding: common limited

access to resources, a process of personal and social identity shifts, social capital as a desistance support, and success in the non-criminal world as a determinant of whether the offender will shed the criminal identity and persist in desistance or abandon the desistance project (Dufour et al., 2015).

Dufour and colleagues concluded findings supported a three stage desistance process. The first stage (structure opening) indicates a desistance process will not begin where there is no structure opening in the environment to counterbalance the offender's underprivileged position and support the desistance process (Dufour et al., 2015). The second stage (structure > agent) indicates offenders must endorse and personify new social identities that will eventually modify the personal identity (Dufour et al., 2015). The third stage (agent > structure) indicates the offender reaches a point where he- or she self-identifies as a contributor to society and no longer self-identifies as a criminal (Dufour et al., 2015).

Fox (2015) was contracted by the Vermont Department of Corrections to conduct a qualitative evaluation of an offender reentry program, Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA). The purpose of the study was to understand how and why CoSA was so effective in reducing recidivism, with a success rate up to 70% evidenced by earlier quasi-experimental studies. The researcher conducted 86 semi-structured interviews with 20 offender participants, 9 reentry coordinators, and 57 community volunteers participating to facilitate community inclusion initiatives (Fox, 2015). Fox (2015) found CoSA's success rate related to two primary support functions provided by assigned community volunteers. One, community volunteers mitigated social exclusion

and isolation offenders' would otherwise experience upon release and two, community

volunteers assisted offenders in the de-labeling process, shedding the offender identity

and constructing a normative, prosocial identity (Fox, 2015).

Offenders expressed a sense of being unsure and overwhelmed with navigating

reintegration with the intent to stay out of trouble (Fox, 2015). Offender narratives

highlighted ways the CoSA team helped ease the process by offering a caring,

nonjudgmental ear, and positive support system that contributed to the offenders' success

on the outside (Fox, 2015). Offenders also expressed perceiving the CoSA team as a

source of encouraging accountability and positive reinforcement, a social connection with

others who demonstrated a genuine interest in their success and belief in their potential

(Fox, 2015).

Hallett and McCoy (2015) conducted an exploratory analysis of life-history

narratives for 25 adult male desistors who attributed Christianity as a source of successful

desistance. Participants were free from arrest or incarceration for at least 2 years, but had

earlier convictions ranging from non-violent drug offenses to murder (Hallett & McCoy,

2015). The researchers used an open-ended interview strategy inviting participants to

share in-depth life histories and desistance experiences (Hallett & McCoy, 2015). The

researchers then coded and analyzed response data for fit to three prominent desistance

theories or perspectives: Cognitive transformation theory, identity theory, and "making

good" (Giordano et al., 2002; Hallett & McCoy, 2015; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009;

Maruna, 2001).

Presence of three of four markers indicated a fit to cognitive transformation theory (Hallett & McCoy, 2015). These four markers were openness to change, exposure to "hooks for change," envisioning a replacement self, and a new view of deviant behavior (Hallett & McCoy, 2015). The presence of at least two of three markers indicated a fit to identity theory: crystallization of discontent, change in social/institutional relations, and identity change/break from the past (Hallett & McCoy, 2015). Presence of a redemption narrative, good self all along who was a victim to situation or society, was the marker for the "making good" perspective (Hallett & McCoy, 2015). Hallett and McCoy (2015) found 75% of participant narratives fit the cognitive transformation markers and 92% fit identity theory markers while none fit the "making good" marker. Important to note, cognitive transformation and identity theory both highlight importance of internal and external changes in the desistance process.

Sharpe (2015) conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 19 mothers between the ages of 20 to 27 with a history of offending. Sharpe (2015) coded responses for desistance themes and stigma experiences using grounded theory analysis and NVivo 10 software. Sharpe (2015) found support for identity theory in many of participant's narratives with the "feared self" being a mother whose children are removed from her care and into state custody (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Many responses also featured responsible motherhood as offering a prosocial replacement self, and the offender self as incompatible with this role (Sharpe, 2015). Sharpe (2015) also found social stigma relating to a criminal history lingered after desistance and emerged as an opportunity area to address in desistance interventions. The lingering "spoiled identity"

appeared to serve as a form of social control with detrimental effects to the mothers' psyche if left unaddressed.

Gormally (2014) conducted an ethnographic study over a year and a half focused on youth and young adults in Glasgow, Scotland who identified or had identified as gang members. As part of the study, Gormally (2014) formally interviewed 15 participants between 14-26-years-old. Of these participants, three self-identified as tertiary desistors, those who not only no longer identified with the gang identity but now identified with a moral community (Gormally, 2014; McNeill, 2014). The remaining participants ranged from those viewing the gang as their sole identity to those in various stages of the de-identification process (Gormally, 2014).

Gormally (2014) found participants perceived willingness to engage in street fighting as a direct link to gang membership. Membership fluctuated with this willingness as participants began to express growing attention to cost/benefit analyses of gang involvement (Gormally, 2014). "Growing up" symbolically and physically as characterized by opportunities to socialize outside of the gang's neighborhood also appeared as an important factor for participants (Gormally, 2014). As participants matured and had access to new community contexts, responsibilities, and social roles, they also experienced opportunities for expanding identities no longer dependent on the gang (Gormally, 2014). As participants began to experience opportunities to develop these new social identities, investment in the gang identity began to dissipate (Gormally, 2014). Gormally (2014) also found the capacity to achieve and sustain tertiary desistance

was dependent on social recognition of these new social identities and opportunities outside of the gang (Gormally, 2014).

Sogaard et al. (2015) conducted an ethnographic study in a Danish reformatory program called New Start. The New Start program offered rehabilitation support for male delinquents and gang members through boxing, weight lifting, and mentor relationships (Sogaard et al., 2015). The researchers used a combination of research methods including observation, field notes, individual, and focus group interviews over a three-month period (Sogaard et al., 2015). Research participants included 12 clients enrolled in the program at the time of the study, eight mentors who were also former clients, three young men considered friends of the program, one project manager, and six other staff members (Sogaard et al., 2015).

Sogaard and colleagues sought to understand identity change in the desistance process through participant narratives, which is directly in line with the study presently proposed. The researchers used the term "micro-narratives" to describe how participant narratives about self-change are a social process of trying out and negotiating institutionalized master narratives through desistance efforts (Sogaard et al., 2015). Sogaard and colleagues noted these micro-narratives evidenced a process of negotiating away from the past self while constructing reformed selves that align with prosocial identities and roles.

Sogaard et al. (2015) found many participant narratives expressed motivations for change through a combination of negative experiences relating to crime and lack, and aspirations to more conventional life status to address that lack. Many expressed coming

from socio-structural disadvantage they did not choose but spoke of growing awareness

of agency and will to desist and change future outcomes (Sogaard et al., 2015).

Participant narratives clearly evidenced a past (negative, offender) and present

(reforming) self (Sogaard et al., 2015). Ambivalence and loyalty were themes throughout

the narratives. Although participant narratives spoke of a personal commitment to

change, they were also clear that loyalty would take priority if closest friends or family

members were ever in trouble (Sogaard et al., 2015).

Sogaard and colleagues found narratives expressed obtaining conventional

employment as a central goal to support the desistance process (Sogaard et al., 2015).

These narratives highlighted employment as economic support, as a means to symbolize

the reformed identity, and achieve the social status participants desired (Sogaard et al.,

2015). Two other themes appeared for successful desistors (wounded healer) and those

struggling to fulfill conventional ideas of success (achiever) (Sogaard et al., 2015).

Wounded healers found opportunities to serve as mentors within the New Start program

to support younger desistors in early reform (Sogaard et al., 2015). These wounded

healers expressed greater responsibility to stay on track with others looking to them as an

example (Sogaard et al., 2015). Others expressed difficulties securing conventional

employment due to lack of skills and education, while others expressed challenges

around losing a sense of independence if working for someone else.

Rajah, Kramer, and Sung (2014) investigated juvenile offender narratives to

understand how offenders perceived themselves at entry into confinement, at exit from

confinement, and six-months following release from the John Doe Youth Center between

2008 and 2010. Rajah and colleagues combined open-ended interviews, observations of

group interventions, and survey data for a mixed methods study with 250 adolescents at

initial interview that reduced to 65 at exit interview, and 24 at six-month follow-up. The

researchers recruited all of these participants from a cognitive treatment intervention

program at the detention center. The study resulted in 278 pages of field data coded for

themes. Rajah and colleagues identified three unique frames each applicable to a

different stage: (a) victim, (b) rebirth/redemptive, and (c) critical (Rajah et al., 2014).

      During the victim stage, offenders expressed the ways socio-economic constraints

beyond their control contributed to offending behavior (Rajah et al., 2014). These

narratives spoke of committing criminal acts to secure material things or provide for

themselves in ways they could not otherwise afford (Rajah et al., 2014). They also spoke

of engaging in criminal acts to go along with peers who they depended on for social

support (Rajah et al., 2014). Narratives in the rebirth/redemptive frame expressed a buy-

in to personal responsibility for a reformed self and a clear ability to reflect on the past

self as different from present and future self (Rajah et al., 2014). These narratives

evidenced a commitment to continue practicing newly formed daily routines post-release

keeping in line with a new sense of self and identity (Rajah et al., 2014).

Rebirth/redemptive narratives also expressed enthusiastic commitment to pursuing

conventional jobs and education to achieve life goals (Rajah et al., 2014).

      During the critical stage at six-month follow-up participant narratives expressed

the challenges faced while seeking employment and education opportunities (Rajah et al.,

2014). They experienced difficulty finding a living wage, as their criminal records were

obstacles to securing employment (Rajah et al., 2014). Many participants began to analyze their situations critically noting parallels between criminal means and conventional means of making money (Rajah et al., 2014). They expressed recognizing plea bargains they were encouraged to take at sentencing now stood in the way of future prospects, and wondering why programs while incarcerated encouraged them to work when their practical prospects are so limited (Rajah et al., 2014). These narratives also highlighted the failure of the intervention program to prepare them for life after release and began shifting back to associate crime as a means to deal with structural constraints (Rajah et al., 2014).

Desistors vs. persisters. Desistance researchers are also focusing efforts on comparison studies between desistors and persisters to identify factors relevant to facilitating desistance and promoting successful outcomes. Liebregts et al. (2015) analyzed narrative interview data for seven identified persisters and seven identified desistors of a larger longitudinal study of 600 cannabis users between 18-30-years-old followed over a three-year period. Liebregts et al. (2015) analyzed the narrative data with a-priori codes identified as relevant to desistance through the desistance literature (current and future identity, future goals, strategies to quit/reduce, refusal self-efficacy, agency, and life events). The researchers also identified other codes as they emerged (Liebregts et al., 2015).

They found both groups believed they needed to change but desistors provided clear, specific, and meaningful reasons to quit coupled with expressed personal interests and desires to quit whereas persisters gave more generalized, abstract reasons they

"should" quit, rather than reasons they "wanted" to quit (Liebregts et al., 2015). Desistor narratives evidenced gradually reducing cannabis use, breaking daily habits, beginning to spend time with more nonusers, not having trouble with refusing to use when offered, reinterpreting use as relating to unpleasant experiences vs. pleasant experiences, and transitioning to self-identify as a nonuser (Liebregts et al., 2015). In contrast, persister narratives evidenced recognizing negative effects of cannabis use that did not interfere with desire to use (Liebregts et al., 2015). Persisters shared experiences of temporary cessation but, perceived it as difficult to maintain and expressed low levels of refusal self-efficacy (Liebregts et al., 2015).

Further, desistors' narratives evidenced high level of agency, recognizing an option to choose, act on intentions, and control outcomes (Liebregts et al., 2015). Desistors' narratives also evidenced future directions, goals, and strategies to achieve those goals (Liebregts et al., 2015). For desistors, quitting cannabis use was an action step toward achieving those goals and required planning and strategies for success (e.g. avoiding situations involving cannabis use, having plans in place to stay on track if faced with a decision) (Liebregts et al., 2015). With each successful decision and action, desistors' sense of self-efficacy grew (Liebregts et al., 2015). Persisters also expressed a sense of control and responsibility for their outcomes to some extent but showed a tendency to attribute negative outcomes to external sources (Liebregts et al., 2015). Persisters attributed failed attempts to quit to others (e.g. partners, peers) and circumstances (e.g. stressful situations) "making" them use again (Liebregts et al., 2015). Persisters expressed a belief that they could quit under the right circumstances that had

not surfaced yet (Liebregts et al., 2015). Persisters' narratives lacked attention to clear tangible goals in the near future and instead expressed postponing change for a later life stage (Liebregts et al., 2015). Persisters also expressed difficulty envisioning a nonuser self (Liebregts et al., 2015).

Terry and Abrams (2015) conducted 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews with 15 previously incarcerated males between 19-24-years-old in Southern California. Terry and Abrams (2015) sought to understand how formerly incarcerated young men navigated day-to-day decisions relating to "criminal influences, crime temptations, and the possibility of getting caught" (pg. 1). The researchers used coding software to identify emerging themes and completed within-case and cross-case analyses (Terry & Abrams, 2015). They identified two major groups they named: "on the road to desistance" and "running in circles" (Terry & Abrams, 2015). Participants in the "on the road to desistance" group were actively taking steps to achieve and maintain desistance whereas participants in the "running in circles" group were struggling to avoid criminal behavior, influences, and run-ins with the law (Terry & Abrams, 2015).

Both groups expressed reaching a point where they became motivated to desist from crime (Terry & Abrams, 2015). However, they differed in their visions of desistance and strategies to achievement (Terry & Abrams, 2015). All seven participants in the "on the road to desistance" group expressed moments of intentional decisions to desist from crime (Terry & Abrams, 2015). The eight participants in the "running in circles" group expressed desires to avoid re-incarceration and possibly reduce offending

to avoid consequences, but expressed not feeling ready or able to desist completely

(Terry & Abrams, 2015).

Terry and Abrams (2015) identified three primary barriers to desistance common between both groups: changing appearance, feeling marked, and associations with others. The researchers noted how the groups differed in approaches to address these barriers including internal and external factors involved in decision-making (Terry & Abrams, 2015). The "on the road to desistance" group pursued lifestyle changes including cutting ties with criminal peers, obtaining legal employment, and pursuing education (Terry & Abrams, 2015). This group recognized the importance of adjusting their outward appearance to be more in line with new contexts if they wanted to succeed (Terry & Abrams, 2015). The "running in circles" group members also expressed recognition of appearance as a barrier, but expressed less willingness to make or maintain necessary changes (Terry & Abrams, 2015).

Both groups expressed effects of "feeling marked," being profiled by police, enemies, and old acquaintances in their neighborhoods for past criminal behavior but they handled the stressor differently (Terry & Abrams, 2015). The "running in circles" group experienced more contact with police, as they were still involved in criminal activity in some way (Terry & Abrams, 2015). They spoke of a higher likelihood of being harassed by police and returning to jail for little reason (Terry & Abrams, 2015). As a result, the "running in circles" group expressed more attention to avoidant strategies to prevent police contact such as staying inside or avoiding areas of the neighborhood (Terry & Abrams, 2015). Participants in the "on the road to desistance group" expressed

not feeling a need to worry about contact with the police because they were not involved in illegal activity (Terry & Abrams, 2015). They expressed more attention to staying out of environments with a high likelihood of running into old enemies or peers (Terry & Abrams, 2015).

According to Terry and Abrams (2015), both groups recognized the importance of peer associations to desistance efforts. The "on the road to desistance" group took care to associate with others who shared visions of being responsible and establishing positive futures and limiting time with negative influences (Terry & Abrams, 2015). The "running in circles" group expressed reliance on criminally involved peers for social support, as they perceived a lack of options for positive social support in other relationships (Terry & Abrams, 2015). The "running in circles" group also expressed failed attempts and access issues with securing education, employment, and housing, which contributed to ongoing reliance on crime to meet basic needs (Terry & Abrams, 2015).

Bachman et al. (2015) conducted intensive, in-person interviews with 304 participants who were investigated in an earlier longitudinal study of serious drug-involved offenders in Delaware. The sample was 61% male, 39% female, 61% African American, and 39% white (Bachman et al., 2015). Bachman and colleagues analyzed the participants' arrest histories using self-report data from the prior study and public arrest records statewide, and nationally. The researchers categorized participants by offending trajectories and identified three desistor groups (low-level desistors = 26%, mid-level desistors = 21%, and high-level desistors = 15%) and two persister groups (low-level

persisters = 14% and high-level persisters = 20%) by level of ongoing offending. The

researchers conducted open-ended interviews and probed for cognitive decision-making

processes surrounding life events (Bachman et al., 2015). A team of four researchers

analyzed the interview data coding for pre-determined themes supported by the

desistance literature and emergent themes (Bachman et al., 2015).

Bachman and colleagues found 80% of desistors' narratives evidenced the

cognitive identity transformation described in identity theory of desistance. Most of

these narratives also mentioned recognition of a feared, future self that came after a chain

of failures (crystallization of discontent) (Bachman et al., 2015). Desistors expressed

moments of decision to no longer be an "offender" or "drug addict" and deliberate,

intentional actions to shift from deviant to prosocial networks and daily routines that

supported the change (Bachman et al., 2015). Few desistor narratives mentioned

employment or partnerships as relevant to the desistance transition (Bachman et al.,

2015). For those who did, employment became a support function to help sustain

desistance, but only after the offender committed to change (Bachman et al., 2015).

Likewise, relationships with significant others served a support function through

desistance only after the ex-offender committed to change (Bachman et al., 2015).

The primary theme through persister narratives was no readiness for change

(Bachman et al., 2015). Persister narratives evidenced various forms of employment and

relationships with family or significant others but many expressed living functional lives

despite ongoing offending (Bachman et al., 2015). Additionally, although persister

narratives noted recognizing costs of ongoing offending, they expressed no interest in

detaching from the offender identity (Bachman et al., 2015). The literature review will now shift to an expanded review of identity understandings before closing with a summary of major themes and discussion surrounding the gap this study will help fill.

Identity Development and Change

      Identity and self-concept. The knowledgebase for the study of self and identity spans over a century in the psychology and sociology disciplines (Swann, Jr. & Bosson, 2010). Identity encompasses one's sense of self as they relate to others and their place in social contexts (Fiske, 2010; Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012; Swann, Jr. & Bosson, 2010). The identity is a social construct that captures roles and group membership (Fiske, 2010). Self-concept can be personal (trait-informed) and social (role- or group-informed) (Fiske, 2010). The self-concept is comprised of one's thoughts, perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about who one is (Fiske, 2010; Oyserman et al., 2012; Swann, Jr. & Bosson, 2010).

      One's identity is not a singular concept. Identities are multifaceted, complex, and theoretically unlimited (Swann, Jr. & Bosson, 2010). For instance, one may be a mother and a criminal offender. The self one believes she is as a mother may be very different from who she believes she is as a criminal offender. Yet, who she is as a criminal offender, makes her no less who she is as a mother. Each is a component of the whole.

      Origination: Perceptions and self-knowledge. Self-concepts and identities are influenced by others' perceptions and self-knowledge (Oyserman et al., 2012). Researchers investigating self have identified various sub-components of self-knowledge and differentiate between active and stored self-knowledge (Carruthers, 2011; Reed,

2010), implicit and explicit self-knowledge (Dislich, Imhoff, Banse, Altstotter-Gleich,

Zinkernagel, & Schmitt, 2011; McWilliams, Nier, & Singer, 2013; Sylvia & Phillips,

2013), personal and social self-knowledge (Cote & Levine, 2014; Fiske, 2010), and

global versus specific self-knowledge (Kwang & Swann, Jr., 2010; Swann, Jr. & Bosson,

2010), among others.

Active and stored self-knowledge. Active and stored self-knowledge addresses

the understanding that the mind cannot actively process all knowledge at once.

Consequently, the mind stores away self-knowledge not presently relevant, and actively

uses self-knowledge that is presently relevant (Swann, Jr. & Bosson, 2010). One's sense

of self as a teenager is no longer as relevant during adulthood. The teen sense of self is

stored away as the adult sense of self develops and becomes prominent. However, the

teen sense of self is not lost, it is only dormant, and may be retrieved via memory when

relevant (e.g. when empathizing with a teen child). Likewise, an ex-offender sense of

self may become dormant as the individual develops a non-offender self. The non-

offender may retrieve the stored self-knowledge if relevant to present goals (e.g.

mentoring and relating with young offenders on the road to reform).

Implicit and explicit self-knowledge. Implicit and explicit self-knowledge

addresses the difference between conscious and unconscious self (Swann, Jr. & Bosson,

2010). Implicit self-knowledge is the sense of self a person develops without intending

to. This knowledge is often a product of heuristic processes, quick appraisals and

judgments at work in everyday experience (Dijksterhuis, 2010; Fiske, 2010). Ethnic or

gender stereotypes exemplify implicit self-knowledge. Internalized labeling and

marginalization are also examples of implicit self-knowledge. A young minority male who lives in high crime areas may internalize stereotypes about what he can do or achieve.

Explicit self-knowledge refers to the sense of self within conscious awareness (Fiske, 2010; Swann, Jr. & Bosson, 2010). The person recognizes these aspects of self and may apply them deliberately (Fiske, 2010; Swann, Jr. & Bosson, 2010). Explicit self-knowledge is intentional. One may choose to be a football player, doctor, or writer. In choosing such a role, the individual may deliberately learn to think and act in a way that is conducive to effectiveness and success in that role (Fiske, 2010).

Personal and social self-knowledge. Personal and social self-knowledge distinguishes between personal character traits (e.g. intelligent, kind, strong, etc.) and social self-perception (Swann, Jr. & Bosson, 2010). Social self-perception relates to social group membership and what one thinks or feels about affiliation with these groups (e.g. ethnicity, status, gender, sexuality, etc.) (Swann, Jr. & Bosson, 2010). Global and specific self-knowledge distinguishes between generalized beliefs about the self and beliefs about the self in relation to specific contexts (Swann, Jr. & Bosson, 2010). A woman may perceive herself as an affectionate mother, but not as an affectionate person generally.

Outcome effects. Self-concept and identities influence self-esteem, a person's sense of self-worth based in global evaluations of the self (Buhrmester, Blanton, & Swann, Jr., 2011; Fiske, 2010; Swann, Jr. & Bosson, 2010). Researchers describe this sense of self-worth as a motivational-affective process that captures how people feel

about themselves and influences behavior (Fiske, 2010; Lazarus, 1991; Leary & Beaumeister, 2000; McDonald & Leary, 2012). A rich knowledge base of self-esteem research demonstrates this link as people scoring higher in self-esteem tend to show higher levels of positive affect (e.g. happier, more enthusiastic, more content, a greater sense of pride, and less depressed); and those scoring lower in self-esteem tend to show higher levels of negative affect (e.g. greater anxiety, shame, guilt, anger, hostility, and experiences of social pain) (Brown & Marshall, 2001; Fiske, 2010; MacDonald & Leary, 2012; Onoda et al., 2010; Simpson, Hillman, Crawford, & Overton, 2010).

Identity and emotions. Self-concepts and identities are cognitive functions that interact with emotions to guide behavior (Keltner & Lerner, 2010; Lazarus, 1991; Silvia & Eddington, 2012). Emotions are affective experiences that encompass traits, moods, states, and sensory experiences (Keltner & Lerner, 2010). Personality differences contribute to differences in emotional traits between individuals (Keltner & Lerner, 2010). One may have a greater general propensity toward gratitude while another tends toward cynicism, regardless of the situation or context at the time. Similarly, one may have a tendency toward an irritable mood across contexts and time whereas another may tend toward an optimistic mood in a like manner.

Emotional states (e.g. anger, joy, sadness, or worry) are temporary and situation specific (Keltner & Lerner, 2010). Sensory experiences are the physiological responses tied to emotions (Keltner & Lerner, 2010). These sensory experiences are learned responses that evolve over time to influence behavioral responses. For instance,

experiences of anger triggered by perceptions of injustice may generate a physiological response (adrenaline) motivating action.

Identity and behavior. One of the fundamental functions of identities is guiding decision-making and behavior (Fiske, 2010; Swann, Jr. & Bosson, 2010). From an internal perspective, characteristics, roles, and positions provide definitions, expectations, and norms that dictate what one generally would or would not do (Fiske, 2010; Swann, Jr. & Bosson, 2010). From an external perspective, identities influence what others think about a person and how they behave toward that person (Swann, Jr. & Bosson, 2010). For instance, social expectations dictate a mother would or should care, nurture, and provide for her children. A mother should not harm her children. Thus, in instances where a mother does harm her children (e.g. commit criminal acts against them) the social response is often confusion, disgust, sadness, or shame, whereas a mother treating her children with care may draw no attention or positive attention.

Summary and Conclusions

The above review offered findings from several recent studies in the desistance literature focused on understanding key factors of the desistance process directly from desistor perspectives. Findings from these studies once again highlight a combination of internal and external factors leveraged by the would-be desistor for success. These include, discontentment with present self, a feared future self, and desired replacement self (Bachman et al., 2015; Gormally, 2014; Hallett & McCoy, 2015; Sharpe, 2015); a personal interest and desire to change (Gormally, 2014; Hallett & McCoy, 2015; Sogaard et al., 2015); a sense of agency (choice, intention, and ownership of outcomes) (Dufour et

al., 2015; Rodermond et al., 2015; Sharpe, 2015; Sogaard et al., 2015); an intentional decision to change (Bachman et al., 2015; Liebregts et al., 2015; Terry & Abrams, 2015); clear future goals, plans, and internal/external strategies to achieve those goals (Bachman et al., 2015; Liebregts et al., 2015; Terry & Abrams, 2015); a sense of self-efficacy to implement strategies and achieve goals (Liebregts et al., 2015; Rodermond et al., 2015; Sogaard et al., 2015; Terry & Abrams, 2015); active behavior modification and goal pursuit (Bachman et al., 2015; Liebregts et al., 2015; Rajah et al., 2015; Sogaard et al., 2015; Terry & Abrams, 2015); distancing from contexts and relationships that would interfere with desistance goals (Dufour et al., 2015; Rodermond et al., 2015; Sharpe, 2015); pursuing positive social supports and structural opportunities (i.e., education, employment) that support desistance goals (Hallett & McCoy, 2015; Gormally, 2014; Liebregts et al., 2015); creating new identities associated with new roles (Sharpe, 2015; Bachman et al., 2015); and achieving a place of no longer identifying with the criminal self (Bachman et al., 2015; Liebregts et al., 2015; Terry & Abrams, 2015).

The review further offered insight into the literature supporting the gap this study was designed to address relating to understanding the process of identity change as a component of the criminal desistance process (Bachman et al., 2015; Bushway & Paternoster, 2011; Gormally, 2014; Rajah et al., 2014; Roque et al., 2014; Sogaard et al., 2015). Specifically, Bushway and Paternoster (2011) noted a need to understand links between identity change and supporting behaviors. Roque et al. (2014) noted future research should investigate determinants of the prosocial identity change involved in the criminal desistance process. Rajah et al. (2014) noted future research should examine

identity change after a longer period of time beyond desistance with special attention toward understanding if the prosocial identity change is sustainable after disconnect from formal interventions. Bachman et al. (2015) noted future research should focus on understanding how desistors sustain identity change when facing structural constraints to the prosocial people and places found to support this change.

The identity literature offered insight into the practical function identities serve. To put it simply, this knowledgebase supports identities function as a mechanism that guides behavior and resulting outcomes in line with individuals' goals. From this understanding, a theme of identity change in the desistance process would be expected from a psychological perspective and makes sense. The desistance literature provides ample data evidencing this deviant to prosocial identity shift. Understanding determinants and behavioral supports in this process was the opportunity area this study helped address. The following chapter will provide an in-depth review of the research design and methods for this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of identity change, from deviant to prosocial, as a component of the criminal desistance process. I designed the research questions to focus on identifying determinants of identity change and supporting behaviors in a diverse sample of successful long-term desistors. In this chapter, I provide a detailed explanation of research methods, design, and rationale for this study. This chapter further includes an overview of participant selection information, my role as researcher, data collection and analysis procedures, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical concerns and the measures I took to address them.

Research Design and Rationale

The research questions guiding this inquiry were as follows:

1. What is the lived experience of identity change as a component of the criminal desistance process?

2. What determinants influence identity change in the criminal desistance process?

3. What behaviors support the changing identity?

Central Concepts

Identity change, criminal desistance, and long-term criminal desistance were the concepts guiding this study. Desistance researchers have identified identity change, from deviant to prosocial, or from offender to non-offender, as a component of the desistance process (Bachman et al., 2015; Bushway & Paternoster, 2011; Liebregts et al., 2015;

Roque et al., 2014). Criminal desistance refers to a behavior change from offending to non-offending. Long-term criminal desistance refers to desistors who have maintained a pattern of non-offending or only trivial offending for 10 or more years.

Qualitative Methods

This was a qualitative study. Qualitative studies are exploratory and inductive investigations wherein researchers seek to understand the phenomenon of interest directly from the perspectives of effected participants (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative studies offer the opportunity to draw rich data informing conclusions that respect human complexity in individual and group processes (Creswell, 2014).

According to Creswell (2014), quantitative approaches, in contrast, tend to be favored for quantifiable data, statistical analysis, and generalizability. The quantitative approach is best suited for testing theories deductively (Creswell, 2014). Considering the process of identity change as a sub-process of desistance has yet to be explored, qualitative inquiry is more fitting. The inductive approach characteristic of qualitative research enabled me to gather rich, tailored data to inform identity theory development and ongoing study efforts (see Creswell, 2014).

Phenomenology. Qualitative researchers choose the most fitting of five approaches to inquiry: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, or case study (Creswell, 2013). After thorough review and consideration of each approach, I deemed phenomenology the most fitting to this study. Phenomenological researchers investigate the lived experiences of several individuals around a single phenomenon for shared themes (Creswell, 2013). The goal of phenomenology is to understand what

people experience in relation to the phenomenon of interest (e.g. loss of a family member, disease, etc.) and how they experience it in order to understand what it means to experience it (Creswell, 2013). Because the purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of identity change in the desistance process, phenomenology was fitting. The following subsections include brief descriptions of the other four potential approaches and why they would have been less effective for my purposes.

Narrative. Narrative researchers gather data from one or two participants in the form of written or spoken accounts of experience from the participant's perspective (Creswell, 2013). Patton (2015) described the foundational purpose of narratology as analyzing how the participant's story offers insight to understanding the individual and the world in which they live. The narrative approach is most similar to phenomenology; participant sample size is the primary difference (Creswell, 2013). The narrative approach is most fitting to explore the experience of a single individual or a small group, whereas researchers may apply the phenomenological approach with up to 25 participants (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology offered the richness of narrative inquiry with an opportunity to understand diverse experiences available with a larger group of participants.

Grounded theory. The purpose of grounded theory research is to develop a theoretical framework directly from the views of participants who have experienced the process (Creswell, 2013). Grounded theory research addresses the problem of attempting interpretations and explanations through ill-fitting theoretical frameworks previously developed around studies that may or may not be relevant to the current issue (Creswell,

2013; Glaser & Strauss, 2012). Grounded theory offers the researcher the opportunity to

tailor a framework directly applicable to the process or action. Paternoster and

Bushway's (2009) ITD already captures identity change as an integral component of the

desistance process. This study helps address these researchers' outstanding questions

around identity change. The intent of this study was not to develop a theory, but to

contribute to an existing theory. Therefore, grounded theory was not appropriate.

Ethnography and case study. Ethnographies focus on a culture-sharing group of

participants to understand how learned patterns of behavior, values, actions, and norms

contribute to the system's functioning (Creswell, 2013). The ethnographic researcher

immerses him- or herself in the daily life of the culture-sharing group for a prolonged

period to derive data from within the participant group's natural contexts (Creswell,

2013). Case study researchers investigate a single case or multiple cases over time in

real-life settings as the phenomenon of interest unfolds (Creswell, 2013). Neither of

these approaches was appropriate for this study because my investigation focused on past

experiences, not lived experiences as they unfold.

Role of the Researcher

Creswell (2013) noted four potential roles the researcher may assume: complete

participant (full engagement with participants while observing), participant as observer

(participating in the participant activity while observing), nonparticipant/observer as

participant (no direct involvement with participants, observing from afar), or complete

observer (the participants do not know the researcher is present). Creswell (2013)

described observation as noting phenomenon in the field secured through the observer's

five senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, or smell). Researchers conducting field observations are simultaneously engaged in some level of participation and observation that distinguishes his- or her role. In this case, I served in the role of participant as observer. I noted observations while conducting participant interviews.

Potential for bias was mitigated by ensuring participants had no personal or professional connections to me, and by attending to informed consent measures to ensure participants were aware that participation was voluntary, and that they were able to discontinue participation at any time. Potential bias relating to my experience as a long-term criminal desistor was addressed through objectivity, bracketing, and reflexivity, further addressed in the following methodology discussions.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Population. According to Creswell (2013), in phenomenological studies, all participants must have experienced the phenomenon of interest. Thus, participants must have met long-term criminal desistor criteria, a documented history of nontrivial delinquency or criminality over a period of 1 or more years who have since successfully maintained a pattern of non-offending or trivial offending "near enough to zero that the offending behavior is not significant" for 10 or more consecutive years. Participants must also have experienced identity change, from deviant to prosocial, as confirmed by the desistor's established and sustained self-perception as a non-offender, verifiable by others' perceptions of the desistor as a non-offender. This required soliciting minimal

supplemental participation from close others (e.g. spouse, parents, siblings, close friends, significant others, etc.) who could attest to perceiving the desistor as such.

I conducted public criminal records searches to confirm long-term desistance for participants who consented to these searches. Criminal records provided confirmation of past criminal offending and desistance tenure. In cases where the desistor's deviant history was during adolescence only, I asked participants if they would share a copy of the juvenile court document for confirmation purposes only. To protect confidentiality and address ethical concerns, confirmation was noted upon review of such records. I did not request, save, or store copies. I address other ethical concerns in a dedicated section later in this chapter.

Because the criminal records search was an anticipated barrier to recruitment, I allowed self-report participation. I allowed participants who declined to consent to the public criminal records searches or show records to confirm they met long-term desistor criteria to participate, and identified them as self-report participants in reporting. Supplemental interviews with close others and document reviews, explained later in the chapter, were used as supporting evidence of long-term desistance.

Sampling. According to Patton (2015), sampling strategies are a hallmark difference between quantitative and qualitative studies. Quantitative researchers frequently use random sampling with larger samples to enhance generalizability and reduce selection bias (Patton, 2015). Qualitative researchers use purposeful sampling with small samples of information-rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 2015). In purposeful sampling, the researcher finds specific participants who fit the study's purpose

(Patton, 2015). Sixteen different strategies to identify information-rich cases fall within

the purposeful sampling approach: maximum variation, homogeneous, critical case,

theory based, confirming and disconfirming cases, snowball or chain, extreme or deviant

case, typical case, intensity, politically important, random purposeful, stratified

purposeful, criterion, opportunistic, combination or mixed, and convenience (Creswell,

2013; Patton, 2015). Sampling strategies I considered for this study included extreme or

deviant case, intensity, and theoretical sampling.

   Extreme or deviant cases. Extreme or deviant case sampling involves selecting

cases "because they are unusual or special on some way" (Patton, 2015, pg. 231). Patton

(2015) highlighted various studies applying this strategy to investigate learning

opportunities from most extreme cases including Stephen Covey's (1990) best-selling

book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and Angela Brown's (1987) study *When*

Battered Women Kill. Patton (2015) indicated the logic behind extreme case sampling is

to draw lessons applicable to improving typical programs. For instance, should a

researcher have an interest in improving intervention programs within correctional

facilities across the nation, the researcher may focus investigation around facilities with

highest rates of recidivism and those with lowest rates of recidivism to inform all

programs.

   Intensity. Patton (2015) indicated intensity sampling is similar to extreme or

deviant case sampling without focus on extreme cases. Intensity sampling allows the

researcher to focus on drawing excellent or rich samples without distorting the

phenomenon of interest, as may occur with highly unusual cases (Patton, 2015). Patton

(2015) highlighted that intensity sampling may be a better fit for some program evaluations because extreme or unusual successes or failures may be discredited as not useful for broad application. Patton (2015) indicated identifying intense versus extreme cases requires considerable judgment and exploratory work on the researcher's part.

Theoretical sampling. Patton (2015) described theoretical sampling as appropriate for identifying participants based on their "potential manifestation or representation of important theoretical constructs" (pg. 238). Researchers may employ this sampling strategy to investigate real-world examples of the construct or phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2015). This sampling strategy allows the researcher to explore these constructs or phenomena specifically, then highlight, refine, or inform the existing theory based on resulting data (Patton, 2015).

Most fitting sampling strategy to research purpose and questions. Theoretical sampling was most fitting to this study, as it was focused toward investigating a special population of participants selected because they met long-term criminal desistor criteria to explore identity change, a construct from an existing theory. Theoretical sampling allowed selection of a diverse representative sample that demonstrated the reality of criminal desistance as a process. People may view results from an extreme or intensity sample as exceptions to the rule. This latter view may have contributed to people minimizing the results as not realistically applicable to inform interventions for others processing through desistance.

Sample size for phenomenology. Creswell (2013) indicated recommendations for sample size in phenomenology vary, but samples typically involve between 3-25

participants. Smaller numbers offer greater opportunity for richness and depth, larger numbers allow an opportunity for greater breadth of experience (Creswell, 2013). Efforts were made to secure a mid-sized group of 10-15 participants for breadth and depth. The study resulted in seven participants, a sufficient group according to (Creswell, 2013).

Recruiting. Volunteer participants were recruited via announcements to university message boards, professional listservs (Society for the Psychological Study of Culture, Ethnicity, and Race, Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, etc.), and social media sites (professional groups via LinkedIn and Facebook). The announcement (Appendix A) detailed criteria participants had to meet, summarized data gathering methods, and provided my contact information, as the researcher, for participation.

Volunteer participants were also recruited through relevant social media groups with administrator permission. The Facebook group, Incarcerated Children's Advocacy Network (ICAN), an initiative of the Campaign for Fair Sentencing of Youth, is one example of such a group. The ICAN group page currently has 1,641 members nationwide who are either ex-convicted juveniles, or family members of juveniles convicted of long-term sentences. Access to these groups requires contacting the group administrator and requesting permission to post the recruitment announcement on the group's page.

Instrumentation

The following types of data and instrumentation were used for triangulation purposes:

- Standardized, open-ended interviews in-person, by video-conferencing, or by phone using interview questions pre-developed to address research questions.

- Audio recorded interviews for transcription.

- Field observation, as possible, around interviewing in-person or by video conferencing.

- Document reviews including public records, journals, letters, papers, or other recordings of the desistance process provided by participants, and/or close others (e.g. family members, close friends, etc.).

Data Collection

      Interviewing. Interviewing was the primary data gathering method for this study. Qu and Dumay (2011) referred to interviewing as "one of the most important qualitative data collection methods" (pg. 238). Qualitative researchers have used a wide variety of interviewing methods, each falling somewhere on a style continuum with three categories: structured, semi-structured, or unstructured (Patton, 2015; Qu & Dumay, 2011). Patton (2015) described four interview strategies within this continuum: informal conversational, interview guide, standardized open-ended, and closed, fixed-response. According to Patton (2015), the researcher may choose to combine strategies as appropriate to the study.

      Patton (2015) offered an overview comparison of the four strategies including strengths and weaknesses of each. Informal conversational interviews have no pre-determined questions. The researcher employing this approach would ask spontaneous

questions during the interview process (Patton, 2015). A strength of this approach is the greater likelihood of questions relevant to the participant and context of the interview at the time (Patton, 2015). Weaknesses are the resulting data would lack structure and may leave vital questions unanswered (Patton, 2015).

The interview guide approach involves use of topics in outline form with no pre-determined questions or sequencing (Patton, 2015). The researcher would determine questions through the interview process (Patton, 2015). The interview guide would provide more structure to the interview than the informal conversational interview, while still allowing for relevant questions in a more informal process (Patton, 2015). However, the interview guide would still lack the level of structure necessary to ensure responses relate to the same, or similar prompts, reducing comparability opportunities in analysis (Patton, 2015).

The standardized open-ended interview involves pre-determined, open-ended questions in a particular order (Patton, 2015). This approach ensures participants answer the same questions relevant to the research purpose, which improves chances of comparing response data and mitigates potential for interviewer bias in the interview process (Patton, 2015). The closed, fixed response approach involves predetermined questions and responses (Patton, 2015). This approach does not allow participants to share from their own experience, as they are required to select from a set of predetermined responses (Patton, 2015). Data analysis is simpler with this approach, but inappropriate to studies intended to elicit participant lived experience in their own words (Patton, 2015). Considering these differences, a standardized open-ended interview

approach was deemed most fitting to this study. Interview questions for desistors were developed to be relevant to the research questions. These questions are provided in Appendix D. Interview questions were also developed for close others to confirm identity change, and provided in Appendix E.

   Interview protocol. I conducted and recorded all interviews. Interviews occurred in person in neutral meeting sites (e.g. coffee houses, libraries, etc.), by telephone, or by video-conferencing depending on the participant's preference and availability. Interviews ranged in duration from 30-60 minutes with primary participants (long-term desistors) and 10-20 minutes with supplemental participants (close others interviewed for verification purposes). Interviews were pre-scheduled with participants allowing ample time before and after for preparation, rapport building, settling in, and ease. Participants were introduced to the interview process with an explanation of how the interview would be conducted. The voluntary nature of participation and confidentiality protections were reiterated before questions began (Appendix D and E include these introductory statements).

   The remaining interview protocol followed Patton's (2015) advice. Patton (2015) highlighted the importance of capturing the interviewee's actual words in qualitative interviewing. Audio recording for verbatim transcription ensures the interviewer does not miss important statements or note statements as interpreted versus as stated (Patton, 2015). As such, audio recording was used during each interview for transcription and coding during analysis. Participant permission to record the interview was secured prior to the interview with the advice the recording may be stopped at any time, the same

process that applies for general participation (Patton, 2015). Supplemental notes were

taken during the interview to capture information relevant to follow-up questions or

important insights (Patton, 2015). Participants were also asked for permission to reach

back out for follow-up questions that could have come up through data analysis, if

necessary.

Observation.   Observation served as a secondary data gathering method for

interviews secured in-person or by videoconference. Patton (2015) advised reflecting on

interview observations post-interview is an elaboration opportunity vital to supporting the

study's integrity. Observations relating to the interview setting, context, participant's

behavior, dynamics of the interviewer and participant interaction, rapport, engagement,

and questions were documented while the interview was fresh for quality control

essential to reliability (Patton, 2015). Participants were asked if they had photos or

videos they were willing to share that evidenced the identity change process on the road

to long-term desistance. Observing media that captured the desistor's changing

appearance or behaviors offered a valuable glimpse into the phenomenon of interest.

Document reviews.   Participants were asked if they were willing to share any

documents or photos they had available that could evidence the desistance transition.

Examples were journals, letters, or other papers. A desistor may have kept a journal or

diary at particular points in life and they might have been willing to share excerpts that

evidence the changing identity for research purposes. Old letters may have offered a

similar glimpse into this change. Examples of papers were old court records

documenting delinquent or criminal history, and college diplomas, or other documents (e.g. awards, letters of recommendation, etc.) evidencing the new prosocial identity.

Data Analysis Plan

      Descriptive phenomenology. Giorgi's (2009) *descriptive phenomenological method* was used to analyze the data (Reiners, 2012). The focus of descriptive phenomenology is the meaning of individual, conscious experience (Reiners, 2012). According to Giorgi (2012), the approach requires the researcher to bracket, or set aside, personal experiences or judgments about the phenomenon to analyze data with a fresh perspective. This is a key difference between descriptive phenomenology and *interpretive phenomenology*, the other prominent phenomenology in social science research (Reiners, 2012). Bracketing will be important to enhance this study's credibility because I am a long-term criminal desistor.

      Giorgi (2012) noted bracketing is a necessary step for objective analysis, as the natural human tendency is to evaluate present experience as it relates to past experience. This natural tendency is generally appropriate to daily life, but may lead to presumptions that interfere with critical data analysis in research (Giorgi, 2009). Assuming a psychological attitude toward the data as a psychology researcher was the first step to apply bracketing to data analysis in this study (Giorgi, 2009). From this perspective, it became clear past experience may interfere with interpretations and reporting. Bracketing required a commitment to disengage past experience from the process, and a conscious effort to ensure all results were supported by statements and evidence presented by participants. Remaining open to emerging data as presented and taking

systematic notes through analysis for well-documented interpretations mitigated potential bias. Although it is impossible to remove all bias, attending to these steps minimized the likelihood that past experience would influence findings.

During bracketing, five steps guided analysis (Giorgi, 2012). First, response data was read in its entirety for individual participants (Giorgi, 2012). Second, the response data was re-read to mark experienced breaks in meaning, referred to as meaning units (Giorgi, 2012). Third, free imaginative variation was used to draw out expressions relevant to the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2012). Fourth, identified expressions were analyzed to write, "an essential structure of the experience" (Giorgi, 2012, pg. 6). Lastly, the structure was applied to interpret and clarify the study's raw data (Giorgi, 2012). Bracketing continued through describing the essence of the experience after which time reintegration, or unbracketing, began for reporting (Gearing, 2004).

Coding via software. NVivo 11 software was the primary data management and analysis tool for this study. NVivo is a data management platform for qualitative and mixed methods research (QSR International, 2015). NVivo handles non-numeric data including interviews, open-ended survey responses, literature reviews, and web content (QSR International, 2015). NVivo software is a central location to store, organize, and analyze data professionally and efficiently (QSR International, 2015).

NVivo is compatible with Evernote, a mobile workspace designed for data collection on the go, or in the field, in the case of research studies (Evernote, 2014). Evernote could be used for note taking during interviews, securing environmental and participant snapshots for context, and documenting reflective notes post-interview to

supplement audio recordings. NVivo includes Evernote access within the platform allowing the researcher to import data from Evernote for analysis in NVivo (QSR International, 2014b). Audio transcriptions and Evernote data could be uploaded into NVivo and analyzed using the various tools available within the software. Organizing and analyzing data in NVivo offered a quality control method supporting study integrity.

Patton (2015) described use of computers and software in qualitative data analysis as a tool to assist in the process. According to Patton (2015), as a tool, qualitative software programs ease and speed up analysis but do not take the place of the researcher as analyzer. Patton (2015) asserted qualitative data analysis "involves creativity, intellectual discipline, analytical rigor, and a great deal of hard work," elements that software programs cannot substitute (pg. 442). Creswell (2013) described qualitative software programs as a simple means of data storage offering greater efficiency through analysis.

Creswell (2013) noted a primary disadvantage to using qualitative software is the daunting task that may come with learning to run the program. I used the program through my qualitative research studies, so I was already comfortable navigating the system. Creswell (2013) indicated qualitative software offers most benefit to large databases with over 500 pages of data. The data for this study was not this extensive, but the software helped with organization and efficiency. Hand coding was used as a backup through the coding process.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility, Dependability, and Confirmability

Researcher bias and credibility questions around subjective interpretation are inherent limitations of qualitative research. According to Janesick (2011), "the researcher is the research instrument in qualitative research" (pg. 1). Creswell (2013) noted the qualitative researcher's perspective is a primary component of qualitative research, as each researcher brings a unique set of assumptions, beliefs, and related interpretive lens to the study. Patton (2015) described the importance of reflexivity to address this in qualitative inquiry indicating to be reflexive requires constant examination of "what I know" and "how I know it" as the researcher. Reflexivity is the process of growing self-awareness, being attentive to and understanding how one's experience and perspective (bias) may influence interpretation and noted themes (Patton, 2015).

Creswell (2013) indicated contemporary qualitative researchers acknowledge that qualitative research cannot be separated from the researcher thus, qualitative researchers must accept the influence of personal experience and worldviews and be open about it in their writings. The qualitative researcher positions him- or herself in writings by making past experience with the phenomenon explicit then discussing how those experiences will influence interpretation (Creswell, 2013). As stated in chapter one, this reflexivity and positioning component was important to this study, as I am a long-term criminal desistor. As such, I opened the study by positioning myself and making my personal experience explicit.

Patton (2015) also noted the need for three elements in credible qualitative inquiry: rigorous methods, researcher credibility, and a fundamental appreciation for qualitative inquiry. Patton (2015) highlighted various strategies to enhance the rigor of qualitative inquiry including generating and assessing rival conclusions, identifying and analyzing negative cases, and use of triangulation. Generating and assessing rival conclusions involves purposefully seeking data to support alternative explanations, understanding failure to find sufficient support for those alternatives increases credibility of the original explanation (Patton, 2015).

Searching for negative cases involves identifying exceptions to the rule (Patton, 2015). For example, a negative case for participants' experiences in a particular program would involve analyzing the experience of program dropouts versus those who completed the program and offered rave reviews. Triangulation involves applying more than one method to gather and analyze data for cross-data consistency checks (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) discussed four variations of triangulation: methods triangulation, triangulation of sources, analyst triangulation, and theory/perspective triangulation. Of these, methods triangulation, using various data collection methods (e.g. interviews, observation, and document reviews), was determined most fitting to this study.

Transferability

Transferability is a concept that addresses the generalizability question in qualitative research (Patton, 2015). According to Trochim (2006), transferability is "the degree to which the results of qualitative research may be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings" (para. 4). The qualitative researcher may note detailed

descriptions of observations specific to the person, time, and place while conducting the study, and offer those details in the results to enhance chances for transferability (Patton, 2015). I took this approach in this study to address transferability.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical concerns and steps to address. Creswell (2013) provided a chart with overviews of ethical issues in each stage of qualitative research and ways to address them. These stages of the study include, prior to, at the beginning, collecting data, analyzing data, reporting data, and publishing (Creswell, 2013). Two ethical issues identified in the "prior to" stage as relevant to this study are gaining permission from participants, and seeking university approval for the study (Creswell, 2013). Volunteer participants were recruited and informed consent (Appendix B and C) to participate was secured. This volunteering and informed consent served as the initial form of permission to conduct the study. International Review Board (IRB) approval was secured from the university prior to conducting the study. The approval number was 05-12-16-0438240.

In the "beginning" stage, disclosing the purpose of the study and not pressuring participants into signing consent forms were identified as relevant to this study (Creswell, 2013). These issues were addressed by disclosing the purpose of the research in participant recruitment announcements, in informed consent forms, and during the introduction to interviews. Recruitment did not involve vulnerable populations, so no ethical concerns relevant to vulnerable populations came up.

Sensitive information issues in the "collecting data" phase were noted as especially relevant to this study, as participants were interviewed based on a delinquent

or criminal past (Creswell, 2013). Some participants may not have been okay with information about this delinquent or criminal past leaking to those in their lives today. As such, fictitious names were assigned for each participant with additional security measures for storing data, explained in further detail shortly. Ethical concerns in the "analyzing data" phase related to honesty and integrity on the researcher's part (Creswell, 2013). Care was taken to ensure all data was reported honestly in a way that protected participants' privacy. Ethical concerns in the "publishing" phase related to sharing data with others and providing proof of compliance with ethical procedures detailed (Creswell, 2013). An audit trail of all steps in the research process was kept for compliance purposes. Participants were also provided copies of the study's results and results will be published in journals or other outlets with readers who may benefit from the study.

Security Measures

All data gathered through the collection phase, related transcriptions, and results were stored on my personal computer in an encrypted folder. The personal computer is password protected. Any printed versions or paper documents involving data were stored in a locked, fireproof filing cabinet in my home. All data was also backed up on an external USB flash drive that was stored in the locked, fireproof filing cabinet. All data will be stored for a five-year period, after which time the data will be destroyed.

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Summary

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The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of identity change, from deviant to prosocial, as a component of the criminal desistance process with specific

attention to identifying determinants of identity change and supporting behaviors with a diverse sample of long-term desistors. This chapter included detailed discussions regarding the qualitative, phenomenological approach to inquiry, rationale for the selected approach, and procedures for recruitment, data collection, and analysis. The chapter further included discussion regarding ethical considerations and steps to address ethical concerns.

To summarize, a qualitative phenomenological approach is most appropriate for exploratory studies with focus on understanding the phenomena of interest from the perspective of participants who have experienced the phenomena. As such, participant selection was limited to individuals who had experienced the phenomena of interest, in this case, identity change and long-term criminal desistance. Seven participants were recruited for this study, in line with a mid-sized group to achieve breadth and depth in phenomenological inquiry. Recruitment included announcements via university message boards, professional listservs, and social media outlets.

Data collection occurred through semi-structured interviews in-person, by phone, or video conferencing and responses were supplemented with observation around interviews, and document reviews. Interviews were audio recorded for transcription and analysis using NVivo 11 software and Giorgi's (2012) descriptive phenomenology approach. Researcher bias was addressed through bracketing and reflexivity. Study findings will follow in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of identity change, from deviant to prosocial, as a component of the criminal desistance process with specific attention toward identifying determinants of identity change and supporting behaviors. I conducted a descriptive phenomenological study using data gathered through semi-structured qualitative interviews. The following research questions guided inquiry:

1. What is the lived experience of identity change as a component of the criminal desistance process?

2. What determinants influence identity change in the criminal desistance process?

3. What behaviors support the changing identity?

This chapter includes a detailed explanation of the study and results. In it, I discuss the setting, conditions, participant demographics, data collection and analysis processes, and evidence of trustworthiness. I also provide a thorough explanation of resulting themes with supporting data and related figures. The chapter concludes with a summary of how the study's results answered the research questions.

Setting

I offered participants three options to participate in recorded interviews: (a) in-person in a private, neutral meeting space, if local to my area; (b) by video-conference; and (c) by conference call. Six of seven participants opted to participate by conference call. As such, I conducted each of those interviews using a private Zoom webinar conference line requiring a meeting ID to enter. One participant opted to meet in person

for the recorded interview. I conducted the in-person interview in a private meeting room at a business office local to me and the participant on a holiday while the office was closed. Permission to use the private meeting room was secured from the office owner prior to scheduling. A cleaning crew was present at the time of the interview, but closing the door to the meeting room was sufficient to address any privacy concerns.

Demographics

Recruiting efforts for this study resulted in 15 respondents who expressed interest in participating as long-term desistors. Of those 15, seven consented to participate after receiving full participation details and reviewing the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved informed consent. One of those seven recruits did not respond to scheduling inquiries. Thus, this study concluded with seven participants, including six long-term desistor participants and one close other participant.

While the sample size goal was 10-15 participants for breadth and depth, time constraints for study completion required setting a recruiting deadline and proceeding with participants secured by that deadline. That deadline was seven weeks from the date the IRB approved the study and recruiting efforts began. According to Creswell (2013), the minimum recommended sample size for a phenomenology is three participants, thus, the sample secured was sufficient to proceed. The smaller sample size was conducive to richer, deeper exploration than otherwise may have been possible in the time allotted for analysis.

Each participant confirmed they met inclusion criteria either by self-report, or with supporting documentation prior to participation. The earliest age of first offense

was noted as 10-years-old. The eldest age of last offense was noted as 33-years-old. Types of offending participants reported included illegal drug abuse and/or distribution, assault, robbery, theft, a sexual offense, and murder. I assigned participants aliases for confidentiality purposes. Table 1 shows a breakdown of aliases, participant type, demographic details, number of years post-offending, and verification method for time since last offense for each participant. Participant types are abbreviated as follows: long-term desistor (LTD) and close other (CO).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant/Alias	Type	Age/ Gender	Ethnicity	Years post-offense	Verification method
1/Roger	LTD	45/M	Black	25	Criminal background check, self-report
2/Tim	LTD	42/M	White	26	Criminal background check, self-report, close other
3/Tammy	LTD	49/F	White	33	Self-report
4/August	LTD	52/M	White	33	Self-report
5/Edward	LTD	32/M	White	13	Criminal background check, self-report
6/Gabriel	LTD	40/M	Black/Hispanic	22	Self-report
7/Peter	CO	76/M	N/A	N/A	N/A

Of six long-term desistor participants, five (83%) were male and one (17%) was female. The ethnic breakdown was as follows: three (67%) White, one (17%) Black, and one (17%) of mixed ethnicity (Black and Hispanic). Long-term desistor ages ranged from 32-52, with an average age of 43. Number of years since offending ranged from 13-33 years, with an average of 25.5 years since last offense.

Data Collection

Interviews were the primary data collection method. As such, I conducted recorded interviews with all seven participants. All interviews were pre-scheduled upon securing informed consent, and followed the IRB-approved interview protocol I had designed. The interviews were semi-structured around predetermined interview questions, with follow-up questions for further explanations when warranted. I used the interview protocols shown in Appendices D and E to guide the interviews. Each included an introductory statement that advised participants of what to expect, reiterated the voluntary nature of participation, and confirmed consent to record.

Interviews conducted via Zoom conference call were recorded using the record feature within the platform. The interview conducted in-person was recorded using an audio recording application on a smart phone. I used written notes to capture opportunities for follow-up questions as interviews progressed. All interviews went smoothly from start to finish with no interruptions or unexpected occurrences. The duration of interviews was between 31-49 minutes from introductory statement to final response. No follow-up interviews were required.

I asked participants if they were able and willing to provide contact information for a close other for a supporting interview regarding their transition from offender to non-offender. Two participants provided contact information for a close other. One of those close others consented to participation, and participated in a supporting interview.

Observations within and around interviews were only possible with the single participant who opted for an in-person interview. Three of seven participants provided documents for review that included resumes, pre- and post-desistance photos, a letter of recommendation, and a criminal history report. The only deviation from the plan presented was an initial intention to use the Evernote application for note-taking during interviews. The first interview was an in-person interview that required using the smart phone as an audio recorder. I used handwritten notes as a substitute for the Evernote application so as not to disrupt the audio recording on the same device housing Evernote. Handwritten notes worked well for the first interview, so I used them in place of the Evernote application through the remaining interviews for consistency.

Data Analysis

Data Analysis Process for the Essential Structure

I used Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological method to explore the experience of identity change as experienced by participants, and to understand and describe the essence of that experience. Analysis for each participant's responses began with assuming the double perspective required of descriptive phenomenology. First, I used bracketing to suspend past knowledge and experience relating to the phenomenon of interest and to heighten awareness and attention to the information as presented (Giorgi,

2009). Second, I assumed a psychological attitude to ensure sensitivity to the data and phenomenon of interest from a psychological perspective (Giorgi, 2009; 2012). I uploaded each audio recording into transcription software, and transcribed them verbatim for analysis. This provided an opportunity to relisten to the participants' responses prior to initiating formal analysis. Once each was transcribed, I applied Giorgi's (2009) five steps.

First, I read response data in its entirety. This included 63 pages of single-spaced text from all seven participants. Second, I reread response data to mark meaning units, resulting in 259 meaning units between all seven participants. Third, I applied free imaginative variation to identify expressions relevant to the phenomenon of interest and transform that data into expressions of psychological value. For step three, I developed a table in a Word document (Appendix G) in line with the example provided by Giorgi (2009, pg. 146) to organize responses identified as relevant to the phenomenon of interest and transform the data. This resulted in 155 meaning units relevant to identity and identity change.

Fourth, I reviewed the psychological expressions with free imaginative variation to write the essential structure of the experience. I used the following additional measures to organize and process through step four as supplemental safeguards to bracketing:

- I created another table in a Word document to organize the final psychological expressions from all participants into a single document for side-by-side review and comparison (Appendix H).

- I further reduced the psychological expressions to identify those directly relevant to the identity change process, which resulted in 100 meaning units.

- I then reviewed those 100 psychological expressions and coded in NVivo 11 (QSR International, 2015) for emergent themes.

- I created another table in a Word document to organize those themes (Appendix J) and identify the essential elements of the essential structure.

- I updated the theme names in NVivo 11 and organized them to determine the count of each emerging theme.

- I created a figure using the table of essential elements to organize visual representations that informed the written structure (Appendix I).

Fifth, I used the essential structure to help clarify, interpret, and report the study's raw data.

Themes

The following themes emerged as the essential elements of the essential structure: a self-determined motivation and commitment to change; a sense of agency to choose and take action toward desistance goals; prioritizing self-regulation and self-development; identifying and pursuing structural supports (school, work, prosocial groups, or activities) conducive to desistance goals; altering social capital to distance from social connections not conducive to desistance goals, and leveraging social connections conducive to desistance goals; and immersing in chosen positive social structures and leveraging those environments and relationships to inform behavior modification and adaptation. As participants were able to identify meaning and purpose greater than themselves, or a

sense of life direction and goals beyond desistance, commitment to ongoing positive development was enhanced. As the non-offender working identity was cultivated, the offender working identity became inactive.

Responses included 25 references to self-determined motivation and commitment to change, 80 references to agency, 82 references to self-regulation and self-development, 62 references to pursuing structural supports, 27 references to altering social capital, 32 references to immersing in and adapting to chosen structural supports, and 23 references to meaning and/or purpose (see Table 2).

Table 2

Essential Elements Distribution

Participant	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7
Roger	5	17	15	12	9	8	4
Tim	3	7	9	14	1	3	5
Tammy	7	9	11	7	1	2	8
August	2	13	14	8	7	5	2
Edward	2	16	19	12	3	8	1
Gabriel	6	18	14	9	6	6	3
Total	25	80	82	62	27	32	23

Note. E1 = self-determined motivation and commitment to change, E2 = agency to choose and act, E3 = self-regulation and self-development, E4 = structural supports, E5 = altering social capital, E6 = immersing and adapting, E7 = meaning and/or purpose

Data Analysis Process for Fit to Identity Theory of Desistance

Participant responses were coded and analyzed with NVivo 11 software for fit to the study's theoretical framework, identity theory of desistance (ITD; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Fit to ITD was determined by analyzing for the presence of six themes as noted factors of ITD: 1) motivation toward desired, positive future self and away from feared, negative future self, 2) growing discontentment with present self, 3) commitment to positive future self, 4) intentional decision to change, 5) behavior changes for success, 6) pursuing structural supports consistent with the desired self. Narratives of all six long-term desistor participants evidenced all six themes to varying degrees.

Responses included 30 references to motivation toward desired, positive future self and away from feared, negative future self, 19 references to discontentment with present self, 20 references to commitment to positive future self, 18 references to intentional decision to change, 88 references to behavior changes for success, and 69 references to pursuing structural supports (see Table 3).

Table 3

ITD Theme Distribution

Participant	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6
Roger	3	2	4	3	13	11
Tim	9	3	3	3	11	12
Tammy	5	2	3	2	10	9
August	8	5	3	3	18	11
Edward	4	5	4	4	21	16
Gabriel	1	2	3	3	15	10
Total	30	19	20	18	88	69

Note. T1 = motivation toward desired, positive future self and away from feared, negative future self, T2 = growing discontentment with present self, T3 = commitment to positive future self, T4 = intentional decision to change, T5 = behavior changes for success, T6 = pursuing structural supports consistent with the desired self

Discrepant Cases

No discrepant cases were identified. This may have been a result of the informed consent process. The recruiting announcement resulted in 15 respondents expressing interest in participation. Full details for participation were sent to those respondents with informed consent forms. Those details described criteria for participation that required meeting the definition of long-term desistor and having experienced a sense of identity change from offender to non-offender. The informed consent process resulted in seven participants, and six who kept commitments to participate. Those who may have been discrepant cases may have withdrawn after reviewing full participation requirements.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility, Dependability, and Confirmability

Several measures were taken throughout data gathering and analysis to enhance the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of this study's results. Careful attention to bracketing and reflexivity mitigated the potential for my experience as a long-term desistor to interfere with results. The descriptive phenomenology approach required setting aside personal experience with the phenomenon of interest to analyze what was present without relating it to past knowledge (Giorgi, 2012). Bracketing through analysis proved to be a challenge that necessitated setting limits around the amount of data to analyze in a given period. The timeframe for analysis was expanded in response to the difficulty to allow ample time to analyze manageable parts while attending to bracketing.

Using Patton's (2015) approach to reflexivity, examining what I know and how I know it, proved invaluable while reviewing emergent themes and reporting results. Reflexivity provided a lens to analyze results objectively and question supporting evidence within participant narratives. This process led to the recognition that additional measures would be necessary to organize and track step four of Giorgi's (2009) five-step descriptive phenomenology. That step required reviewing the psychological expressions identified within participant narratives with free imaginative variation to write the essential structure of the experience.

The use of free imaginative variation was identified as one of the more difficult steps to maintain bracketing. Thus, several additional safeguards were implemented to supplement bracketing. Those included developing additional tables and figures to

organize the essential elements of the essential structure as they emerged to ensure the evidence was documented in a way that could be referred back to through reporting; and coding through NVivo 11 software for accuracy. Adding these safeguards served to enhance dependability and confirmability, as they resulted in several revisions of the results until the documented, coded evidence substantiated findings. The step-by-step analysis process was recorded and reported for anyone interested in replication.

Observations, document reviews, and secondary interviews with a close other were secondary data gathering methods requested for triangulation purposes. The majority of participants opted to participate in the interview portion of the study only, which limited opportunities for triangulation. One participant selected an interview method that allowed for observations during and around the interview. One participant's close other consented to participate in a secondary interview. Three of six long-term desistor participants provided documents or photos for review.

Transferability

Details of participant's background, demographics, and experiences are reported in a way that enhances chances of transferability. Results are reported with thorough descriptions and extensive use of direct quotes to provide insight into each participant's experience as they experienced it for transferability purposes.

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Results

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The following results are organized in the order analyzed beginning with observation and document reviews then moving through narrative highlights informing

the descriptive phenomenology and fit to identity theory of desistance. The essential structure of the experience is provided and used to address each research question.

Observation and Document Reviews

Roger. Roger was the only participant who opted for an interview forum that allowed for visual observations, thus observations related to his appearance during the interview were possible. He appeared relaxed and personable. He came across as easy spoken and open to engage through the interview process.

Roger provided several personal items through e-mail for document review purposes. Those included his most recent resume, a letter of recommendation, four pre-desistance photos, and one post-desistance photo. The resume provided a detailed history of his progressive employment and education since his early path toward desistance. His academic achievements began with a technical certificate then moved onto an Associate's degree 3 years later, a Bachelor's degree immediately following the Associate's, and work toward a Master's degree 2 years after completing his Bachelor's.

His work history shows progressive employment within the automotive industry where he began as a diesel technician and quickly moved into leadership roles where he continues today. For 11 years, he was simultaneously employed as an adjunct instructor with a community college where he taught automotive and diesel classes. He has also been actively involved in the community by serving on the local city council and in leadership roles within his local church. The letter of recommendation provided is dated in early 2016 wherein a City Attorney who notes his 40 years of tenure as an attorney speaks highly of Roger's performance during his time on the city council.

The pre-desistance photos provided show Roger as a teen with a serious almost daring look on his face in each of the four photos. His posture was reserved with arms crossed in some way in each of the photos. He was with a group of friends in three of the four photos and wore relaxed clothing (e.g. t-shirts, shorts, jeans, and ball caps) in each. Roger's posture, demeanor, and clothing show a stark difference in the post-desistance photo provided. In the post-desistance photo, Roger was smiling, his posture was open, he was wearing a business suit, with button down shirt and tie, and held a Bible. He appears clean-cut and exudes a pleasant demeanor.

Tim. Tim provided a copy of his criminal background report via e-mail for document review and confirmation of long-term criminal desistance. His criminal background report was dated 08/03/2015 and confirmed no reportable records within the previous 10 years. The extended 25-year search from the same report confirmed misdemeanor and felony charges between 1990-1995 including forgery, larceny, breaking and entering, and drug possession.

Tim also provided a copy of his most recent resume for document review. Tim's resume shows early employment in the food service industry, retail sales, and handy man work that transitioned to established professional tenure in audio-visual media where he now has over 15 years of experience. This transition occurred after Tim completed an Associate's degree in video production in 2001.

August. August provided pre- and post-desistance photos via e-mail for document review. In the pre-desistance photo, August appeared to be at a social event. His hair was long, beyond shoulder length, and undone. He wore a black t-shirt. He was

smiling or laughing and appeared to be having fun. In the post-desistance photo, August also appeared to be at a social event. He was also smiling and appeared to be having fun. His hairstyle and style of dress were the primary visible differences. His hair was short and clean-cut and he wore a button down, collared, Hawaiian print shirt.

No documents were provided by Edward, Tammy, or Gabriel.

Descriptive Phenomenology

Essential elements of the essential structure.

Self-determined motivation and commitment to change. Each long-term desistor participant described reaching a point of self-determined motivation to stop offending that they leveraged to commit to doing so. For Roger, Tim, August, and Gabriel, this self-determined motivation and commitment followed serious negative consequences as a result of offending. For Tammy, this motivation and commitment related to becoming a mother. For Edward, the motivation and commitment related to finding himself living a life that he knew was below his potential. The motivation was deep enough to fuel the desistor's perseverance through the challenges, threats, discomfort, and vulnerability experienced through the change process.

Roger described his experience during a court recess while facing a 25-year prison sentence:

While I sat there that whole time, I got the opportunity to reflect. All of the

friends and all of the promises that told me they'd be there for me, and nobody

came and brought me no money. Nobody put money on my books…

My girlfriend that I was with at the time, now she's pregnant by one of my friends. So, all of the life I was willing to die for had just folded before me. So, now I'm sitting here getting ready to accept this 25-year sentence and I say, God, if you give me one more opportunity I swear I'm done.

Tim described several negative experiences associated with consequences of his offending as contributors to his motivation and commitment to change. Tim described one of those experiences as follows:

They put me in a juvenile holding cell block and it was me and seven other black guys…and for three days, they literally beat the shit out of me, and the jailers didn't do anything about it. I had to go to the hospital, it was so bad. Um, so you know, that experience just was, this isn't the life for me…I just knew that wasn't my future. That was my past, and just didn't want to go back.

August described experiencing a sense of desperation for change after hitting rock bottom:

I had a bad drug problem…I'd done heroin for quite a while, a very long time. And I had a pretty healthy habit for a young guy. And then I discovered crack cocaine, and crack cocaine took whatever was left of my life and flushed it right down the toilet. That was a real motivator…that was the catalyst of change. I hit such a bottom. There's only one way to go. I was gonna croak if I kept doing what I was doing, or I had to pick myself up and start marching to a different tune.

Gabriel described a growing motivation and commitment to change while in solitary confinement serving a 25-year prison sentence:

I was placed in solitary confinement for a year. And during that time, I had a lot of, you know, I guess moments to reflect upon my life and during that time, I started to really think about…what brought me to this place…

Um, death row was probably 100 feet away and a part of me felt like one day I may end up there. Because…the pace of my life was moving quite quickly toward what I started to sense as swift destruction…

…but then, I also reflected on the people I hurt. You know, that played a big role as well…in reality, there was nothing I could do to go back and change things. I thought at the very least, I can just try to at some point start something more positive and hopefully have a better legacy for my life.

Tammy described becoming a mother as influencing her motivation and commitment to change:

The love of my children. I knew I was the only person there for them and so…it was my big motivating factor…I guess if I didn't show them that I was strong, then I would fail them…if I hadn't had children. I don't know.

Edward described experiencing a moment wherein he realized he was not living to his potential:

Instinct. Um, something I knew I had to do. Uh, let's see. I was working in 2006 when I got serious. In 2007, I was working in a warehouse busting tile in the middle of the summer in the middle of the valley. It's hot…and I'm doing this

with these guys and it's like, I feel like I got more. I feel like I got more than this

in me.

Agency. All six long-term desistor participants expressed a sense of agency to

choose and take action to achieve the non-offending working identity. Statements

highlighted a sense of power to alter their outcomes and life direction. Roger's sense of

agency emerged as he described an encounter with a friend who asked if he was going to

return to selling drugs after his release from jail:

> The very first person I see as I got out is one of my friends and he said, are you
>
> going back to work? No. What are you going to do? I don't know. I didn't have a
>
> plan. I didn't finish the 10th grade. I had a reading disability. I'm dyslexic…I
>
> didn't know what I was going to do. I didn't graduate high school. No GED.
>
> That was a little difficult still. But, I was prepared. And he said, who's gonna
>
> hire you? You can't get a job. What are you going to do? I don't know. I'll
>
> figure it out later.

Tim's sense of agency was apparent in the statement, "at 16, I really made a

decision that I'm gonna do whatever I have to, to get out of this crap." As was Tammy's

in the statement, "I always knew I was going to make my life better no matter what."

August's was apparent in the statement, "I was gonna croak if I kept doing what I was

doing or I had to pick myself up and start marching to a different tune." As was

Edward's in the statements, "I experienced that awakening of um, you gotta be alright

with who you are. You gotta figure out who you are before you can start talking to people

so you can tell people who you are." Gabriel's surfaced in the statement, "I just said, I need to take control of this. And, that's where it started to happen."

Self-regulation and self-development. All six long-term desistor participants described identifying behaviors that were detrimental and helpful to desistance goals, leveraging and developing those conducive to desistance goals, and refraining from using those not conducive to those goals. This was ongoing throughout the identity change and desistance process. Roger described several such instances. Here are two examples:

> When I was in the streets, I was really aggressive. There were some guys that were passive and just kind of hung out. I've never been passive. I'm a really passionate person, so I've approached everything in a really aggressive manner. And then, I just thought about, what if I turned that same level of passion that I gave the street life…what if I gave that same level of passion to the church? Not only am I passionate, I'm a bit more…outgoing. Fear has never been a problem for me. I've never had any fear whatsoever. Not of death, or any man, or anything else…so a lot of times, when I put my thought process toward something, nothing deters me. That relentless pursuit…don't ask me where that comes from…I've always had that.

Roger's attention to self-development was evident as he discussed fatherhood, his church life, work life, and academic pursuits. Many of those narrative excerpts will follow in the themes to come.

Tim described becoming more aware of his emotions, learning to manage them, and finding a sense of life direction:

I think, being able to recognize my emotions. Um, you know back then it was, like I said, a lot of anger…not being able to recognize it…not even knowing it was there. And, now when I have emotions, or some really strong feelings about something, I can pinpoint it.

When I went to college…it was an art degree so, semi-college. Um, but just when I really started focusing on my future…alright, this is the subject I'm gonna study…this is gonna be my path…this is what I'm gonna do. I think once I clipped on that maturity level, of really looking forward…and I guess once I really decided to find a career, uh that was the biggest changing point for me emotionally. Being able to, I guess see the world differently. And not wanting to die young.

Tammy described harnessing her willpower and intentionally reinventing herself:

I started reinventing myself…I've always had motivation and had a desire…I'll just put effort, willfulness…like even when I was getting my GED, I would walk 10 plus blocks with my kid to drop her off at a daycare and then walked…I don't know, three blocks back to the bus stop to take a bus you know, half an hour away, and then do it all…just the opposite to get back home…

August described intentionally changing his outward appearance and recreating himself by identifying his positive traits and nurturing those:

You know, I had a very bad reputation, and deservedly so. I resolved things through violence. I don't do that anymore. So, there was this whole stigma and a character that went along with it. I mean, I went as far as like, I used to wear my

wallet on my left side. I wore it on the right side. I parted my hair on the side. Now I part it in the middle. I mean it sounds stupid, but all of it really helped honestly, because I had to become a different person. I could no longer be that person anymore. I had to like recreate myself. Um, take the good that I found that was inside of me and like massage it, care for it, water it, let it grow, and you know, trust a little bit…

"Um, I had an extreme desire to succeed…I took all my powers for evil and I used them for good. I like, I changed the polarity of my life…"

Edward described experiencing social acceptance, becoming aware of his need to develop appropriate social skills to improve his relationships, and attending to that development:

After I went back to city college, I was hanging out with some student government people and I remember making a comment about you know…I'm pretty popular here. I think I'm really liked. I'm talking to the ladies, you know, like girlfriends. So, I'm thinking, you know, I need to start approaching these girlfriends…I need to start approaching them from a better place. Because, you know, I didn't really approach them from a good place prior to that, and my search history will corroborate that, because that's what's driving me every day…finding a good woman and keeping her.

Yeah, so these…that college girl and this girl that I started playing music with recently, they um…they started something inside of me that forced me to be a little more reflective, a little bit deeper in my reflections. Um, not see just the

problems before my eyes, but to try to put things together. To try to listen. Um, I

had to learn how to take a thought and hold onto it for a little while. You know,

so it was really a process of developing communication skills within myself.

Gabriel described recognizing a need to adjust his perceptions and default

responses, attending to that work, and re-structuring his time around prosocial, productive

activities while in prison:

…there were times I knew in order to make a positive change I would have to

redefine certain things around me. I had to humble myself. I had to not be…this

me that I used to be. I knew I couldn't continue on having such a low threshold

for certain things. Which was why I was in the hole in the first place. So, I had to

figure out ways to avoid conflict. I had to figure out ways to, you know,

whenever a situation would arise, to try to talk things through, to try to find non-

violent…ways of dealing with things. Whereas, up until that point, every

problem was solved with violence. So I had to change that about myself.

What was going on outside of me at that time was a support group and then, also

educational opportunities…I invested my time in school. So, whereas in the past,

I was involved in a lot of gang activities, I structured my own life with having a

job inside the institution as an academic office clerk…and then after work I would

go to the gym from like 3:30 to 5:00. I would train and then I would go back to

my cell, take a shower, get dressed, head out to school…and I would take classes

from like 6:30 to 7:00 'til almost 9 o'clock depending on when classes were over.

So my whole day was structured with work, school, and physical activities…so, that helped me a lot.

Structural supports. All six long-term desistor participants described pursuing some variation of structural supports conducive to desistance goals. Those included school, work, prosocial groups, and/or positive, productive activities. Roger described pursuing an education, securing jobs, and joining a church:

My path to non-offending initially started with me getting a job. Before I actually got a job…it was really hard for me to get on the road…once I got out, I got a trade, started working. Soon, started a family and at that point, I wanted more schooling, so I went back to school. I realized I didn't need any free time. The free time was more volatile than anything, so I needed to occupy my time with positive things and positive people. That was the biggest thing…I of course, joined the church…

Tim described going back to graduate high school and working full-time to support himself:

I just knew I needed a change. I finished high school…I had dropped out and started going back to school…to finish my diploma. I was actually living on my own, working full-time, and going to high school full time…I just felt the need to not go back there, and to work for myself, and be proud of myself, as opposed to waking up hung over or stoned or in jail.

Tammy described pursuing education and employment:

I knew that I had to finish school…I had to get my GED. I went to college for

nursing and I failed chemistry 101 from high school, so I took it three times

before I passed it. But I managed to just get by and then I failed my clinicals…

I went and changed careers shortly after…I went into engineering and I became a

stationary engineer, but I couldn't get a job because I couldn't leave my

children…I knew that…if I was gonna improve my children's lives at all that it

was gonna be through school…at about 25, I became a stripper and I stripped for

like 15 years and I got my associate's degree…

August described joining a 12-step group:

"I landed in a 12-step group. I landed in narcotics anonymous and I had an

enormous amount of help there and some very good examples…I can honestly say that

place really, really helped my life."

Edward described pursuing education:

"I went to college and that, that was really the event that, or the catalyst perhaps,

that facilitated the necessary steps in order to make myself a productive member of

society."

Gabriel described pursuing a job, an education, and prosocial extracurricular

activities:

I started boxing. I sort of channeled a lot of that energy that I had. Some of that

aggression into a more structured, disciplined sport that allowed me to express

myself and learn and grow…I invested my time in school…I structured my own

life with having a job inside the institution as an academic office clerk…

Altering social capital. All six long-term desistor participants described altering social connections in some way toward relationships more conducive to desistance goals and/or away from relationships that would otherwise threaten desistance goals. This process involved distancing from or completely detaching from social connections that may threaten desistance goals, either immediately or over time; and/or leveraging relationships with others who supported desistance goals, or were no threat to desistance goals.

Roger's experience with this process is highlighted in the following statements:

I, of course, joined the church, and they had a lot of activities and I found myself staying around a lot of positive people doing positive things. And I think that helped me more than anything. It gave me a different outlook on life and it gave me a lot of different perspectives that I didn't have…

The biggest thing that helped me was remembering my promise to God. Ultimately, that loyalty to him superseded the loyalty that I have for anybody else…and anything I felt would hamper my relationship between me and him, I cut it. It was hard, but I cut it. My relationships that I severed, a lot of people will never be happy or thrilled with me again, but I'm content.

Tim described leveraging the positive social support in his life through his desistance process. When asked what factors he believed supported his successful desistance he responded:

My family and the people around me…even the buddies I was hanging out with when I got in trouble. They were supportive…my grandparents…my guidance

counselor at my high school…I guess just having a lot of really good people in

my life…I made my choice to change…but the outside support…just because it

was so consistent…even when I didn't need to talk to my parents or anybody, just

knowing it was there was comforting.

Tim's father, Peter, also described Tim's social support while he was offending

and the reconnecting that occurred through Tim's desistance:

…people in my family… especially his grandfathers, my father, and my wife's

father. They loved him and were supportive of him, as were aunts, and uncles,

and cousins…throughout his treatment years, they never stopped loving him and

supporting him…he did not have to experience being rejected by his family.

…just an unbelievable period…we loved each other through all of that…as he got

older in his 20s…we started getting our relationship back…we've always loved

him very much and our families have always loved him very much. And he's

always loved all of us too.

Tammy described her relationship with her children becoming her life line:

"The only thing that kept me going was my children…I ended up having three

children by the time I was 21, and then I had two more children afterwards."

August described detaching from the social network he associated with while

offending, leveraging family support, and building new relationships with a peer group

pursuing similar goals:

I ran around with murderers, rapists, and thieves…during that transition you

know, I let go of those people that really were dragging me down ultimately. And

I began to sort of hang around with people who had similar backgrounds to me, but were further along down the path…and they were able to mentor me a little bit and that really helped...

"My family was a big help. My mother especially. She supported me doing what I was doing…."

Edward described leveraging interactions with peers in his new academic environment and leveraging family support:

Going to school forced me to be around people all the time. People that I might not have normally associated with, and the same for them. They were forced to be around me, which they might not normally associate with, so there was a lot of learning that I got to experience by interacting with other people…

I think, like I said, that was the catalyst, that was kind of the petri dish that everything got to be put into. So, if that's the petri dish and I'm one element, then the other element was definitely my mother and the support system that was behind my mother, which was, you know, family and friends…yeah it was college, but it was also a factor of the people that I had as a support system and you know the atmosphere that I was able to…that I was given an opportunity to participate in.

Gabriel explained a need to make drastic changes to his social network as an active gang member at the time he initiated his transition toward desistance. He also described building a prosocial network, and leveraging those relationships through his progress:

Well, my situation was a bit challenging because…I was faced with physical threat. I was faced with violence. It wasn't like I said, well, I want to change, and I started going to school and my life changed. It was more like, well, I need to change, and first and foremost, I need to leave this gang. And, because of that, it was really a life or death situation that could have gone horribly wrong…I was fortunate to have people say, you know what, let him live his life. You know, there's no point in trying to force him to be something he doesn't want to be. I would say, finding a positive peer group. Um, I mean eventually I was able to meet people who were much like myself. Who, although they were in prison, they had no desires to do things that were criminal in nature…

Immersing and adapting. All six long-term desistor participants also described immersing themselves in chosen prosocial environments and leveraging related networks to guide behavior modification. Four of six described identifying specific exemplars or role models as guides from those networks as they worked toward desistance.

Roger described an example of this process relating to his church environment:

Again, you know, being in that whole environment…there's not really a 12-step program with God, but there was a factor of trying to gain righteousness, or trying to develop myself into the man of God that was spoken of in the Bible.

Tim described leveraging the positive examples he had in his life growing up:

I would say the inside…just always wanting to be independent. And, it's the influences in my life. I took that to heart. I saw my dad be successful working for himself. I saw my granddad. He spent 20 years in the naval reserves and

owned his own business after WWII, and went from a grunt to a flight deck

captain on a carrier in WWII…just having direct exposure to that

independent…desire. So, that's why it all started from the inside. From the

outside exposure I guess.

August described leveraging 12-step groups and related social networks:

But, there was this hope I got from witnessing other people making the same

changes and going through the same things as me. I got a lot of help from these

self-help groups. It sounds corny, but I did, and it certainly changed my

life…people would call me on the phone to check on how I was doing. I never

had anything like that happen. I found out what it was like to have friends. I

never really had friends. I had accomplices.

Gabriel described following the examples of his new positive peer network and

building that network as he progressed:

You know they were more so involved in sports and…school. They're investing

their time in reading and writing. And, I remember I had a cellie who loved

poetry. So, these are people who tapped into themselves, their own strengths,

their own gifts and they learned to express themselves through these things. And

so, I started to paint. I started boxing. I sort of channeled a lot of that energy that

I had…some of that aggression into a more structured disciplined sport that

allowed me to express myself and learn and grow…and that was very helpful.

Through that, I met people who were like-minded, who were not gang involved.

Tammy described moving to new environments to ensure here children's opportunities and influences remained positive after making changes to her academic and career pursuits:

> I moved to upstate New York…people were different…and they were very kind. I lived in one of the friendliest cities in the nation…when my oldest child reached junior high, I had my children in school districts that were better than what I could've had them in considering my circumstances…my kids were getting some of the best education and I knew that. But, I moved back to Ohio…it wasn't as prestigious as where we were, but I knew the school systems were better than being inner city.

Edward described leveraging his college environment as a safe space and framework for development:

> When I went to school, you know, it was a really, really positive environment for me to do what I was good at. And that was focus and study and kind of be on my own. So, I'm able to be…I'm in a place where I'm not…I'm not like…they're not gonna fire me because they don't like me. I have subject matter. We have lesson plans. We have teachers and I'm able to use those resources…I'm able to use the campus resources and feel like, hey, this is a comfortable place for me to do work, focus, follow a task, and also interact with people if I wanted to.

Meaning and purpose. All six long-term desistors described identifying and leveraging reasons to change beyond desistance and purpose outside of self as they progressed through the identity change and desistance processes:

Roger described his wife and children in this capacity:

It was my family. My wife and my kids. I never knew my father and so for a

long time I never wanted to have kids…I never wanted to put my children through

what I went through…My wife now, decided differently.

…after I had kids, I did say, if I ever did have kids, I would always make sure that

whatever I could do to help them not fall into the same traps that I fell into, I

would make sure I was there for them…so after I had kids…I came to the

realization that I needed to change. I needed to do something different, because I

needed to display and show something different to them.

Tim described realizing how his actions were affecting his loved ones and

leveraging his appreciation for them to change his outcomes:

I saw the sacrifices people made just for me. I didn’t want them to ever have to

do that again. And, to just be able to enjoy life with them without depending…I

don’t think there’s much else other than that. And wanting them to be proud of

me. You know, changing the course my life was going in. With their sacrifice,

they could now turn around and look back at my life and be proud.

Tammy’s commitment to her children as her purpose beyond herself continuously

emerged as highlighted throughout narratives shared in earlier themes. Some additional

thoughts are shared here along with a few statements related to her purpose beyond

desistance:

I had a lot more on the line that I had to survive for. My kids are now growing, so

I’m like, okay, I can do whatever, look what I’ve been through…I’ve got really

wonderful kids. I don't know how I did it, but my kids turned out good, which

makes me feel good as a parent. Especially knowing where I came from.

I always knew I was going to make my life better no matter what and I still feel

that way. You know, I know that someday I'm gonna have…a little cottage on

the lake…or you know, somewhere as a second or third home, like I know that.

I've got bigger dreams always.

August described realizing how his offending affected others and becoming a

father:

During that transition of working the 12-steps, it was a lot of self-discovery. A lot

of live and let live. You know, I can't change what's happened in the past, as

much as I would like to. I did some horrific things to my family, and friends, and

strangers. You know, I've gone way out of my way to make amends to people for

the things that I did. A lot of times the damage that I did was so bad…the best

amends I could make was just staying the hell out of that person's life. Those

were like knife in the heart discoveries that are like, you've done something so

bad, just stay away…those moments were like you're on that roller coaster ride

and…your heart goes into your stomach for a second. That's what it felt like

when I realized just how badly I'd screwed things up, and how much I didn't want

to do that.

"I think a big part that helped enormously was, um, I became a father. That was a

whole game changer."

Edward described recognizing the need to learn to function in and with society in a mutually beneficial way:

> To be able to live in, you know, within life city limits, you know. Live around people and be able to…live my life and not intrude upon others, or to live in harmony…and these are things that I didn't really understand how they worked before you know.

Gabriel described considering others beyond himself in his initial decision to change as shared in the intrinsic motivation theme narratives. He shared this meaning and purpose growing beyond desistance after his release from prison:

> I got out of prison when I was 26 going on 27…when I was applying for jobs, I kept being denied. So here it is, I had changed so much it's like, I came out with degrees. I had so much hope. You know, I was so confident I'd be able to come out and do something with my life. But, you know, I was met with barriers at every turn. I was denied job opportunities simply because of my lack of experience and my criminal conviction…When I went back to get a Master's degree I was told I couldn't become a licensed professional counselor. Even though that's what I hoped for. I was denied that opportunity because of my criminal conviction.
>
> So, I started volunteering. I said, if I'm not gonna be able to get paid for this, well that doesn't mean I'm not gonna live this life. I'm gonna live this life whether I get paid for it or not. So, I'm gonna go volunteer my time. So, I started

volunteering at the YMCA. I started volunteering with Youth of Christ Ministries on the south side of Chicago…

I had no job and I was using bus passes they gave me. And I was doing that simply as a way of telling myself that, look, one way or another, you're gonna be able to do what you aspire toward. And it's gonna take time, but for now you have to just show them what you have to offer. And at the same time, it gave me a sense of purpose and meaning by doing these things because it felt like you know hey, I'm taking my past and I'm using it to benefit other kids, you know.

Essential structure. Data from the above themes informed the following essential structure of the experience of identity change, from deviant to prosocial, as a component of the criminal desistance process. The essential structure in its entirety answers the first research question:

1. What is the lived experience of identity change as a component of the criminal desistance process?

The essential structure. The criminal desistor's identity change process is initiated through a self-determined commitment and sense of agency to pursue a non-offending working identity. The desistor begins refining his or her internal and external world to fit the non-offending working identity. Internally, the desistor prioritizes self-regulation and self-development. This involves 1) leveraging existing strengths, traits, and skills conducive to the non-offending identity, and 2) learning and developing new skills conducive to the non-offending identity, 3) while working to refrain from using those that would otherwise compromise the non-offending identity.

Externally, the desistor identifies and pursues accessible structural supports conducive to non-offending. Those structural supports may include formal education, employment, positive social connections, or other productive, prosocial activities. The desistor alters social capital toward connections in line with the non-offending identity and away from connections who would otherwise threaten the non-offending identity's development. The desistor remains actively engaged in chosen prosocial environments and leverages them to guide behavior modification to develop the non-offending identity. Through these efforts, the non-offending working identity is cultivated and the offending working identity becomes inactive. The ongoing commitment to the non-offending working identity is enhanced as desistors identify and leverage purpose outside of self and purpose beyond desistance to fuel efforts.

The following elements of the essential structure answer the second research question:

2. What determinants influence identity change in the criminal desistance process?

The determinants.

- A self-determined commitment to pursue a non-offending working identity
- A sense of agency to pursue the non-offending working identity

The following elements of the essential structure answer the third research question:

3. What behaviors support the changing identity?

The behaviors.

- The desistor begins refining his or her internal and external world to fit the non-offending working identity.

- The desistor prioritizes self-regulation and self-development.

- The desistor identifies and pursues accessible structural supports conducive to non-offending.

- The desistor alters social capital toward connections in line with the non-offending identity and away from connections who would otherwise threaten the non-offending identity's development.

- The desistor remains actively engaged in chosen prosocial environments and leverages them to guide behavior modification to develop the non-offending identity.

Figure 2 was created to illustrate the way the essential elements work together to influence the identity change process.
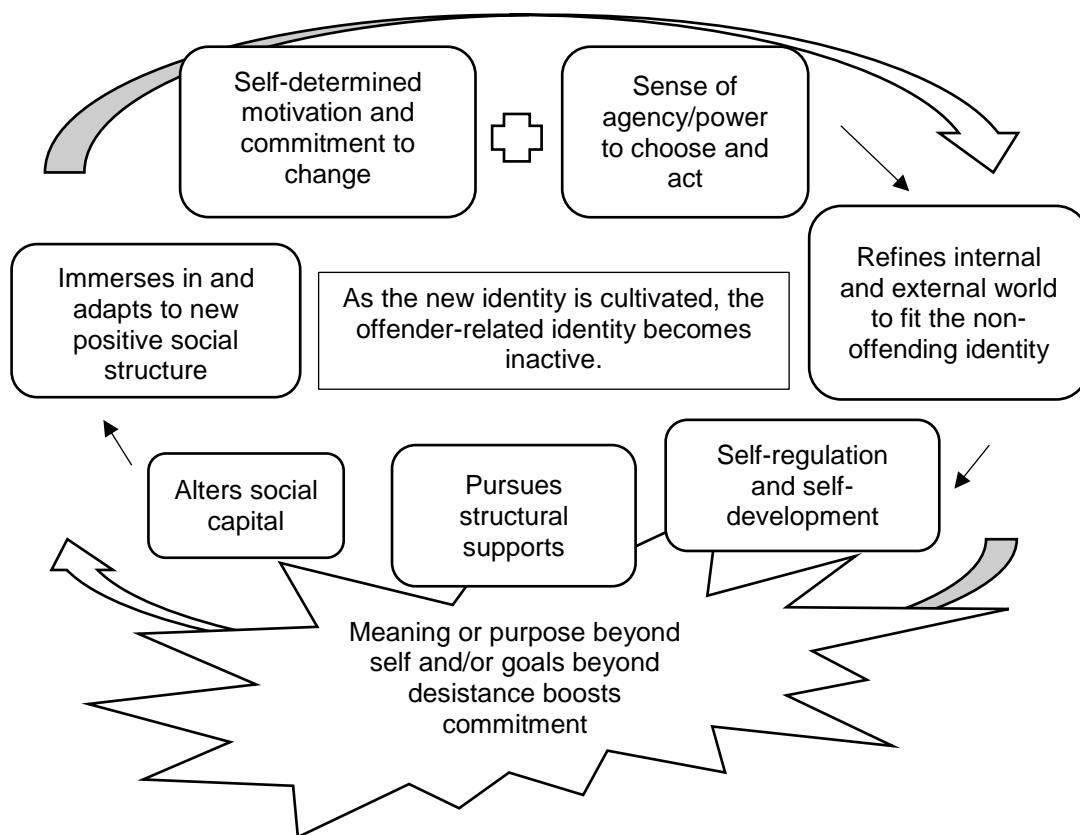
Figure 2. A flowchart illustrating the identity change process.

Identity Theory of Desistance

The following statements highlight ways each participant's experience fit the six

themes noted as factors of ITD: motivation toward desired, positive future self and away

from feared, negative future self, growing discontentment with present self, commitment

to positive future self, intentional decision to change, behavior changes for success, and

pursuing structural supports consistent with the desired self.

    Theme one: Motivation.

Roger. "I'm sitting here ready to accept this 25-year sentence and I said, God, if you give me one more opportunity, I swear, I'm done."

Tim. "So, I was facing over 70 years. So, after getting the shit beat out of me, I just knew that wasn't my future. That was my past."

Tammy. "I was just willful enough to um, not want to be back involved with drugs…and the love of my children. I knew I was the only person there for them, so…it was a big motivating factor."

August. "I mean, I had a bad drug problem…I hit such a bottom. There's only one way to go. I was gonna croak if I kept doing what I was doing, or I had to pick myself up and start marching to a different tune."

Edward. "I was working in 2006 when I got serious…I was working in a warehouse…in the middle of the summer in the middle of the valley. It's hot…and it's like, I feel like I got more than this in me."

Gabriel. "I was placed in solitary confinement for a year and during that time I had a lot of…moments to reflect upon my life…I started to really think about…what brought me to that place…where I was going. Um, death row was probably like 100 feet away and a part of me felt like one day I may end up there."

Theme two: Discontentment.

Roger. "I wanted to change. I knew there was more to life than being behind bars."

Tim. "I guess I just recognized the extreme that I had gotten to and just sitting in jail thinking about that. I mean, I knew something had to change."

Tammy. "I knew if I was gonna improve my children's lives at all that it was gonna be through school…"

August. "That's what it felt like when I realized just how badly I'd screwed things up and how much I didn't want to do that."

Edward. "So, I bounced around and it wasn't until I was working in that warehouse that I wanted to do more than this."

Gabriel. "I also reflected upon, you know, the people that I hurt. You know, that played a big role as well…It starts to weigh upon your thoughts and you start to think what could I have done different."

Theme three: Commitment.

Roger. "I thought about what I said in that holding cell. If you give me an opportunity, as soon as I got out, I was done."

Tim. "I just felt the need to not go back there, and work for myself, and work hard, and be proud of myself."

Tammy. "I've been um, just determined to um, always improve my life somehow or another, or improve my children's life."

August. "And I said to myself, anything had to be better than this. Anything is better than this."

Edward. "I met a lot of people. I thought, wow, these people are really cool…What is it that makes them cool? And I thought, like well, they all went to college together…this is a life I want to live for myself."

Gabriel. "I thought at the very least, you know, I can just try to, at some point, start something more positive and hopefully have a better legacy for my life."

Theme four: Intentional decision.

Roger. "I kept going back to that one moment when I told him I wasn't going back…that was my commitment moment…"

Tim. "I made my choice to change. I really made a decision that I'm gonna do whatever I have to, to get out of this crap."

Tammy. "I always knew I was going to better my life no matter what."

August. "I knew that I was at death's doorstep and I had to do something."

Edward. "I'm able to…feel like, hey this is a comfortable place for me…I think that really had an impact on…understanding not how not to offend, but how to like contribute…just like be normal. Like, that's all I was looking to do."

Gabriel. "I just said, I need to take control of this. And, that's where it all started to happen."

Theme five: Behavior change.

Roger. "I realized I didn't need any free time…so, I needed to occupy my time with positive things and positive people."

Tim. "I think once I…said screw this, you know, even, my old friends…that were still using, once they knew that I was not going to, they're not going to be able to influence me anymore, they left me alone."

Tammy. "I started reinventing myself. I didn't even drink until I was about 24 or 25…um, let alone try any other drugs. Beforehand, I was into a lot of other drugs."

August. "You know, it was a lot of stops and goes. It was a lot of finding out what worked and finding out what didn't work. It took a lot of trust."

Edward. "I had to learn how to take a thought and hold onto it for a little while. Um, you know, so it was really kind of uh, a process of developing communication skills within myself."

Gabriel. "I need to change, and first and foremost, I need to leave this gang…I knew in order to make a positive change, I would have to redefine certain things around me…"

Theme six: Structural supports.

Roger. "I got a trade…started working. Soon, started a family and…I went back to school…I of, course, joined the church."

Tim. "I was actually living on my own. Working full-time, going to high school full-time… my family and people around me…just knowing the support's there…"

Tammy. "I reinvented myself. I had to get my GED. I went to college…at about 25, I became a stripper and I stripped for like 15 years and I got my Associate's degree…"

August. "I landed in narcotics anonymous and I had an enormous amount of help there and some very good examples…I began to sort of hang around people who had similar backgrounds to me, but were further along the path."

Edward. "I went to college and that was really the event that, or the catalyst perhaps, that facilitated the necessary steps in order to make myself a productive member of society."

Gabriel. "…eventually I was able to meet people who were much like myself. Who, although they were in prison, they had no desire to do things that were criminal in nature…I think that positive peer group is very important."

Summary

In summary, the study's results revealed narratives of each long-term desistor participant fit ITD, the study's theoretical framework. The essential structure of the experience of identity change from an offending working identity to non-offending working identity provided answers to each of the research questions guiding inquiry. The first research question poised the study's focus to explore identity change as a component of the criminal desistance process. The second and third research questions were focused toward understanding the determinants that influenced identity change and behaviors that supported identity change.

Results demonstrated the identity change process began with a self-determined motivation and commitment to change supported by a sense of agency to pursue a non-offending working identity. This led to behaviors conducive to desistance goals including prioritizing self-regulation and self-development, pursuing structural supports in line with the non-offender identity, altering social capital in a way that supported the non-offender identity, and remaining actively engaged in the new, prosocial networks. As the non-offending working identity was developed and reinforced, the offending identity became inactive. Ongoing commitment to the non-offending working identity was enhanced as meaning and purpose beyond self and/or goals beyond desistance were identified. An understanding of the essential structure also offered an opportunity to

develop an illustration of the identity change process that may serve as a model to guide

future intervention efforts. Further discussion surrounding interpretation and application

of the study's results follows in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of identity change, from deviant to prosocial, as a component of the criminal desistance process while identifying determinants of identity change and supporting behaviors. I conducted a descriptive phenomenological study using data from semi-structured interviews with seven participants, including six successful long-term desistors with an average of 25.5 years from last offense. I also conducted a secondary qualitative analysis of these interviews to determine whether or not participants' narratives fit Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) ITD.

The primary analysis resulted in seven themes I identified as essential elements of the essential structure of the experience of the identity change process. Those themes were:

1) A self-determined motivation and commitment to change.

2) A sense of agency to choose and take action toward desistance goals.

3) Prioritizing self-regulation and self-development.

4) Pursuing structural supports (school, work, prosocial groups, or activities) conducive to desistance goals.

5) Altering social capital to distance from social connections not conducive to desistance goals, and leveraging social connections conducive to desistance goals.

6) Immersing in chosen positive social structures and leveraging those environments and relationships to inform behavior modification and adaptation.

7) As participants were able to identify meaning and purpose greater than themselves, or a sense of life direction and goals beyond desistance, commitment to ongoing positive development was enhanced.

Results of the secondary analysis demonstrated narratives of all six long-term desistors fit ITD. In this chapter, I offer interpretation of this study's findings as they compare to ITD and the remaining desistance literature reviewed in Chapter 2. I also discuss limitations and recommendations for future research along with implications for positive social change.

Interpretation of Findings

The results of this study underscore the cooperative effort necessary between internal and external factors if the would-be desistor is to succeed in the transition to non-offending. Results showed the essence of the experience of identity change through the criminal desistance process involves refining the internal and external world to fit the non-offending working identity. The distribution of the essential elements of this experience included 187 references to internal factors influencing the changing identity and 121 references to external structural supports (see Table 2). Internally, the would-be desistor comes to a place of self-determined commitment to change. This self-determined commitment reflects a self-endorsed willingness to begin the work toward positive reform. The would-be desistor then attends to the self-regulation and self-development necessary to support reform efforts.

These findings relating to internal pre-requisites confirm the intentional decision to change and self-regulating behaviors within the ITD framework (Paternoster &

Bushway, 2009), and the openness to change within cognitive transformation theory

(Giordano et al. 2002). They further confirm Gormally's (2014) findings regarding

offender willingness to engage in criminal behavior and willingness to pursue alternative

identities, and the growing agency and will to desist offending identified by Sogaard et al.

(2015). However, those internal efforts would no doubt be insufficient without the

external supports that serve as the framework to guide and nourish the changing identity.

Those structural supports, whether employment, education, positive social relationships,

or positive social groups, must be accessible to the would-be desistor before she or he

may begin to leverage those supports as frameworks for change. This essentiality of

cooperation also underscores a need to address internal and external reservations and

barriers that may otherwise impede the opportunity for effective collaborations.

Internal Concerns

The following opening statement from one long-term desistor participant

evidenced one such reservation that may interfere with the internal willingness required

for effective reform:

> I didn't really think about this until just now, when you were going through
>
> your…beginning statement. You make an assumption that because I have…been
>
> incarcerated, or convicted of a crime, that I am an offender. And that in order for
>
> me to not be an offender, I somehow have to change…when I think of
>
> myself…when I think of the path that I've taken to get to where I am today,
>
> which is very far from where I was before, I look and say, you know, I made a

mistake. I made a poor decision and I broke the law, but in my narrative, I don't necessarily consider myself somebody who is classified as such.

This statement highlights a misperception that one's identity is a singular concept and that singular sense of self has to change entirely for desistance to occur. This perception may lead people to believe they have to change who they are to achieve desistance goals. This misperception can serve as a barrier to positive change, because an individual may not have any desire to change every other facet of their sense of self to stop offending. Fortunately, the nature of an individual's identities as multi-faceted and numerous means desistance does not require a holistic change (Swann, Jr. & Bosson, 2010).

Through this understanding, it is possible to change the working identity engaged in offending behavior while remaining who one is. Identities capture the sense of self as it relates to others and social roles, so changing one aspect of one's identity is possible without changing the sense of self as a whole (Fiske, 2010; Oyserman et al. 2012; Swann, Jr. & Bosson, 2010). The process may involve much smaller shifts, engaging and/or disengaging specific traits, responses, relationships, and/or environments. This was evidenced in the narratives of each long-term desistor participant in this study. I developed Figures 3 and 4 to illustrate this process.
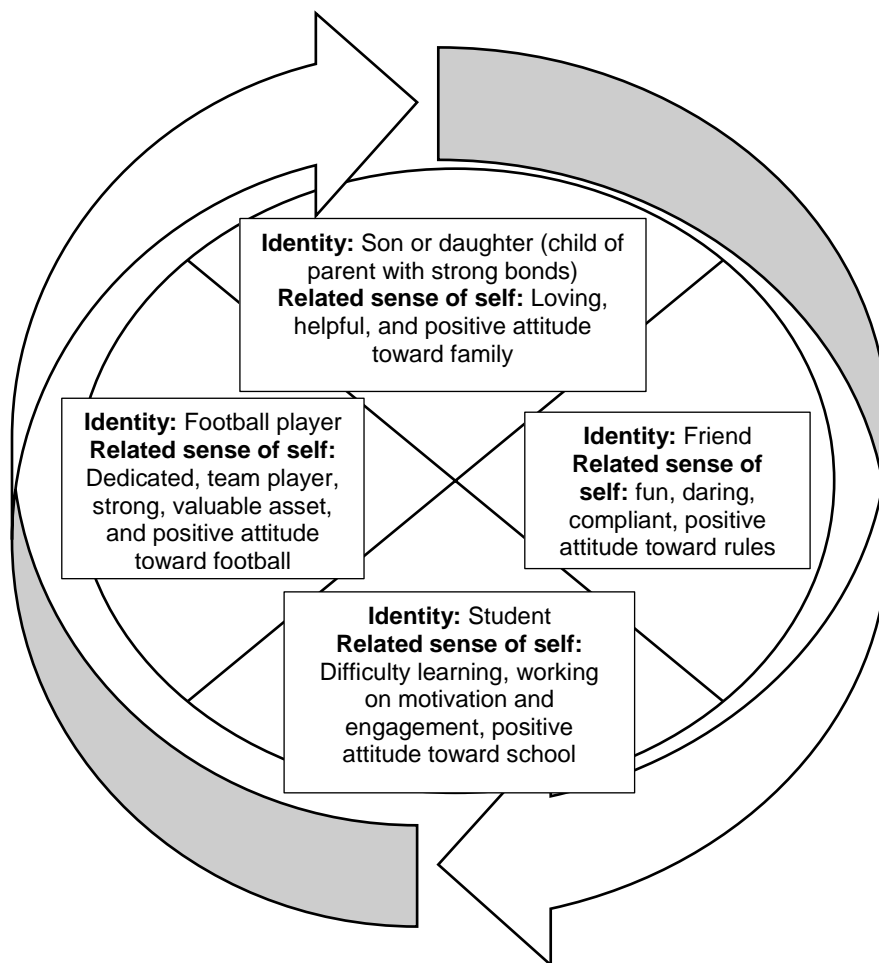
Figure 3 illustrates the holistic self-concept prior to identity change. The pre-change self-concept encompasses the example individual's identity as a child of a parent with strong bonds, a friend, a football player, and a student. In this example, the individual perceives the self as child as loving and helpful, and as having a positive

attitude toward family. The individual perceives the self as football player as dedicated,

strong, a team player, and a valuable asset. The football player self has a positive attitude

toward football. The individual perceives the self as student as having difficulty learning

and remaining engaged, lacking motivation, and having a negative attitude toward school.

The individual perceives the self as friend as fun, daring, and deviant with a negative

attitude toward rules or authority.
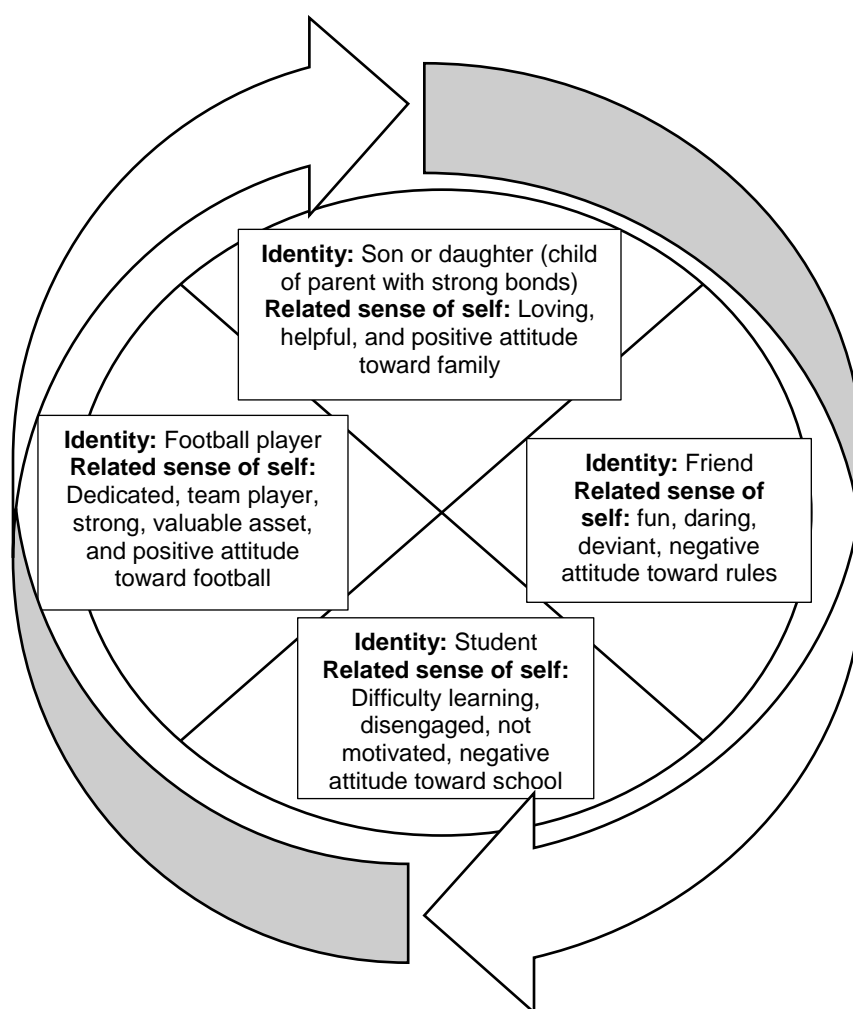
Figure 3. A flowchart illustrating an example of the holistic self-concept pre-identity

change.

Figure 4 illustrates the holistic self-concept after the example individual has begun the process of self-regulation to pursue desistance goals. This individual has identified specific behaviors and attitudes not conducive to desistance goals and refrains from using those while continuing to leverage those conducive to desistance goals. The shifts in this scenario occurred in the friend and student identities. The individual chose to shift from deviance to compliance, from disengagement in school to engagement, and shifted from a negative attitude to a positive attitude in both contexts.

Figure 4. A flowchart illustrating an example of the holistic self-concept post-identity change.

External Considerations

Externally, the collateral consequences of criminal convictions that limit would-be desistors' access to and acceptance within the structural supports vital to reform should be of primary concern to anyone interested in reducing recidivism rates. Results of this study showed the non-offending working identity was cultivated as the desistor remained actively engaged in chosen prosocial structural supports and related relationships, and leveraged those to guide behavior modification. As the non-offender working identity was cultivated, the offending working identity became inactive.

These findings are directly in line with the shift toward structural supports described by ITD (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009), the engagement with prosocial environmental resources that influences behavior change within cognitive transformation theory (Giordano et al. 2002), and the influence of conventional roles and social bonds on behavior in Laub and Sampson's (1993) age-graded theory of informal social control. They are in line with the second stage of the three-stage desistance process identified by Dufour et al. (2015), in which the offender must endorse and personify new social identities that will eventually modify the personal identity. They are similarly in line with Gormally's (2014) finding that participants' de-identification as gang members was influenced by opportunities to socialize outside of the gang's neighborhood, which provided access to new contexts with related social roles, potential to expand identities to those roles, and opportunities to develop those expanded identities. As Gormally's (2014) participants continued to develop new identities, identities as a gang member dissipated. Participants in the Sogaard et al. (2015) study also noted leveraging

conventional employment as central to supporting the desistance process and associated reformed identity. Considering the crucial role structural supports serve in the desistance process, ongoing efforts to revise the laws and policies that bar offenders' access to the social institutions they could otherwise leverage for successful desistance are well-placed and timely.

Limitations of the Study

A few limitations were inherent in the research design and approach to inquiry. First, results of this study were primarily developed by analyzing participant responses to semi-structured interview questions. As such, the primary limitation relates to the need to give participants the benefit of the doubt and assume they provided honest responses to the interview questions (Giorgi, 2009). Second, all results of qualitative studies are subject to potential bias, as the researcher serves as the primary data analysis instrument, and thus results are derived from subjective interpretation (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). This potential for researcher bias was also heightened by my experience as a long-term desistor. Third, the small number of participants most appropriate to an in-depth phenomenology limit the potential to generalize this study's findings across populations (Creswell, 2013).

Recommendations

An unexpected finding that emerged while interpreting results related to the apparent relationship between access to resources and to what extent internal and external resources contributed to desistance. The long-term desistor participants who expressed access to strong, positive social support networks (Roger, Tim, and August) referenced

external contributors to the identity change process more often than those who expressed limited positive social support and/or barriers to structural supports (Tammy, Edward, and Gabriel) (see Figure 5). Those who expressed limited access to structural supports appeared to rely more heavily on internal factors for successful desistance.
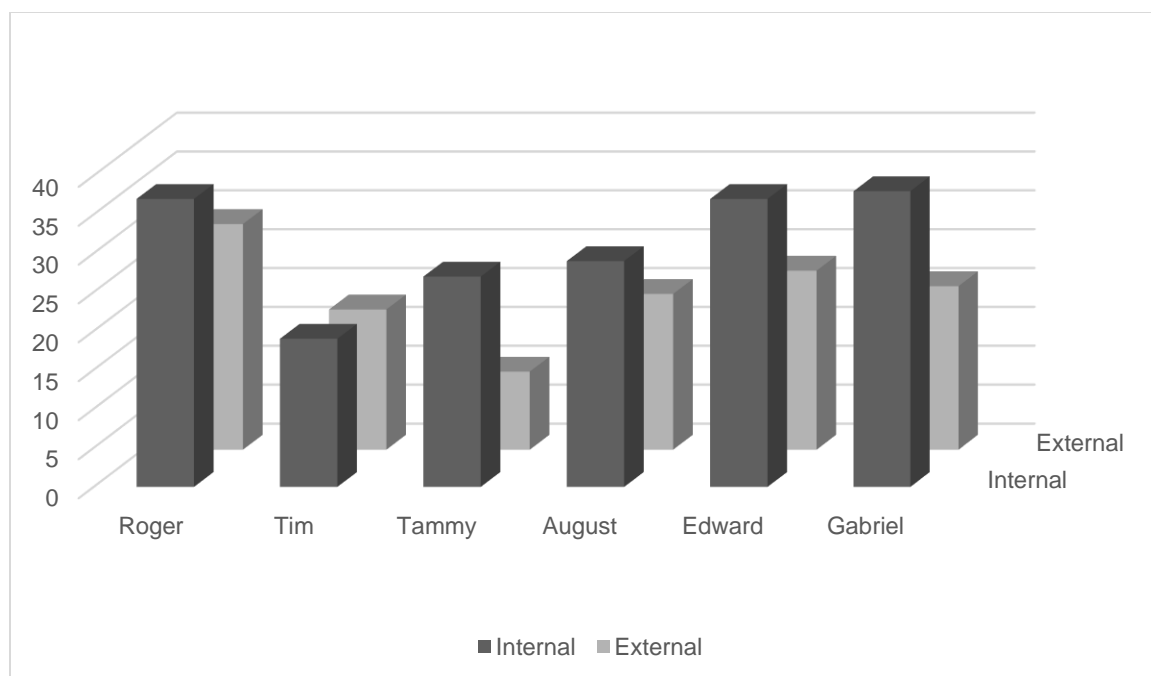
Figure 5. Distribution of participant references to internal factors and external factors

This finding may warrant future research. Offenders' internal and external resources will vary in numerous ways. Understanding how successful desistors leveraged internal resources to supplement limited external resources, or the converse, could inform more effective tailored desistance support services. Studies exploring this phenomenon may focus on ways various advantages and disadvantages relating to the internal and external resources influence outcomes. Future research may also address population limitations to include more women and ethnic minorities.

Implications

Positive Social Change

Several long-term desistor participants in the present study mentioned having friends or associates from the time they were offending who were either murdered, serving long-term prison sentences, or who died by overdose. Each of these participants were able to avoid similar outcomes through the methods identified by desistance researchers now confirmed and expanded upon by this study. The goal of desistance research is to understand the factors that contributed to successful transitions from offender to non-offender to inform intervention initiatives that facilitate those processes.

Results of this study expand the desistance knowledgebase by providing insight into the determinants and supporting behaviors that facilitate the deviant to prosocial identity change within the desistance process. These results offer a more in-depth understanding of that process as captured by ITD (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). That deeper understanding may lead to more effective application of the ITD framework by intervention programs and professionals offering desistance support.

Many of the themes, illustrations, and summaries within this study may be transformed into educational materials for would-be desistors and the individuals and organizations who support them. For instance, Figure 2, the flowchart illustrating the identity change process, and the summary provided in the essential structure of the experience may be used to inform desistance programs within reintegration support services, behavioral health centers, alternative sentencing programs, or alternative schools serving system-involved youth. That program could be a continuum of care

wherein a therapist works with the would-be desistor to develop the motivation and sense of agency to change. Once the would-be desistor is committed to desistance and ready to begin that process, other support services like coaching, mentoring, or support groups may be utilized as desistors progress through each stage.

At the societal level, results of this study further confirm laws and policies restricting would-be desistors' access to employment, education, and housing only serve to inhibit desistance. These findings deepen the knowledgebase supporting several related federal initiatives designed to mitigate these issues. The White House (2015) recently provided a fact sheet that highlighted several examples of federal reform initiatives to address these most pressing collateral damages. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) updated anti-discrimination guidance for employers regarding use of criminal records in employment decisions is one example (EEOC, 2012; The White House, 2015). Several other examples are provided involving the U.S. Department of Labor, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Office of Personnel Management, the Small Business Administration, the Federal Trade Commission, the U.S. Department of Education, and the National Institute of Justice with each initiative as encouraging as the next from a desistance research perspective.

Conclusion

Criminal desistance and related identity change appears to be an evolutionary process initiated by the offender's readiness and willingness to attend to the behavior changes necessary for success, but dependent upon access to the structural supports the offender must leverage for success. Individuals are not defined by or limited to offending

behavior. They have the power to choose and commit to making the changes necessary to abstain from offending and contribute prosocially. But, individuals live in external environments. An individual's basic survival depends on his- or her ability to access the external resources necessary to subsistence and growth. This requires cooperation between the individual and his- or her environment and social connections. Through this lens, desistance depends on individual and social responsibility. Individuals must be willing to change, but society must be willing to give them a chance to make that change. Individuals must do the work to change, but society must allow them access to the structural supports where they will do that work.

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Appendix A: Research Participant Recruiting Announcement

Identity Change and Long-Term Criminal Desistance Study

Be part of a research study aimed at supporting young offenders through positive, long-term change.

- Are you over 18 years of age?

- Do you have a history of delinquency or criminal offending when you were younger, with ten or more years of non-offending since?

- Do you believe you experienced a sense of identity change through this transition?

If you answered YES to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in this research study.

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experience of identity change as part of the transition from criminal offender to non-offender. The greatest potential benefit of participation is the chance that your success story could help other young offenders who want to make a positive change and live a crime free life. The information you share could help people and programs supporting those young offenders to be more effective.

The researcher, Leah B. Mazzola, is conducting this study in partial fulfillment of her PhD in Psychology with specialization in Forensic Psychology through Walden University. Please contact Leah via inbox message at https://www.facebook.com/leah.mazzola, or by e-mail at leah.mazzola@waldenu.edu for full details if you or someone you know would like to participate.

Appendix B: Informed Consent

CONSENT FORM: Long-term Desistor Participants

You are invited to take part in a research study about the lived experience of identity change as part of the transition from criminal offender to non-offender. The researcher is inviting adults who achieved and maintained non-offender status for ten or more years and experienced identity change through that process to be in the study. I obtained your name/contact info via ____. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding if you want to participate.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Leah B. Mazzola, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experience of identity change as part of the transition from criminal offender to non-offender.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
1. Consent to a public criminal records search to confirm prior criminal activity and ten or more years of non-offending since. Results of these searches will not be saved. The searches are for confirmation purposes only to verify participants meet criteria for participation.
2. Participate in a 30-60-minute interview in-person at a neutral meeting site (if local to the Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas area), by telephone, or by video-calling (Skype or Zoom video meeting room).
3. Provide contact information for a close other (e.g. parent, spouse, sibling, friend, etc.) who can attest to your identity change experience as part of your transition from criminal offender to non-offender.
   o The researcher will contact the close other and ask if they are willing to participate in a 10-20-minute supplemental interview with the researcher in-person at a neutral meeting site (if local to the Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas area), by telephone, or video-calling. To protect the close other's privacy, you will not be told if the close other participated. The close other's participation is not required.
4. Share documents, pictures, or videos you may have that evidence your identity change through the desistance process as you experienced it.

5. Participate in a brief 10-15-minute follow-up interview by telephone or video-calling, if requested for clarification purposes, after the researcher analyzes all study data.

Here are some sample questions:
- How would you describe your path to non-offending?

- What factor(s) do you believe initiated your path to non-offending?

- What factor(s) do you believe supported your successful transition to non-

  offender?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one within any referring agency or group, or the researcher will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you know me, the researcher, from any of my work outside of this study, please be assured that work is separate from this study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as becoming upset while recalling past events. If you become upset while recalling past events, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) offers a free national referral hotline to help you locate mental health services in your area. That number is 1-877-SAMHSA7 (1-877-726-4727). Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

The greatest potential benefit of participation is the chance that your success story could help other young offenders who want to make a positive change and live a crime free life. The information you share could help people and programs supporting those young offenders to be more effective.

Payment:
There is no monetary payment or gift compensation in exchange for your participation in the present study.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by data encryption, password protection, and use

of aliases. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university, and securely discarded thereafter.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via e-mail at leah.mazzola@waldenu.edu. You may also contact a research participant advocate by calling 1-612-312-1210 or emailing IRB@waldenu.edu. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date.**

Please print or save this consent form for your records.
Obtaining Your Consent
If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consent by signing below for in-person interviews, or replying to this email with the words, "I consent," if participating in an interview by telephone or video-calling.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

_____

Participant's Signature

_____

Researcher's Signature

_____

Appendix C: Informed Consent

CONSENT FORM: Long-term Desistor's Close Others

You are invited to take part in a research study about the lived experience of identity change as part of the transition from criminal offender to non-offender. The researcher is inviting adults who achieved and maintained non-offender status for ten or more years and experienced identity change through that process to be in the study. I obtained your name/contact info via ____ as a close friend or relative of someone who successfully transitioned from criminal offender to non-offender who can speak to his- or her experience. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Leah B. Mazzola, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experience of identity change as part of the transition from criminal offender to non-offender.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
1. Participate in a 10-20-minute supplemental interview with the researcher in-person at a neutral meeting site (if local to the Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas area), by telephone, or video-call.

Here are some sample questions:
- How do you know criminal desistor?

- How long do you believe criminal desistor has maintained status as a non-

  offender?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one within any referring agency or group, or the researcher

will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you know me, the researcher, from any of my work outside of this study, please be assured that work is separate from this study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as becoming upset while recalling past events. If you become upset while recalling past events, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) offers a free national referral hotline to help you locate mental health services in your area. That number is 1-877-SAMHSA7 (1-877-726-4727). Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

The greatest potential benefit of participation is the chance that your success story could help other young offenders who want to make a positive change and live a crime free life. The information you share could help people and programs supporting those young offenders to be more effective.

Payment:
There is no monetary payment or gift compensation in exchange for your participation in the present study.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by data encryption, password protection, and use of aliases. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university, and securely discarded thereafter. In further effort to protect your privacy, the person who referred you will not be told whether or not you participated in this supplemental interview.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via e-mail at leah.mazzola@waldenu.edu. You may also contact a research participant advocate by calling 1-612-312-1210 or emailing IRB@waldenu.edu. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date.**
Please print or save this consent form for your records.

Obtaining Your Consent
If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consent by signing below for in-person interviews, or replying to this email with the words, "I consent," if participating in an interview by telephone or video-calling.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

                                _____

Participant's Signature

                                _____

Researcher's Signature

                                _____

Appendix D: Interview Questions for Long-term Desistor Participants

Introduction

Before we begin, I would like to reiterate your participation in this interview is absolutely voluntary. I will be taking notes throughout the interview to record your responses. I will also be recording the interview via voice recorder to ensure accuracy when analyzing your responses. I want to be sure I don't misstate anything or put words into your mouth. The recording will help in that area. Do I have your permission to record this interview?

Ok. Thank you. I am conducting a study to explore the process of identity change, from deviant to prosocial, as a component of the criminal desistance process. I will be asking you a series of questions to explore this concept. We are scheduled for one hour. Be advised that you may choose to withdraw your participation at any time. You even have the option of cutting our interview short should you wish to, without penalty. All information obtained including your identity, will be protected as confidential data. Do you have any questions around any of the logistics? Would you like to proceed?

Thank you. Let's begin.

Criminal Desistance Questions

1. How would you describe your path to desistance?

2. What factor(s) do you believe initiated your path to non-offending?

3. What factor(s) do you believe supported your success through desistance?

4. What factors within you do you believe contributed most to your successful desistance?

5. What factors outside of you do you believe contributed most to your successful desistance?

6. Which of these factors do you believe came first (inside or outside)?

7. Which do you believe had the most powerful impact (inside or outside)?

Identity Change Questions

8. How would you describe your past (offending) self?

9. How would you describe your present (non-offending) self?

10. In what ways, if any, do you believe your present (non-offending) self is different from your past (offending) self?

11. At what point do you believe this identity change began to occur?

12. What factors within you do you believe contributed to this identity change?

13. What factors outside of you do you believe contributed to this identity change?

14. Did you experience any inside or outside factors that may have disrupted your experience of identity change from offender to non-offender?

15. Which of your responses or behaviors do you believe were most important to your experience of identity change from offender to non-offender?

Appendix E: Interview Questions for Close Others

Introduction

Before we begin, I would like to reiterate your participation in this interview is absolutely voluntary. I will be taking notes throughout the interview to record your responses. I will also be recording the interview via voice recorder to ensure accuracy when analyzing your responses. I want to be sure I don't misstate anything or put words into your mouth. The recording will help in that area. Do I have your permission to record this interview?

Ok. Thank you. I am conducting a study to explore the process of identity change, from deviant to prosocial, as a component of the criminal desistance process. You are participating as a "close other," (a parent, spouse, relative, friend, etc.) for (criminal desistor participant name) I am interviewing you for verification purposes to supplement responses provided by (criminal desistor). I will be asking you a series of questions to explore your perception of (criminal desistor) experience of identity change in the criminal desistance process. We are scheduled for 15 minutes. Be advised that you may choose to withdraw your participation at any time. You even have the option of cutting our interview short should you wish to, without penalty. All information obtained including your identity, will be protected as confidential data. Do you have any questions around any of the logistics? Would you like to proceed?

Thank you. Let's begin.

Interview Questions

- How do you know criminal desistor?

- How long do you believe <u>criminal desistor</u> has maintained criminal desistance?

- How would you describe <u>criminal desistor</u> during the time he- or she was

   offending?

- How would you describe <u>criminal desistor</u> now?

Appendix F: Observational Protocol

Length of Activity:	
Descriptive Notes	*Reflective Notes*

Appendix G: Step Four A – Transform Meaning Units into Psychological Expressions

Repeat participant's words in the third person.	Transform the part into a psychological expression, a description of the world of the other, the essential psychological insight contained in this moment of the experience.	Transform again if necessary	Notes:
Example from Giorgi (2012): The car seemed like a giant boat. He had visions of it going out of control or of crashing into another car. As he went onto the road and in with traffic he felt that his car was all over the road – that he took up all four lanes.	Example from Giorgi (2012): In the process of acquiring mastery of driving a car, he is aware of distorted perceptions of the vehicle and the environment while simultaneously being aware that the distortions are distortions. He is also aware that his control of the vehicle is tenuous as he nevertheless continues to perform adequately.		
1. P1's path to non-offending began with obtaining a job. Before he obtained a job it was really hard for him to get on the road. After getting out of jail, getting a job and starting a trade helped him build confidence. He was able to use that confidence to begin the process of moving away from his past.	P1 indicated prior to obtaining a job it was hard for him to get on the road to desistance. Starting a trade and obtaining a job in that trade helped to build his confidence. He was able to leverage that confidence to begin the desistance process and move away from his past.	Beginning the desistance process was difficult for P1 until he was successful finding a prosocial trade and obtaining a job in that trade. With this achievement, P1 successfully accessed a door to a new prosocial role, social context, and group membership. That accomplishment helped build the sense of self-efficacy he needed to begin his process toward reform.	Activated a new role, group membership, and social context.

Note. The table above is a sample of the tables created to transform each participant's meaning units into psychological expressions.

Appendix H: Step Four B – Review Psychological Expressions for Themes

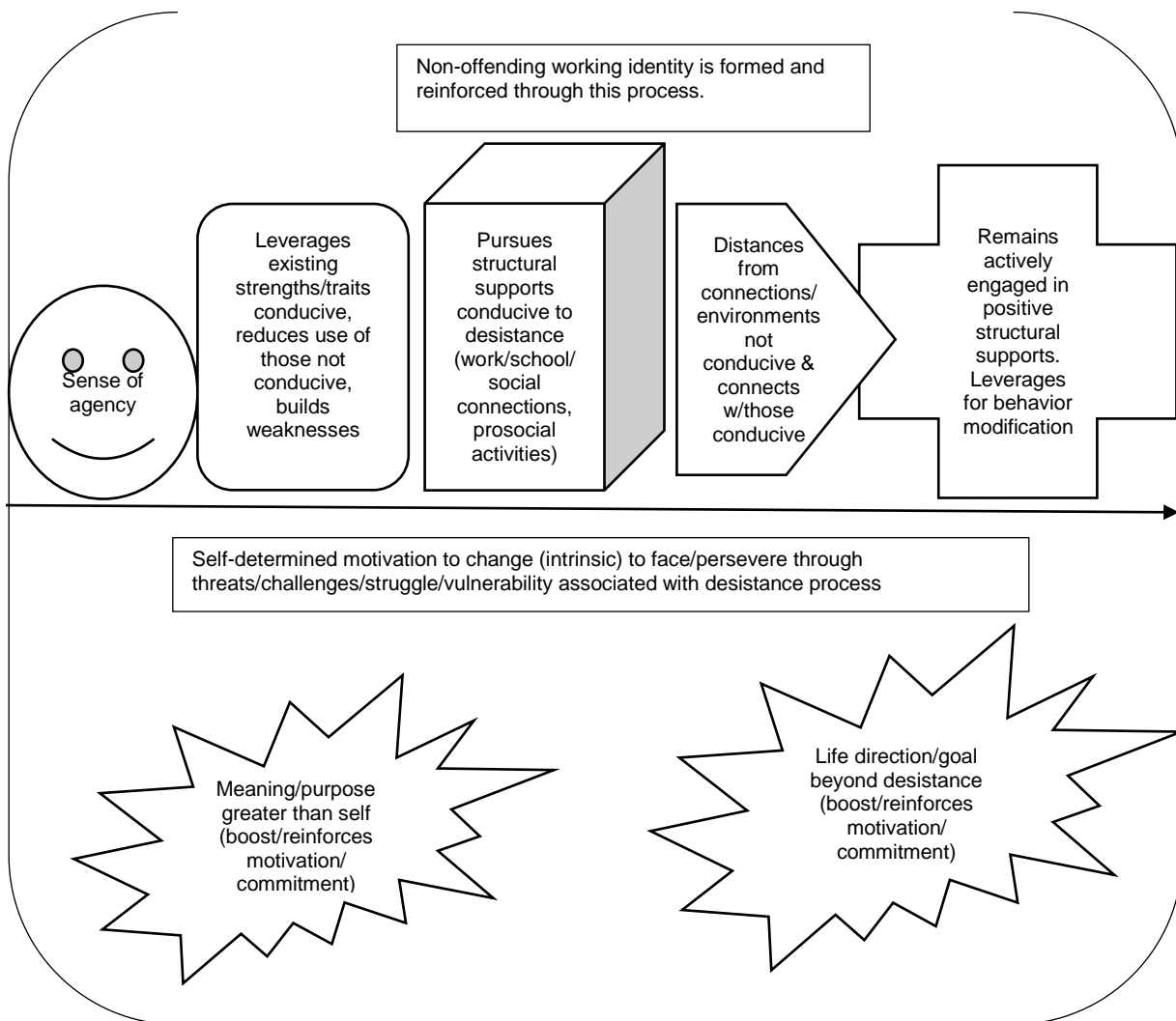| P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
After his release from jail, he chose to begin pursuing the positive structural and social supports necessary to his desistance goal. He worked toward the education he needed to become qualified for a particular trade. He was successful obtaining the qualification and securing a job in that trade. He also started a family and went back to school to continue his education. He recognized free time was a threat to his desistance goals, so he worked to occupy his time with positive activities and positive people. That self-awareness and applied strategy to address potential detractors was very important to his success.	P2 began to pursue the structural supports necessary to succeed as a non-offender. He went back to school and earned his diploma while working full-time and living on his own. His re-entry into high school was facilitated by the support of a guidance counselor who advocated on his behalf to ensure he had the access he needed to finish school.	P3 has an introverted personality, so she was not a social person. She did not have a strong social support network, as she never got close to anyone. When she became pregnant at 18, she relied on the conditioning for success she received from the drug rehabilitation program as a roadmap to follow. From this perspective, she knew she had to go back to school and remain free from substance use, so this was the path she took. She began the process of reinventing herself.	P4 experienced several stops and starts through his desistance transition. Through this process, he attended to what worked for him and what didn't work for him. A 12-step narcotics anonymous group was a large part of this process for him. He had access to good examples through this program and an enormous amount of help.	P5 perceived the college experience as a privilege. He was able to draw parallels between the concepts he was learning in economics and his life. He began to understand he was good at school, and he wasn't good at other things. He realized he could leverage what he did well to forge a path to success.	P6's situation was challenging because he faced a direct threat of physical violence. He was part of a gang at the time so making the decision to change was not as simple as a choice to pursue new goals. His first step was to leave the gang despite the threat to his life. He took the necessary steps to leave and was fortunate to have been allowed to do so without harm.

Note. The table above is a sample of the table created to review the psychological expressions for themes.

Appendix I: Step Four C – Review Themes for Essential Elements

P1	P2	P2 Close Other	P3	P4	P5	P6
Identified relationship/ way of life to access/lever age to shift toward & through which to rebuild identity	Began to pursue structural supports necessary to prosocial success (school, work, living on his own)	Rebuilt relationships with family	Leveraged constructive teachings and modified behavior in line with those	Leveraged deep motivation to change to push through challenges/ discomfort/ struggle associated w/desistance process	Pursuing and beginning college/ education (prosocial structural supports)	Self-reflection, self-insight
Begins identifying and leveraging structural supports and opportunities (work, education, family) conducive to desistance goals and adapting behaviors to those domains/ relationships	Identified and leveraged the positive examples in his environme nt to emulate	Leveraged positive/ constructive life experiences prior to offending to get back on track	Prosocial responsibilities increased which enhanced meaning and purpose boosting commitment (children)	As prosocial responsibilities increase meaning/ purpose expands to boost commitment (becoming a father)	Found a new environment that met his needs and supported goals beyond desistance. Remained engaged in that environment and developed skills through it.	Sense of agency to change outcomes
Remained engaged in those positive contexts & began to develop prosocial skills through them	Leveraged the deep motivation to change to endure the challenges of identity change	Leveraged positive social support	Leveraged strengths and positive character traits	Meaning and purpose bigger than self boosts commitment (daughter)	Identified his strengths and learned to leverage and apply them in his new environment	Detaching from/ disassociating w/social connections/ groups whose goals were not in line with newfound desistance goals

Note. The table above is a sample of the table created to review emergent themes for essential elements of the essential structure.

Appendix J: Step Four D – Illustration of the Essential Elements

Non-offending working identity is formed and reinforced through this process.

Sense of agency

Leverages existing strengths/traits conducive, reduces use of those not conducive, builds weaknesses

Pursues structural supports conducive to desistance (work/school/ social connections, prosocial activities)

Distances from connections/ environments not conducive & connects w/those conducive

Remains actively engaged in positive structural supports. Leverages for behavior modification

Self-determined motivation to change (intrinsic) to face/persevere through threats/challenges/struggle/vulnerability associated with desistance process

Meaning/purpose greater than self (boost/reinforces motivation/ commitment)

Life direction/goal beyond desistance (boost/reinforces motivation/ commitment)

Note. The above illustration was created using the essential elements to inform the essential structure.