Exploring the relationship between self-identity and future offending among a sample of serious and violent young offenders

by

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Ethics Statement

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Abstract

Cognitive transformation perspectives describe identity as an important aspect of an individual's decision to involve themselves in criminal behavior. Pro-sociality is inconsistent with a criminal lifestyle, whereas negative and antisocial perceptions of oneself increases the likelihood of (a) overall offending trajectories and (b) involvement in desistance and/or recidivism behaviours. Due, in part, to a lack of validated measures of identity, it remains relatively unclear how different perspectives of self-identity impact continued involvement in offending. Drawing from a sample of incarcerated serious and violent young offenders ($n = 211$), the current study explores the relationship between self-identity profiles in adolescence (per Schneider’s Good Citizen’s Scale) and continued involvement in offending during emerging adulthood. The results are discussed within the context of the importance of identity for theories of desistance and with specific reference to identity as a key risk factor for criminal justice system practitioners to consider in developing intervention and treatment strategies for adjudicated youth.

Keywords: Young offenders; incarceration; self-identity; developmental criminology; custody; serious and violent
To my mother, my grandparents, and my wonderful wife: without each of you, none of this would have come to fruition. Thank you for reminding me that persistence, not perfection, is the cornerstone of success.
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<td>ISVYOS</td>
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</tr>
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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1. Young offenders in Canada

Viewed as both in need of public protection while still being held accountable under the law, Canadian young offenders are subject to the 2002 *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA) and separate judicial systems at the provincial and territorial levels. Likewise, the responsibility of correctional services is divided amongst the federal, provincial, and territorial branches of government and the administration of these services differs for adults (i.e. aged 18 years and older) and young offenders (i.e. at least 12, but under 18 years of age) (Malakieh, 2018). For adolescents, the provinces and territories administer both custodial and community sanctions, including the supervision of youth in pre-trial detention (i.e. youth being held while awaiting trial or sentencing) (Malakieh, 2018, p. 3).

Young offenders represent a small, but prolific segment of the offender population in Canada. Since 2016, approximately 88,000 young persons were in contact with youth justice, with 45% leading to formal charges initiated by police (Keighley, 2017). Similarly, approximately 900 youth were formally incarcerated in any given day across the country, with British Columbia reporting the lowest rate of incarceration at 2 per 10,000 youth (Malakieh, 2018).

Despite the persistent decline in the number and rates of young offenders since the inception of the YCJA in 2003, a significant, though small, number of such offenders pose on-going policy challenges. In particular, serious, violent, and sexual young offenders pose distinctive administrative and judicial concerns, including the need for custodial sentences, restrictive community supervision, and an overall greater degree of responsibility to the youth justice system (Malakieh, 2017; 2018).
1.2. A special niche of offender: the serious, violent, and chronic young offender

Problem behaviours and criminal activities typically increase during early adolescence and decline in late adolescence into early adulthood (i.e. mid-twenties) (Moffitt, 1993; Rocque, Posick, & White, 2015). However, theories for this universally acknowledged age-crime-curve remain contentious - especially when considering a persistent proportion of young offenders in every country continue their criminal careers well into adulthood (Rocque et al., 2015). Typically, this group consists of young offenders - with more serious and chronic offending patterns – that have been one of the research foci of adult offending trajectories. Emanating from previous research, one theoretical perspective asserts that recidivism and desistance are largely influenced by biology – drawing explanations from individual determinants (Rocque et al., 2015). In contrast, a competing theoretical school emphasizes environmental, psychological, and sociological influences (Rocque et al., 2015). The current study relies heavily on research put forward from the latter camp to examine social relationships and changing identities regarding criminal desistance and recidivism trajectories.

Consistent with earlier studies on young offenders in Canada, Lussier, Corrado, and McCuish (2016) in their study define serious youth offending (SYO) as consisting of either major drug-related offences, violent crimes (e.g. homicide, serious assault), or offences involving weapons (p. 1132). Their study involved data from the Incarcerated Serious and Violent Young Offenders Study (ISVYOS) which began in 1998 in British Columbia and is ongoing. This project also included gang-involved, highly criminogenic youth in British Columbia, where ‘chronic offending’ is defined “a stable and sustained pattern of offending during some time period” (Lussier et al., 2016, p. 1131).

The YCJA resulted in the provinces and territories creating a more comprehensive and complex set of pathways for youth involved in youth justice -- ranging from extrajudicial diversion alternatives by the police and extrajudicial
sanctions by Crown prosecutors for less serious offences, to judicial processing and custodial sanctions for more serious offences (Alain, Corrado & Reid, 2016). However, according to critics such as Caputo and Vallee (2008), the adult-length sentences for presumptive offences (i.e. murder, major sexual assaults, armed robbery, major physical assaults, and pattern of moderate offences) reinforce the demonization of youth and the public’s perception that young people are dangerous. Yet, young offenders’ custodial sentences declined substantially, and incarceration was reserved primarily for ‘serious and violent’ offences, and/or serious repeat offenders under the new Act (Corrado & Peters, 2013). Until the Bill C-10 amendment of the *YCJA* in 2011, the definitions of a ‘serious violent’ offence or the number of offences a young person needed to commit before being designated a ‘repeat offender’ were inadequate and ambiguous (Caputo & Vallee, 2008). As a result, a certain proportion of multi-problematic young offenders received seemingly arbitrary sentences, which frequently placed them in direct contact with equally anti-social peers (Corrado & Peters, 2013). In effect, the *YCJA* inadvertently created a ‘new class’ of offender; the Serious and Violent Young Offender (SVYO).

1.3. **The current study**

There has been a growing consensus among social scientists concerning a wide range of factors associated with recidivism and criminal desistance beyond those occurring prior to criminal or deviant behaviour(s). However, examinations of factors occurring *after* a crime has been committed remains incomplete in the existing literature (Scott & Steinberg, 2008). Researchers increasingly have begun exploring post-sentencing circumstances when examining rates of desistance and recidivism -- with dynamic factors being a marked focus of intervention (Rocque, Posick, Paternoster, 2016). Criminological research inevitably has focused on those factors that were potentially changeable in the young person’s life and the focus of this study is no different.
Far more than older adults, youth and young adults typically continue to evolve physically, emotionally, and cognitively throughout their development – often resulting in changes to self-identity (Maruna, LeBel, Mitchell, & Naples, 2004; Moretti & Peled, 2004). However, research looking at the relationship between custody, identity measures, and incarceration to future offending among SVYOs remains scarce (see McCuish, Lussier, & Corrado, 2018). In addition, this study is concerned with incarceration and among SVYOs. A related policy assertion is that, without understanding the relationship between incarceration and a young offender’s identity, case management programs to assist SVYOs will remain problematic and the cycle of offending for Canada’s most vulnerable young offenders will continue.

Based on a sub-sample of incarcerated serious and violent young offenders ($n = 211$), the current study explores the relationship between self-identity profiles in adolescence - utilizing Schneider’s (1990) Good Citizens Scale - and continued involvement in offending during emerging adulthood. A limitation of existing identity research is the tendency for the sole focus to be on the participant’s self-esteem. Pertinent to the current study, Schneider’s (1990) scale can be applied to young offenders to measure identity in a way that explores a youth’s own sense of self beyond single constructs such as self-esteem. Consequently, the centrality of identity in theories of desistance provides the context empirically to examine identity as a key risk factor in criminal offending. Researching identity also provides criminal justice system practitioners greater evidence to consider when developing intervention and treatment strategies for adjudicated youth.

Until more recently (e.g. the ongoing ISVYO studies), much of what is understood on self-identity and deviance in young offenders has been based primarily on qualitative research and quantitative community-based samples exploring theoretical perspectives such as labeling and psycho-social development (see Maruna et al., 2004; Moretti & Peled, 2004). A major limitation of surveys of community samples was that only small subsamples of youth
involved in serious, chronic, violent, and/or sexual offending were included -- and often only binary recidivism outcome measures were employed.

Research has supported the hypothesis that criminal identity was significantly associated with incarcerated SVYOs, especially when social interactions disproportionally involved the criminal community (Asencio, 2011). This identity factor too is hypothesized to be associated with persistent criminal trajectories into early adulthood. Again, these themes are examined in the study because the sub-sample involves SVYOs - including sexual and violent juvenile offenders - who typically have been at greater risk of recidivism post-custodial release (Lussier, et al., 2015).

The current study, therefore, focuses on re-entry to the community from custody and future offending outcomes of serious, violent, chronic, and sexual young offenders. The key study question is what the influence of incarceration is on with an offender's experience upon re-entry into the community?’. A second theme to be examined is the policy and intervention implications of the study’s results.

From Moretti and Higgin’s (1990) classic work on self-identity operationalized constructs (also see Moretti & Higgins, 1999; Moretti, 1992), are examined and adapted in the current study: how the youth view themselves; how the youth perceive the staff view them; and, how these youth perceive their friends' perceptions of them. These self-identity constructs are then associated with future violent and general offending outcomes of young offenders after community re-entry. To reiterate, the primary purposes of the study are to: assess the contributions of self-identity measures in violent and general rates of criminal recidivism to add a quantitative perspective to the existing desistance research and longitudinal perspectives and to assess how identity constructs influence incarcerated young offenders in their future desistance patterns and whether identity change is a fruitful area of intervention. More specifically, this study examines self-identity types - along with demographic factors and past
offending - as significant contributors to the future offending behaviours of incarcerated serious, violent, and sexual young offenders following re-entry into the community.
Chapter 2
Understanding Canadian Legislation

2.1 Understanding the Youth Criminal Justice Act

Prior to the adoption of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA) in 2003, the *Young Offenders Act* (YOA) provided the legislative framework concerning young offenders in Canada (Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2009). Several criticisms of that legislation centered on the lack of structured, comprehensible principles that it offered (Corrado, Gronsdahl, MacAlister, & Cohen, 2007).

Under the YOA, Canada had one of the highest rates of youth custody and one of the lowest rates of youth diversion globally (Bala et al., 2009, p. 2009). The YCJA was introduced following what many Canadians believed to be the systematic failing of the YOA to properly address youth crime, particularly SVOs (Corrado & Peters, 2013). Specifically, the YCJA was enacted to implement diversion practices to reduce the perceived over-reliance reliance on the youth courts for minor offences and to introduce legislative principles and criteria that restricted the use of pre-trial and custodial sentence detention (Corrado & Peters, 2013). In conjunction with the far more specified youth sentencing alternatives and extrajudicial sanctions, the YCJA mandated the limiting of incarcerating young offenders to, primarily, the most serious offenders -- particularly SVYO (Corrado & Peters, 2013).

At its inception, the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* had two primary objectives (Roberts & Bala, 2003). First, the YCJA sought to decrease the use of custodial sentences - particularly for non-violent young offenders who commit less serious infractions (Corrado et al., 2007; Roberts & Bala, 2003; Corrado & Peters, 2013). Second, for those offenders who do commit the most extreme and serious offences, the YCJA imposes more severe, sometimes adult, sentencing options to protect the public and hold these offenders responsible (Roberts & Bala, 2003;
Bala et al., 2009; Department of Justice of Canada, 2016). Related legal philosophy and policy concerns are the absence of explicit YOA sentencing principles; the over-reliance by youth courts on custody for non-SVYOs; lack of specific directives regarding sentencing young offenders to incarceration; and, the lack of insensitive rehabilitative custody and supervision option (Bala & Anand, 2012a). The federally-assistance funded intensive rehabilitative custody and supervision (IRCS) program under the YCJA is a notable addition to the sentencing options available to a court for SVYOs (Department of Justice Canada, 2016).

The IRCS program established a new sentencing option for young for young offenders with mental illness, psychological disorders, or emotional disturbances who are convicted of specific, serious violent crimes (i.e. murder, attempted murder, manslaughter, and aggravated sexual assault) are eligible for specialized therapeutic programs and services. Provinces and territories across Canada are provided federal funding to ensure that each jurisdiction was able to adequately address this demanding group of offenders. The IRCS initiative provided these multi-needs young offenders with additional reports and assessments, individual custodial programming, and various rehabilitative and reintegration services (Department of Justice Canada, 2016).

2.2 Sentencing and the YCJA

In a study released in the same year that the YCJA was introduced, Anand (2003) reported that, “one of the great impetuses for repealing the Young Offenders Act and replacing it with new legislation is the dissatisfaction felt by many people concerning youth court sentencing” (p. 944). Not surprisingly, judicial processing of young offenders, particularly sentencing, became a central concern in the drafting the new legislation. This Act included a new set of principles and options for the sentencing of young offenders, which was described as “the most systematic attempt in Canadian history to structure
judicial discretion regarding sentencing of juveniles” (Roberts & Bala, 2003, p. 396).

The sections addressing committal to custody under the YCJA have been described as the “gateway to incarceration provisions” (D. MacAlister, personal communication, 2018). As such, these provisions include the prohibition from sentencing a young person to custody unless the young person meets section 39 criteria:

(i) the young person has committed a violent offence;
(ii) the young person has failed to comply with non-custodial sentences;
(iii) the young person has committed an indictable offence for which an adult would be liable to imprisonment for a term of more than two years and has a history that indicates a pattern of either extrajudicial sanctions or of findings of guilt or of both under this Act or the Young Offenders Act, chapter Y-1 of the Revised Statutes of Canada, 1985; or,
(iv) in exceptional cases where the young person has committed an indictable offence, the aggravating circumstances of the offence are such that the imposition of a non-custodial sentence would be inconsistent with the purpose and principles set out in section 38.
(Youth Criminal Justice Act, SC 2002, c. 1)

An effect of these sentencing provisions has been a shift in offender populations of juvenile correctional facilities, with custodial sanctions typically reserved for more serious, violent, and/or repeat offenders (Malakieh, 2018). However, several years after the legislation came into effect, researchers have found that the severity of punishment imposed on young offenders had no effect on the overall crime rate (Corrado et al., 2007). Yet, since 2003, Canada has a substantial decrease in the overall rate of youth custody populations (see Figure 1), with fewer and fewer youths facing custodial sanctions (Corrado & Leschied, 2011; Malakieh, 2018).
In contrast to the YOA, the YCJA clearly specifies accountability and proportionality as main philosophical sentencing principles (Bala & Anand, 2012d, p. 493). More specifically, unlike adult offenders, young offenders’ accountability is limited in direct proportion to their age (Bala et al., 2009). The Supreme Court of Canada highlighted this principle in *R v RWC*, where the judiciary confirmed that a 'young offender' status is a mitigating factor in sentencing adolescents criminally charged under the justice system (Bala et al., 2009, p. 137; *R v RC*, 2005). Judicial interpretations of several of the key YCJA provisions, such the diversion of youth charges from youth court and restitution to a victim were further reinforced as "extrajudicial measures" under the Act (Bala et al., 2009, p. 137).
The YCJA stipulates that the purpose and nature of the Canadian youth criminal justice system “was enacted with the intent of decreasing the use of courts and restricting the use of custody for adolescent offenders, while improving the effectiveness of the responses to serious violent youth offenders” (Bala et al., 2009, p. 132). However, this law asserts that a fundamental sentencing principle is the “long-term protection of the public” (Roberts & Bala, 2003, p. 397). The long-term protection of the public suggests sentencing proposals that allow young offenders the opportunity to change to develop prosocial identities and non-criminal behaviours (Roberts & Bala, 2003).

An exception to the Supreme Court of Canada’s confirmation of the YCJA sentencing sections SVYOs concerning the reverse onus principle regarding defence having to “show cause” why the SVYO should not be sanctioned to adult length sentences for presumptive offences. This court “ruled unconstitutional provisions of the YCJA that create a presumption of adult sentencing for the most serious offences by young offenders, limiting the effect of provisions of the Act directed at serious violent offenders” (Bala et al., 2009, p. 132).

The focus – and ultimate goal - of youthful offender rehabilitation was to prevent further offending and victimizations (Fortune, 2018). Declaring as a central rehabilitation goal, the YCJA “directs judges to impose sentences that facilitate the rehabilitation of young offenders, rather than impose custodial sentences that will merely incapacitate them” (Bala et al., 2009, p. 136). Nonetheless, Bala and Anand (2012c) assert that there was evidence that courts have utilized custodial sanctions to encourage desistance. Despite this, the restriction on the use of custodial measures for young offenders resulted in increased community-based sentences and the diversion of youth away from youth court (Corrado & Leschied, 2011).

The long-term protection of the public is to be achieved through three strategies (Roberts & Bala, 2003):
(i) prevent crime by addressing the circumstances underlying a young person’s offending behaviour;
(ii) rehabilitate young persons who commit offences and reintegrate them into society;
and,
(iii) ensure that a young person is subject to meaningful consequences for his or her offence. (p. 397).

Over the last decade and a half, rates of youth incarceration have steadily declined and the reliance on custodial sentencing has been reduced (Corrado & Peters, 2013; Malakieh, 2018). Of the 10 reporting provinces and territories\(^1\), British Columbia most recently recorded the lowest incarceration rate across the country, at 2 per 10,000 youth population (Malakieh, 2018). In effect, many youth offences have declined nationally while rates of serious violent crimes remained stable (Corrado & Leschied, 2011; Corrado & Peters, 2013; Malakieh, 2018).

\(^1\) Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Quebec were excluded due to unavailability of data
3.1 Adolescence, legislation, and age jurisdiction

The YCJA stipulates that the jurisdiction of this Act is limited to ‘young persons’ being between the ages of twelve and less than eighteen years old (Youth Criminal Justice Act, SC 2002, c. 1). In effect, it can be asserted theoretically that this Act encompasses several fundamental developmental stages from adolescence to young adulthood. However, the YCJA has been described as philosophically (i.e. multiple and potentially contradictory broad goals) and legally complex (i.e. numerous and lengthy sections and subsections) (Bala & Aland, 2012b). Canada’s leading youth justice scholar and contributor to the drafting of the YCJA, Professor Nicholas Bala (Bala, 2015; Bala et al., 2009; Bala & Anand, 2012c) has expressed concerns with this law’s balance of sentencing principals. Specifically, that the YCJA has resulted in a small percentage of SVYO's experiencing repeated sanctions -- including multiple custodial sentences (Bala, 2015). However, significant numbers of these young offenders - for a myriad of reasons, such as major childhood traumas and developmental neurological disorders – were incapable of fully understanding their criminal behaviours and the long-term negative consequences to victims as well as themselves (Freedman, Wong & Corrado, 2015).

Despite several differences and changes made between the YOA and the YCJA, age jurisdiction did not change (Roberts & Bala, 2003). Also, young offenders still are sentenced based on their age at the time of the offence – not when charged and brought to court and a uniform nation-wide age authority (i.e. 12-18 years of age) remains national (Bala & Anand, 2012b). A key legal YCJA assumption is that a “young person” can be assumed to be in the period of development and time between childhood and adulthood. In effect, a “child” (i.e. 11 years and under) cannot be held accountable for criminal offences and is
therefore without criminal liability. In contrast, an “adult” is an individual who bears full legal accountability (Bala & Anand, 2012b).

According to Zedner (1998), this assertion of a universal period of adolescence is based on social and political arguments rather than social science and neuroscientific research. She argues that “the age of criminal responsibility is a social construct determined more by differences in legal, social, and political culture, by differential attitudes to juvenile delinquency, and the use of criminal sanctions, than differential rates of juvenile development” (Zedner, 1998, p. 170). In other words, there have been increasing, empirically-based research challenges to the apparent arbitrary YCJA definitions of adolescent-based legal responsibility. Equally important, life-course and developmental-theoretical based research has focused on the inherent complexity and diversity of age-stage transitions and their impact on how children/youth engage in rational choice versus impulsive decision-making generally and specifically regarding to anti-social and criminal behaviour (Corrado, Leschied, & Lussier, 2015; McCuish, Mathesius, Lussier, & Corrado, 2018; McCuish et al., 2018).

Late childhood and pubescence are identified as fundamental transitional periods where biological, social, and environmental experiences influenced the physiologically maturing brain (Casey, 2013). The initial teenage stage (i.e. 13 to 15 years of age) characteristically involve major emotional and affective changes related to impulsivity, sensation seeking, risk tasking, and an increased social reliance on peers as opposed to parents in previous stages (Steinberg, 2008). According to Dahl (2004), the risk of dying because of high-risk behaviours increased by 200% during adolescence. Similarly, research has shown that approximately by age seventeen, adolescents were most likely to: have engaged in substance use and experimentation; be at an elevated risk for motor vehicle accidents; have exhibited suicidal ideation; and, have had peak criminal involvement (Steinberg, 2012).
Consistent with Moffitt’s (1993) classic developmental theory of crime binary constructs – life-course persistent and adolescent limited-- Van der Put et al. (2011) found that rates of offenses by most young offenders increased as children entered adolescence, peaked during mid-adolescence, and decreased in later adolescence. Only a small percentage of young offenders engaged in serious anti-social behaviours as children (including crimes in legal criminal jurisdictions with minimum ages below 12) and continued such behaviours into adulthood. While all cohort studies including the initial and longest project, the Cambridge-London study by Farrington and West (1990), as well as more recent such studies (e.g. Poulton, Moffitt, & Silva, 2015; Loeber, Farrington, & Stallings, 2011) have confirmed the age-crime-curve trajectory. Sampson and Laub (1997) found further that there were several pro-social turning points involving the latter factors in later adolescent and young adulthood developmental stages that partially explained the age crime curve. Similarly, researchers have also confirmed the importance of developmentally-related factors such as multi-problem families (e.g. negative attachment, poor parenting, father/sibling criminality) anti-social peer group involvement, and impulsivity and egocentrism and protective factors such as acquiring pro-social skills, and stable social, especially intimate, and work relationships (see Viljoen, Bhanwer, Shaffer, & Douglas, 2018).

Most of the historical theorizing and research traditionally has involved the psychology discipline - especially the original pioneering work of Eric Erickson (1963) on shifting self-awareness and identity phases through 9 age-related and full life course stages. From this original perspective, recent research and theorizing by Moretti, Holland, and Moore (2002) on anti-social and self-harming adolescents also has explored the association between distinct types identity (as well as attachment types) and youth criminality (also see Moretti & Holland, 2003; Odgers et al., 2005). In the last decade, many criminological researchers, especially those within the developmental life course perspective, have begun to considerably explore and integrate the complex theoretically and operationally
evolving self-concept construct in explaining SVYOs (see McCuish et al., 2018; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009; Rocque et al., 2016).

3.2 Self-concept and criminal justice research: A gap in the literature

As mentioned above, there has been a longstanding and documented interest in how individuals identify and view themselves (Rocque et al., 2016). The identity construct traditionally was focused both on individuals distinguishing themselves from, and being part of, a shared commonality with groups at multiple societal levels from family to country and ethnicity/race. As a construct, individual identity paradoxically has been considered as consisting of a simple conceptual definition; what the individual expressed, or self-labelled, at various stages in life. However, this simple conceptualization and, even more its related operational definitions, have become persistently more complex (Alarid & Vega, 2010). Again, self-concept identity traditionally was focused on the development of successively normative identity types according to life course stages (Rocque et al., 2016, p. 46; Erikson, 1968). The consensus was that adolescence was a fundamental transitional and formative identity period between childhood and adulthood primarily because of the separation of the sense of self - or, identities - from their family to peers and other broader social categories (Crank, 2016).

Self-concept and identity constructs have historically also been utilized to explain deviance and crime (Rocque et al., 2016; Crank, 2016). Specifically, labeling theories and theories of self-ascription have argued that the way in which individuals perceived themselves affected pro-social and anti-social attitudes and behaviours especially in middle childhood (i.e. approximately 6 to 9 years old) where extrafamilial, social interactions increased dramatically and delinquent behaviour opportunities increased in conjunction (Crank, 2016). In effect, it was asserted that an individual’s behaviour was typically congruent with how they viewed themselves (Rocque et al., 2016). However, as mentioned earlier, this hypothesized relationship has been primarily explored empirically
within labeling, symbolic interactionism, and psychological internalization theories, which focused on explaining and predicting delinquent offenders (see Crank, 2016).

A major theme in this thesis is that a more fully elaborate construct of self-identity is required to better explain its role in assisting in the explanation of SVYOs. This study emphasizes the relationship between identity formation and self-identity constructs in explaining future offending trajectories of incarcerated SVYOs. As will be discussed in the methods section, a multi-dimensional conceptualization and operationalization of self-identity is utilized to adequately represent the inherent theoretical complexity of this key construct.

### 3.3 Identity and the self

According to formative research on the self, the development of a stable pro-social identity was imperative for normal, adolescent behavioral development in terms of mental health, stable social relationships, and educational achievements (Erikson, 1968). The process of identity formation is universal across both non-offending and offending populations (Crank, 2016). Conversely, from this perspective, it has been asserted that personal instability, oppositional behaviours, delinquencies and criminality were typically related to chaotic family and even neighbourhood (e.g. housing, schools, playgrounds, youth gangs) environments (see Carbonneau, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2001; LeBlanc & Tremblay, 1988). Utilizing the ISVYOS data, Yang, McCuish, and Corrado (2017) found significant relationships between social instability, such as foster care, and continued involvement in serious and violent crime. In other words, negative environments contributed to negative self-identities while stable, pro-social environments facilitated pro-social self-identities.

Beginning with Erickson (1968), identity formation has been typically defined as an evolving process stretching throughout childhood, adolescence, and well into adulthood. Therefore, identity types have traditionally been
considered along a fluid continuum, depending on age-stages when identity remained relatively stable (Klimstra et al., 2011). Perhaps most concisely, these identity statuses have been referred to as the 'stages of exploration and commitment'; periods of exploring developmental alternatives and eventually committing to a (more or less) continuously ascribed identity (Marcia, 1996).

However, an individual’s ‘committed’ identity will be subjected to a variety of environmental, psychological, and social influences – influences that can be both congruent and incongruent with their established self-identity (Alarid & Vega, 2010). How greatly these external influences are internalized, will often affect how that individual’s identity takes shape. This inherent complexity of the self-identity construct, arguably, requires a multidimensional approach. For this study, the identity dimension is conceptualized as an individual’s self-evaluations -- frequently associated with the various roles he or she holds. While the ‘self’ encompasses a more overarching concept, frequently reflecting an internalization of one or more identities (Rocque et al., 2016).

In addition, identity and self-concept are distinguished from an individual’s personality, or personality traits, and the identity and the self have each been asserted to be relatively stable in adulthood – potentially facing certain, usually subtle, changes when an individual enters a new life stage (Erikson, 1968). Unlike their adult counterparts, the identity of youth and young adults is largely malleable and therefore susceptible to change (see Boldero, Moretti, Bell, & Francis, 2005). From a policy and program intervention perspective, it is this hypothesized variability of the self and identity dimensions associated with environmental, social, and internal change variables that can be a potentially effective focus of intervention for SVYOs.

3.4 Self-identity and the development of deviant identities

Young offenders, especially SVOs, often have been associated with persistently disruptive family and neighbourhood environments, which facilitates delinquent and criminal behaviours, associations, and identities (Moretti &
Holland, 2003; Carbonneau et al., 2001; Crank, 2016; Yang et al., 2017). While there has been a long-standing debate among criminologists about the direction of the causal paths between self-identity and delinquency/crime, a historical consensus has existed since the 20th century about that the relationship is robust (e.g. Shaw & McKay, 1942; Miller, 1958; Cohen, 1969; Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983; Farrington, Piquero, Blumstein, 2003; and, more recently, Piquero, Farrington, & Blumstein, 2007). More importantly, theories of desistance consistently have asserted that self-identity, at the most basic level of conceptualization (i.e. as either pro-social/conformist or anti-social/deviant), was causal concerning delinquency and crime trajectories (Rocque et al., 2016).

The self-concept too has been defined as a multidimensional construct (Crank, 2016). Gecas (1982) theorized that these dimensions include physical, social, and spiritual or moral being themes. In effect, the self-concept extends beyond an individual’s inherently more narrow or unique internal perceptions because the latter often reflect environmental (e.g. neighbourhood characteristics such as gangs), social (e.g. labeled negatively or positively by peers or authorities), and even frequent and time limited circumstantial influences (e.g. trauma, school/sports/artistic achievements (Moretti & Holland, 2003).

As mentioned, labeling theory argued that criminal justice systems officially designating a child or youth as a ‘delinquent ‘because of often minor and typical or primary deviant behaviour causes secondary deviance, or criminality (Lemert, 1951). The key psychological process described by this theory was that children and youth were particularly susceptible to accepting and internalizing the delinquent/criminal label, and then engaging in the related delinquent or criminal trajectories because of the now self-attributed designation. However, Matza’s drift theory of delinquency - related to the broader labelling theory - argued that children and youth more typically moved back and forth between deviant and pro-social behaviours. This suggested that the delinquent self-identity was inherently unstable and involved a more complex psychological process (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Matza, 1964). Hagan’s (1987), view of labelling theory Hagan
and McCarthy’s (1997; Hagan, 1987) pioneering study on street youth in Vancouver and Toronto, Baron’s (1999) subsequent research on street youth in Edmonton, and, more recently, research by Odgers et al. (2005) on multi-problem/needs institutionalized youth all provided support for the more complex explanation of this intricate process. Again, though, labelling theory’s asserted causal direction between self-identity and criminal trajectories has remained in dispute (Rocque et al., 2016).

More recently, criminological research on the relationship between identity and desistance too has found evidence that an offender was more likely to have desisted from criminality only after a pro-social self-identity change (Rocque et al., 2015; 2016; McCuish et al., 2018). However, it is asserted in this thesis that there has been insufficient empirical exploration of different processes that possibly influenced an individual’s perceptions of identity, most importantly for incarcerated SVYOs, regarding the role of their peers and correctional staff as daily authorities.

### 3.5 Identity, custody and the desistance process

Alain et al. (2016) describe how certain individual provinces adapted their youth justice systems to the YCJA mandated principles and processes. The use of custody was a particular concern for the reasons discussed above. To reiterate, a primary concern was that custodial sentences be typically reserved for SVOs and those young offenders who were involved in persistent criminal trajectories including violations of youth court administrative conditions. Corrado et al. (2007) further maintained that, regardless of whether the young person pleaded guilty or was found guilty, “the most challenging decision made by the youth justice court judge is determining the sentence and what principles to utilize” (p. 540). The YCJA acknowledged that multiple sentencing principles were needed for both the rehabilitation of SVYOs and the subsequent protection of the public form continued criminal trajectories after these youth were released from custody into their communities. Several Canadian studies reported the
multi-problem needs (e.g. mental health, drug/alcohol dependency, major trauma, developmental neurological disorders) dependency of incarcerated young offenders and the further negative impacts of custody (Cesaroni & Petersen-Badali, 2013; 2017; 2019; Corrado et al., 2007; Viljoen, Brodersen, Shaffer, Muir, & ARROW Advisory Team, 2014; Viljoen, Brodersen, Shaffer, & McMahon, 2016).

Desistance from crime has been defined as involving intricate processes where individuals refrained from and/or decreased criminogenic behaviours (Kazemian, 2007). Frequently, the focus of desistance research was on the relationship between custodial sanctions and future offending among incarcerated inmates (see Bala & Anand, 2012c; Corrado & Peters, 2013). While there has been research on the self-construct and criminal behaviours (see Moretti & Holland, 2003), there was little research on the theoretically asserted, more complex reciprocal relationship between incarceration and self-identity concepts and desistance from crime. Accordingly, there was a paucity of these themes concerning incarcerated SVOs, even though there has been a consensus that youth were likely to be more vulnerable to the negative impact of custody on their self than their adult counterparts (see Cesaroni & Petersen-Badali, 2013; 2017; 2019; Corrado et al., 2007).

This vulnerability reflected the inherent developmental instability of these constructs in adolescence -- especially in custodial contexts where SVOs routinely interacted according to both imported and institutional aggression-violence values along with related identities (Abrams & Hyun, 2009; Cesaroni & Petersen-Badali, 2005; 2010; 2019). The latter variables were exacerbated where custodial facilities included informal groups/gangs and formal gangs, which utilized this fear to intimidate/victimize other incarcerated young offenders and/or recruit those who sought protection and/or gang focused identities (Descormiers & Corrado, 2016). Although youth had pre-custody shaped identities, how an incarcerated young offender maintained their identities in
custody and subsequently when released into the community was not well understood generally and in Canada in particular.

There is extensive sociologically-based research regarding factors associated with desistance generally with theory focused on pro-social and conventional bonds versus anti-social and criminal bonds in institutional settings such as hospitals, and correctional and/or psychiatric facilities. A key factor was stigma; according to Abrams and Hyun (2009), “more recent studies of institutionalized populations (i.e. homeless shelter residents, prisoners) locate processes of ‘talking back’ or ‘resisting’ stigmatizing messages to preserve positive versions or images of self” (p. 30). In effect, this theoretical perspective emphasized that resistance to the internalization stigmatic or negative ascriptions of identity was related to pro-social behaviour outcomes among institutionalized populations. In addition, such institutionalized individuals typically negotiated their self and identity dimensions as they related to both their peers and fellow residents (Abrams & Hyun, 2009). This negotiated identity process involved altering self-concepts based on persistent, external social interactions and internal mental stimuli (Abrams & Hyun, 2009). Excluding research coming from Simon Fraser University’s Adolescent Health Lab (see Moretti & Higgins, 1990; 1999; Moretti et al., 2002; Oggers et al., 2005; also see Rocque et al., 2016) multi-dimensional studies of adolescents in a Canadian mental health facility, which included some formerly incarcerated young offenders, the negotiated self-model process has been insufficiently explored among incarcerated youth (Abrams & Hyun, 2009).

In his classic theorizing on self-identity stages, Erikson (1968) asserted that in late childhood and adolescence pro-sociality was definitionally inconsistent with a deviant or criminogenic lifestyle. Similarly, he argued that a criminogenic lifestyle was incongruent with pro-social identity formation. He explained that “the high recidivity of criminality in the young who, during the years of identity formation, are forced by society into an exclusive identification with hardened criminals” (Erikson, 1968, p. 256). However, where pro-social identities
did develop, it was hypothesized to be related to the process of desistance. In other words, Erickson (1968) theorized over fifty years ago that custodial institutions facilitated negative self-images and identities.

Arguably, the above discussed theories affected those involved in the reform of the YOA-based provincial and territorial youth justice systems in Canada (Alain et al., 2016). Bala (2009; 2015; Bala et al., 2009), in particular, noted the extensive documentation of the damaging, long-term effects of early involvement in the criminal justice system, especially custody, and, therefore, decreasing the number of young offenders sentenced to custody became primary goal of the YCJA (also see Corrado et al., 2007). Bala et al. (2009) argued that imprisoning young offenders was potentially “inhumane” and “may contribute to a cycle of juvenile re-offending” (p.135). This research too described how the youth criminal justice system isolated multi-problem and multi-needs young offenders from positive role models and peers, thereby hindering pro-social self-images and identities.

Additionally, the reliance on custodial sentencing sanctions were too often both costly and unsuccessful at meeting the objectives of the YCJA (Corrado & Peters, 2013). Equally important, custodial sentencing of SVYOs under the YCJA continued to disproportionately have involved Indigenous youth. This is despite the YCJA and Supreme Court of Canada’s key Gladue (R v Gladue, 1999) adult case law precedent stipulating that indigenous status and/or identity must be considered a mitigating factor in sentencing (Smandych & Corrado, 2018). Smandych and Corrado (2018) recently theorized and utilized extensive research that focused on the inadequacies of the YCJA and provincial/territorial youth justice systems - especially in the Prairie provinces - in addressing the complex array of intervention needs - including major self and identity challenges - of incarcerated Indigenous SVOs.
Chapter 4
Methods

4.1 Incarcerated Serious and Violent Young Offender Study (ISVYOS)

The current study involves data from the Incarcerated Serious and Violent Young Offender Study (ISVYOS), which has been ongoing since 1998. Fourteen hundred young offenders between the ages of twelve and nineteen were interviewed in open and secure custody facilities within the Greater Vancouver Regional District and surrounding areas between 1998 and 2012. The current thesis project consists of an initial subsample \( n = 349 \) that includes Moretti and Higgins (1990; 1999; also see Moretti, 1992) complex self and identity models survey-based, operationalized questions.

All young offenders included in the subsample were incarcerated in a youth detention centre in British Columbia at least once between the ages of twelve and nineteen. However, since the focus of this thesis is SVOs and their criminal trajectories, the final subsample \( n = 211 \) includes only young offenders who had spent a minimum of 30 consecutive days in custody whose offences had been coded as part of the initial follow-up period of data collection.

To dissuade the use of custody as a sentencing option for non-serious offence, the YCJA mandates that, “judges must only consider incarceration as an option if the offender was deemed to have committed a serious or violent offence. As such, a commonality between many youths included in the sample, was that they were considered by the courts to be serious and/or violent young offenders” (Lussier et al., 2015, p. 95). Demographics, sample characteristics, and convictions incurred during the follow-up period are included in Table 1.
4.2 Procedure

The purpose of the ISVYOS was to better understand risk factors associated with diverse criminal career patterns through the collection of multi-informed, longitudinal data (McCuish, Cale, & Corrado, 2017). Acting as the legal guardian of youth in custody, the British Columbia Ministry of Child and Family Development, the Ministry’s consent allowed for the research team to approach youth and ask if they wanted to participate in the study (McCuish et al., 2017). Since the replacement of the Young Offenders Act with the Youth Criminal Justice Act, British Columbia has closed four of its six main custodial facilities. From the ISVYO there are two main cohorts of interviewees: YOA-sentenced young offenders, 1998-2002 (cohort I); and, YCJA sentenced young offenders, 2005-2012 (cohort II). Due to legislative changes, Cohort II is considered a more serious and violent group of young offenders, with approximately 50% of all Cohort II participants incarcerated for at least one year from the ages of 12 to 23. The current study includes only cohort II.

Initial self-report interviews were conducted at the time of entry into the correctional facility and exit interviews were administered approximately one to two weeks prior to re-entry into the community. Research assistants (RAs) interviewed each youth in private, separate interview rooms to better ensure confidentiality and facilitate open and honest answers. To further improve the reliability of self-reported information, participant’s answers were corroborated by accessing information contained in case management files. Included in case management files are the youth’s highly detailed Pre-Sentence Reports (PSRs), which frequently have information regarding the youth’s life from pre-birth to the time of the most recent conviction.

Using the ISVYOS data, McCuish et al. (2017), provide a succinct summary of participant eligibility requirements, stating that “youth were eligible to participate in the study if all the following criteria were met: (1) were English-speaking, (2) demonstrated an understanding of interview questions (e.g. had no
noticeably severe learning disability), and (3) were willing to provide accurate information" (p. 6). Although data concerning refusal rates were not collected, at the time of collection, approximately 5% of youth refused (McCuish et al., 2017 p. 6).
Table 1.  Descriptive characteristics of the sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>185 (87.67)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26 (12.32)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnic Origin</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>106 (50.23)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>64 (30.33)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Indigenous Minority</td>
<td>41 (19.43)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age of Youth at Exit Interview</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>16.49 (1.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-17 years</td>
<td>169 (80.09)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18+ years</td>
<td>41 (19.43)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Count of Offending Outcomes upon Re-entry</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Convictions</td>
<td>178 (84.36)</td>
<td>8.27 (8.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Convictions</td>
<td>94 (44.54)</td>
<td>1.09 (1.60)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $n = 211$. 
4.3 Sample demographics

With the major exceptions of Prairie provinces and territories, the study sample of SVOs are overwhelmingly male (87.67%) and Caucasian (50.23%). Youth ranged in age from 13 years of age to 19 years of age at the time of the exit interview. Consistent with age-crime trajectories and established patterns of youth offending, the sample was predominantly comprised of adolescents in their mid-teens (i.e. between the ages of 14 years and 17 years).

As discussed above, Canadian Indigenous young offenders were substantially over-represented in custodial settings, which is not dissimilar to the vast overrepresentation of African American, Hispanic, and Indigenous juvenile offenders in most jurisdictions in the United States (Corrado, Kuehn, & Margaritescu, 2014). As expected, approximately one third of the study sample identify as Indigenous (Lussier et al., 2015). Consistent with trends in adult corrections, Indigenous young offenders accounted for approximately 30% of the current study. This a gross overrepresentation of the 6.2% and 4.1% Indigenous persons account for in the Canadian and provincial populations respectively (Malakieh, 2018).

Almost 85% of the young offenders in this study incurred at least one general conviction upon community re-entry, with only 33 individuals reported as having zero convictions during the study’s 8.44 years follow-up period. Of the 211 youth who were followed upon community re-entry, although the majority of youths reportedly incurred no new violent convictions upon release, approximately 44% reported one or more violent convictions upon community re-entry. As these are incarcerated young offenders, the study sample is not representative of all juvenile offenders within Canada. Rather, this sample is reflective of incarcerated SVYOIs (i.e. young offenders convicted of serious, violent, and/or sexual offending with chronic offending patterns) (see Lussier et al., 2015).
Again, all the individuals in study sample had been incarcerated for a minimum of thirty consecutive days -- therefore excluding offenders who received shorter sentences and who, assumedly, are considered to have been subject to substantially less custodial impacts on their self and identity. Regarding their criminal trajectories, on average, this subsample of young offenders was sentenced approximately four times as adult offenders (Lussier et al., 2015, p. 95). Overall offending convictions for the sample began from age twelve, with the oldest participant at 26-years-old during the follow-up period. Five participants were excluded from analyses as they were not released from custody – all five had been convicted of a homicide offence.

4.4 The exit interview and the self-Identity questionnaire

Several studies have assessed the relationship between affect and criminal behaviour (see Boldero et al., 2005); however, few studies have examined self-identity among incarcerated SVYOs (Corrado & Peters, 2013). The current study adapts Schneider’s (1990) classic research measures of self-identity involving incarcerated older juveniles. Based on a sample of 876 participants across six US cities, Schneider’s (1990) study involved a thorough empirical examination of young offenders’ remorse and criminal behaviour (Corrado & Peters, 2013). Her measurement employed a seven-item, 100 point scale to measure recidivism known as the Good Citizen Scale. From her study, this scale was further developed, tailored, and utilized to examine serious and violent incarcerated youth (Corrado, Cohen, Glackman, & Odgers, 2003).

Referencing Moretti’s (see Moretti & Higgins, 1990; 1999; Moretti, 1992; Moretti, et al., 2002; Odgers et al., 2005) extensive research on at risk, multi-needs adolescents, Schneider’s (1990) Good Citizen Scale was adapted and applied to the current study, with incarcerated youth being asked a series of questions regarding their self-identity. The measurement includes a 15-item, 7-point scale, in which higher scores point to more positive attributes of self-identity and sense of self (McCuish, 2017). Administered within two weeks prior to re-
entry into the community, participants were read a set of dichotomous characteristics and asked to indicate which word they think best describes them (e.g. from ‘good’ to ‘bad’; ‘helpful’ to ‘harmful’).

Firstly, the young offender is asked to “Rate to what extent you think this word best describes yourself by using the 7-point scale”, with attributes such as ‘polite or rude’, ‘dishonest or honest’, and ‘lazy or hardworking’ included. The incarcerated youth is also asked to “Rate to what extent you think this word best describes the way the staff here sees yourself by using the 7-point scale” as well as how other individuals in their social structures - both within, and outside of, the custody centre - may describe them. Participants were asked to do this several times, evaluating their self-identity perspectives, the opinions they think the staff hold of them, how their parents view them, and, lastly, how they believe their peers view them. Each young offender in the current study was to answer the questionnaire at the time of entering the custody centre and at the time of re-entering the community. From these scales, three identity constructs formed for each offender.

4.5 Measures

**Violent offending:** Incarcerated young offenders’ violent convictions after community re-entry, and following the exit interviews, are examined in the current study as a dependent variable. Close to half of the sample (44.5%) incurred at least one violent conviction (mean = 1.03) following community re-entry. Total violent convictions following re-entry into the community was measured as a count variable – ranging from zero \((n = 105)\) convictions to nine convictions, with a single conviction occurring most frequently \((n = 42)\) at approximately 20% of all youths.

**General offending:** Like violent convictions, participants’ general convictions were measured. General convictions included convictions such as property charges, administrative charges (e.g. breaching probation), and drug
charges. Only 33 participants of the total sample failed to evade a general offending conviction following community re-entry, with the range of general convictions from 0 to 41 (mean = 7.93). Approximately, 85% of the sample incurred at least one general conviction following community re-entry.

**Identities:** Three distinct identity dimensions are derived: i) identity measures formulated by how the young offender viewed him/herself (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.83; mean = 54.51; SD = 9.25); ii) identity measures based on the perceptions of custody staff (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.90; mean = 51.73; SD = 12.74); and, iii) an identity construct based on how the offender perceived his or her friends viewed them (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.81; mean = 51.03; SD = 11.03). This operational measure of identity allows for a self-based comparison with their perceptions of peer and custodial officials’ perceptions. However, preliminary analyses indicated that the offender’s parents’ perceptions dimension was not valid because of missing data (i.e. many of the youths lack consistent, stable living environments and parental figures), therefore, it was not included in the subsequent analyses.

**Independent and control variables:** Basic demographic variables (i.e. gender, ethnicity) are included in the final statistical analyses. The demographic variables are: age; sex (1 = male); age at re-entry into the community; and, race (Aboriginal = 1). To analyze future offending trajectories, proportion of time free from incarceration and opportunity to incur new criminal charges is accounted for in the statistical modeling of hypothesized relationships. This is discussed more in depth later in the paper.

**Age at re-entry:** Because the exact age of the youth at the time of reentry is unknown, one year was added to their known age. The data did not differentiate between an offender who was 16 years of age and 360 days when released or an offender who was 16 years and one day at re-entry, as years-long custodial sanctions are relatively rare among young offender populations, this adjustment prevents the inclusion of convictions incurred prior to the time spent
in custody and administration of the exit interview. In addition, the age of the offender at release date, plus one year, facilitates the inclusion of the theoretical key them involving the age-crime curve (i.e. older age at reentry has been consistently associated with lower rates of recidivism).

Missing data: Missing values analysis was employed, since the data set was found to having missing cases. However, this MCAR analysis indicated that missing was not random; p value for Little’s MCAR test was significant. As the pattern of missing values do not depend on the data values, missingness was assumed to influence any future analyses. As such, the data were then further tested and observed to be missing not at random (MNAR). As the data were observed to be MNAR, this required the researcher to perform multiple imputation to further analyze the dataset (see Garson, 2015). Specifically, multiple imputation generated possible values for the missing values, therefore generating ‘complete’ datasets. Once the missing data had been addressed, the following analytic strategies were employed.

4.6 Analytical Strategy

Identity constructs: A principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted to identify whether the hypothesized principal structure of the extensive list of identity measures was evident (Garson, 2013a, p. 272). In other words, Schneider’s (1990) 15 predictor variables were asserted to be a valid operationalization of the self-identity criterion variable. Each self-adjectival variable/indicator (e.g. kind/cruel, rich/poor, rude/polite) was re-coded so that the attribute closest related to a positive self-identity were designated a ‘7’ (i.e. “thinking about yourself, use the 7-point scale to rate yourself”). The PCA distinguished three identity dimensions. However, concerns of the validity of the PCA constructs prevented theoretical, conceptual inferences based on the three dimensions (see Raykov, Marcoulides, & Li, 2017).
Instead of utilizing PCA-formulated identity factors, three distinct identity constructs are derived from the source of assessment: (1) self-perceptions of the 15 measures; (2) their perceptions of peer perceptions on these measures; and, (3) young offenders’ perceptions of custody staff views as based on these same measures.

**Negative binomial regression:** The current study employs a generalized linear model of analysis. As both violent and general offending outcomes were overdispersed, Poisson could not be applied, and negative binomial regression was used. As negative binomial regression utilizes the count data as the dependent variable when a Poisson model is marked by over-dispersion (Garson, 2013b, p.3257).

**Exposure variable:** Exposure consists of the amount of time that a youth was in the community and at risk to re-offend (Lussier et al., 2015). Though negative binomial regression utilizes count data, this statistic, by default, examines each case over the same amount of time. To control for the amount of time that an offender was in custody and unable to re-offend, the study accounted for the differences in opportunities to offend within the community (e.g. 1 year and 1 day versus 1 year and 364 days). This method accounts for the example where two participants were followed for 2 years but one spent x years in custody and the other spent NO time in custody. Based on British Columbia’s CORNET data system, an exposure variable was created according to the proportion of the total study period in which the person was followed, and in which they were not incarcerated (i.e. total study period is 8.44 years; the longest period that a single individual was followed). If, for example, Offender X was followed for 8.44 years, his proportion of time free is 1.00. In addition, another variable was the amount of time each participant was incarcerated. For example, if Offender Y was followed for 8.44 years, but three of those years were spent incarcerated, then Offender Y’s proportion would be less than 1.00. In effect, an exposure variable was created based on estimating individuals’ predicted number of offences, while each participant’s differences in opportunity
to offend is considered. Succinctly, the exposure variable was created to account for an offenders’ differences in time (i.e. opportunity to offend) spent in the community versus incarcerated.
Chapter 5

Results

5.1  Bivariate analyses and preliminary findings

Consistent with previous research, a younger age at reentry into the community was found to be significantly related to an increase in future offending outcomes (see Roque et al., 2016; Moffit, 1993). As well, and as expected, males are found to be significantly more likely than female young offenders to have a criminal conviction following re-entry. However, race is not a predictor of future offending, even when accounting for the overrepresentation of Aboriginal offenders in custody. Perhaps most interesting, the ISVYOS found that having a prior violent conviction was not found to be significantly related to future violent offending upon release from custody. Succinctly, contrary to the periodic media and public perceptions of SVOs, typically following a notorious violent crime (see Corrado & Markwart, 1994; Doob, Marinos, Varma, 1995), having a prior violent conviction as a young offender is not significantly related to future violent offending as an adult.

The first preliminary analysis looked at the bivariate relationships between offending trajectories, identity measures, and time spent incarcerated. Table 2 indicates that youths’ self-identities are not significantly associated to either future offending outcomes. Similarly, a youth’s perceptions of how his or her peers viewed them is not significantly related to future violent convictions. However, identity measures involving a young offender’s perceptions of how custody staff (e.g. correctional officers, psychologists, teachers, etc.) viewed the youth are significantly related to general offending convictions upon community re-entry. Despite the findings, these bivariate analyses did not control for time at risk/time spent in the community, which, as discussed above, need to be considered.
Table 2. Bivariate relationships between identity, offending outcomes, and time incarcerated

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self-Identity (Youth)</th>
<th>Self-Identity (Staff)</th>
<th>Self-Identity (Friends)</th>
<th>General Convictions</th>
<th>Violent Convictions</th>
<th>Time Incarcerated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Identity (Youth)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.646**</td>
<td>0.607**</td>
<td>-0.092</td>
<td>-0.081</td>
<td>-0.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Identity (Staff)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.178*</td>
<td>-0.092</td>
<td>-0.092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Identity (Friends)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.129</td>
<td>-0.127</td>
<td>-0.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Convictions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.641**</td>
<td>-0.569**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent Convictions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.523**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Incarcerated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05  **p < 0.01  ***p < 0.001
5.2 Violent convictions after community re-entry

A primary aim of the study is to examine the relationship between a youth’s self-identity measures and their violent offending trajectories after community re-entry. Specifically, count data of the number of violent offending convictions were analyzed via negative binomial regression. Table 3 presents the negative binomial regression involving the self-identity factors on violent offending convictions following re-entry into the community. Unsurprisingly, significance (p < 0.05) was found among gender and violent offending convictions; male offenders were found to incur more convictions upon release and community re-entry than female offenders in the sample. However, no differences exist involving race and where the self-identity factor originated from (i.e. peers, self, or custody staff) resulted; simply put, controlling for all other factors there is no difference across race in likelihood to reoffend violently.
Table 3. Negative binomial regression model with violent convictions after reentry as the outcome of interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demographics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.26 (0.10-0.67)*</td>
<td>0.29 (0.11-0.76)</td>
<td>3.16 (1.25-7.99)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous = reference group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>0.79 (0.44-1.45)</td>
<td>0.64 (0.34-1.21)</td>
<td>2.28 (0.93-5.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Indigenous Minority</td>
<td>0.48 (0.20-1.12)</td>
<td>0.47 (0.20-1.10)</td>
<td>1.84 (0.78-4.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identity Measure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Identity (Youth)</td>
<td>0.99 (0.93-1.02)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Identity (Staff)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.98 (0.96-1.00)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Identity (Peers)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.98 (0.96-1.05)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05  **p < 0.01  ***p < 0.001
5.3 General convictions after community re-entry

A second study aim was the examination between a youth’s self-identity measures and their future general offending trajectories upon community re-entry. Again, count data of the number of offending convictions is analyzed utilizing negative binomial regression. The negative binomial regression capturing the relationship between self-identity measures and general offending convictions following reentry into the community are present in Table 4. Like the binomial regression completed for violent offending outcomes, significance was found among gender and general offending convictions after re-entry. However, Table 4 shows that peers and staff were protective factors towards the rate of future general offending upon community re-entry. Once again, controlling for all other factors, there is no difference across race regarding general convictions upon reentry. Of interest is the 2% reduction in general offending convictions found in Model 2 and significance found in Model 3.
Table 4. Negative binomial regression model with general convictions after reentry as the outcome of interest

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.38 (0.22-0.66)**</td>
<td>0.41 (0.24-0.72)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>(Indigenous = reference group)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>0.84 (0.55-1.28)</td>
<td>0.75 (0.49-1.16)</td>
<td>1.43 (0.77-2.66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Indigenous Minority</td>
<td>0.75 (0.42-1.32)</td>
<td>0.78 (0.44-1.37)</td>
<td>1.21 (0.67-2.17)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Identity Measure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Identity (Youth)</td>
<td>0.99 (0.97-1.01)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Identity (Staff)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.98 (0.97-0.99)*</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Identity (Peers)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0.98 (0.96-0.99)*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05  **p < 0.01  ***p < 0.001
Chapter 6
Discussion

6.1 Offending trajectories

While other studies utilizing the Incarcerated Serious and Violent Young Offenders Study (ISVYOS) sample have examined relationships between offending trajectories and criminal desistance (Lussier et al., 2015; McCuish & Corrado, 2018; McCuish et al., 2017; 2018), this study explores the associations between incarceration self-identity measures, and desistance from future offending in the community.

Since its implementation in 2003, legislative and policy changes resulting from the YCJA have resulted in four of British Columbia’s six youth custodial facilities. As the criminal justice system continues to divert most young offenders from formal custodial sanctions, incarceration has become reserved for those most serious offenders. These policy and sentencing changes have greatly impacted the characteristics of the populations of incarcerated young offenders. Similarly, the offending trajectories of these high offending, serious and violent youth are dissimilar to youth with less criminogenic and chronic offending profiles. As the sample is composed of YCJA-sentenced SVYOs, the results of this study are not generalizable to all juvenile offender populations, but, rather, to serious and violent young offenders.

It is contended that assessing self-identity - both in terms of risk and protective, pro-social factors possibly related desistance and recidivism - has important intervention policy implications (see McCuish & Corrado, 2018; Viljoen et al., 2018). Three significant findings are evident in the current study: (1) controlling for several key established risk factors (e.g. ethnicity, gender, and proportion of time free from custody), males are significantly more likely to incur a conviction following community re-entry; (2) a young offender’s own positive self-
identity measures are not associated with future offending trajectories; and, (3) how a young offender perceives how staff and, lesser so, how peers view them along identity dimensions is associated with the increased likelihood of future criminal convictions.

Importantly, regarding the first theme involving gender - especially when controlling for Indigenous self-identity (i.e. non-indigenous, and minority ethnicities, and Caucasian self-identities) as well as proportion of time free from incarceration and eligible to commit new crimes, males remain significantly more likely to incur an offending conviction following community re-entry than incarcerated female offenders. Despite the universal acceptance of gender as one of the most significant variables associated with delinquent and criminal involvement, this long established truth deserves a renewed attention and focus of interventions and social policy.

Much of the literature involving the theorizing concerning the vast disproportionately of Indigenous young offenders generally, and SVOs particularly, has included the essential role of negative self-identities (see McCuish & Corrado, 2018). The obvious historical reasons for the persistence of self-harming and negative self-identities involve the racist, external stereotyping throughout the multi-century colonization period and the catastrophic trauma on Indigenous school children during most of the 20th Century, because of residential school forced assimilation policies (McCuish & Corrado, 2018). Related to these distal risk factors associated with negative self-identity formation are the hypothesized proximate factors involving an array of family risk factors, including alcohol/drug misuse, neurological developmental disorders (e.g. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder), poverty-related school performance, domestic violence, and unstable intimate adult relationships (Corrado & Freedman, 2011; Söchting et al., 2007). In addition, it has been asserted that these negative risk profiles have been transmitted intergenerationally as well (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2014). Nonetheless, for this sample of SVYOs, self-identity is not related to recidivism. Conceivably, because of these same approximate risk
profiles characterized by most these young offenders. In other words, while the prevalence of risk profiles differed by Indigenous ethnicity historically in Canada, self-identity construct is not a distinguishing factor for recidivism in this study sample.

As mentioned, YCJA-related legislature and policy has resulted in a small percentage of SVYOs experiencing repeated sanctions -- including multiple incarcerations (Bala, 2015). However, significant numbers of these young offenders are incapable of fully understanding their criminal behaviours and the long-term negative consequences to victims as well as themselves (Freedman, et al., 2015). Many of these youth have experienced childhood traumas and inter-generational (i.e. Residential Schools) trauma, face neurological and developmental deficits, and suffer from a myriad of other variables that influence a failure to appreciate long-term consequences and actions. Similarly, approximately 30% of the sample self-reported as Indigenous, which is a gross over-representation of Aboriginal persons in the Canadian population. It is evident that the YCJA has failed to curb the national crisis of over-representation of Indigenous in Canada’s correctional facilities. Consistent with existing research, the current study asserts that there are various and extensive risk factors contributing to adult offending – including the contribution and risk adding by deleterious legislation and related policy.

6.2 Self-identity and offending trajectories

Regarding the influence of self-identity on a young offender’s criminal trajectory, the current study did not find a significant relationship between the two. Specifically, a young offender’s own self-identity perceptions, as measured in the exit interview, were not found to influence future offending and conviction trajectories in the sample. Unlike previous studies (see Paternoster & Bushway, 2009), the current study’s findings failed to demonstrate significant connections between a young offender’s own identity measure and desistance from adult offending.
Paternoster and Bushway (2009) proposed a theory of identity and desistance that argued for the agency of positive future identities and the contrasting ‘feared self’ as motivation to criminally desist. In effect, an adult offender’s possible self – the positive identity they work towards until the costs outweigh the benefits – motivate offenders to alter their preferences in social networks and stabilize an emerging (positive) self (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Although the current study did not find a relationship between a youth’s positive identification and future criminal behaviour, the offender’s social environment did contribute to future offending trajectories. Most importantly, those young offenders who perceive positive staff and peers’ views of them incurred less future convictions than those who did not. In effect, that the sense of self-identity of youth and young adults is dynamic and subject to environmental and social influences (Rocque et al., 2016; Moretti & Peled, 2004). It is the author’s belief that assessing self-identity – regarding both risk and protective factors – has important intervention and policy implications.

This finding is consistent with the key YCJA philosophical sentencing principal regarding the importance of considering age as a mitigating factor in the custody length given to young offenders. As discussed above, this YCJA principal reflected the developmental life course theoretical perspective that asserted that self-identity was inherently fluid and dependent on age-stage. And further, the adolescent stage was characterized by the increasing importance of peer and certain positive authority types (e.g. mentors, coaches, cultural icons). In most Canadian provincial and territorial custodial facilities, staff have been trained and mandated to interact with incarcerated young offenders as positive adult role models. Of course, while there were variations among custodial staff in implementing this policy in British Columbia, incarcerated young offenders interviewed in the ISVYO project overwhelmingly perceived custodial staff positively (Corrado, Markwart, Gronsdahl, & Kimmitt, 2016). In addition, during intake custodial the staff administered a standardized needs assessment instrument that guided program scheduling during the custody period and, often, for release planning as well. This planning typically included structured
interactions with staff, specialists (e.g. mental health staff, teachers, social workers), and, very importantly, other young offenders in varied contexts (such educational classes, vocational classes, and sports activities) throughout the custody facilities. Arguably, these institutional environmental factors possibly provide part of the explanation for why self-identity is not related to trajectories in this study.

6.3 Peer interactions and desistance from future offending

In developing their multi-pathways model of SVYO's, Corrado and Freedman (2011) reviewed the extensive empirical literature that across nearly a century of research has consistently reported that having delinquent friendships and belonging to a delinquent or criminally-involved peer group during adolescence were key risk factors. The classic importation model asserted further that persistent aggression and violence in custody settings was based anti-social/criminal self-identity and values which were brought into these facilities (DeLisi, Berg, Hochstetler, 2004). The related institutional model of aggression/violence in custody asserted the primary explanation was based on the inherent aggressive/violent custodial structures (e.g. locked cells, mandated uniforms, rigid rules, fear of punishment) and the dominance of aggression and violence values in most custodial-peer interactions (see McCuish, Lussier, & Corrado, 2018).

Whether the imported model or institutional model is valid, the custody environments overwhelmingly have involved the concentration of young offenders with criminal values - especially aggression - and particularly among incarcerated SVYO's. In other words, when a young offender is incarcerated, rather than being removed from the influences of his or her negative peer group, the young offender is instead further entrenched in the delinquent/criminal social environment (see McCuish et al., 2018). However, the self-identity process is more complex when the institutional environment instead provides a positive, perhaps safe, self-identity experience. Consequently, much of a young
offenders' social and personal development during these formative years is guided by influences external to themselves, but within the confines of the correctional facility. Understandably, an incarcerated youth’s peer group – and, by extension, the custody staff members – are a significant source of effect on their self-identity formation.

Consistent with existing research, this study found that what mattered the most to incarcerated youth and young adults was how they believed their peers and authority figures viewed them. Lussier et al. (2015) theorized that “youth who have benefited from prosocial influences and learned the necessary prosocial skills to adjust to adolescence–adulthood transition prior to their delinquency involvement” frequently enter criminality at a later age and are therefore more likely to desist in adulthood (p. 93). Longitudinal studies utilizing samples of at-risk youths have found that most adolescent offenders desist after age eighteen (Lussier et al., 2015). It remains uncertain as to the applicability of the traditional age-crime curve findings for serious, violent, sexual and chronic samples of young offenders (Lussier et al., 2015).

6.4 Custody staff and desistance from future offending

Under the YCJA, the use of custodial sentences continues to decline, and incarceration has largely been limited increasingly to SVYOs – including convictions for patterns of multiple, administrative offences and being held in pre-trial detention (Doob, Sprott, & Webster, 2018). Similar to most provinces and territories, the two BC youth detention centres have consisted of populations of SVYOs. A key theme of this study is the relationship between self-identity and the custody environment, specifically the role of peers and custody staff.

It is asserted that custody staff providing pro-social programming components and modeling of BCs custody facilities partly explains the key study finding. Explicitly, a youth’s self-perception and identity formations reflect how a young offender perceives authority figures’ (i.e. custody staff) perceptions of
them. In turn, these perceptions are related to offending convictions upon re-entry to the community. However, prior studies on the impact of custody staff on incarcerated young offenders have found that staff were challenged by the competing, duality of roles as supportive and authoritarian (Inderbitzin, 2007).

Inderbitzin (2007) found that in his US study of juvenile correctional facilities, custody staff engaged in functions that fluctuated between counselors and role models to one of rule-enforcers and disciplinarians. It has been asserted that the balance between these roles has been critical in establishing the cultural and structural environment of a specific custodial facility. In other words, predominant custody staff roles represented the underlying and implicit - and frequently explicit - norms, values, and overall culture of a correctional facility. In addition, this environment has been theorized to have affected self-identities, either pro-social or anti-social/criminal (Abrams & Hyun, 2009).

Based on their large US study of largely SVOs in Chicago’s massive Cook County juvenile facility and other such studies, Abrams and Hyun (2009) asserted further that correctional institutions regularly imposed pro-social identities often complementary of those found under the traditional “American dream”; an identity of law-abiding, middle-class hegemony. Arguably, a parallel likely exists between this study’s BC facilities and Chicago’s Cook County facility (i.e. while SVOs have not been exposed routinely to such positive role modeling pro-social self-identities in their communities, BC custodial institutions’ staff provide exposure to pro-social and conventional values of the equivalent “Canadian dream”) (Abrams & Hyun, 2009, p. 31).

This finding is particularly significant in terms of reinforcing the training of youth corrections officers to facilitate pro-social self-identities, despite the inherently coercive structure of custodial institutions (i.e. daily strict behaviour rule enforcement and extensive physical confinement structures). Again, youth custody staff in Canada typically includes not only correctional officers, but also school teachers, mental health professionals, and recreational program leaders
as well as a multitude of program volunteers. As will be discussed further in the policy section, in this study SVYOs typically have endured an array of extremely negative/harmful life experiences during key child and early adolescent developmental stages (Corrado & Freedman, 2011; McCuish et al., 2018), which have been associated with self-identity formation (Moretti, 1992; Moretti & Higgins, 1990; 1999). In effect, a positive or prosocial relationship between SVYO and custody staff likely contributes to the formers’ perception of how to become a pro-social adult – based, partly, at least on their perceptions of staffs’ positive perceptions. The development of a relationship between the criminogenic youth and the pro-social adult may continue to have further impacts as the youth begins to form new relationships upon community re-entry. If an incarcerated young offender believes that he or she can interact favourably with adults in authority, this belief may then influence their later interactions once outside of an institutionalized setting. Likewise, this positive interaction between staff and youth - and the capacity to form it – may be one of the first, stable and pro-social connections the young offender has.

Custodial staff are typically exposed to intense, personalized involvement with SVYOs. Whereby the former frequently have a trust-based understanding of how the particular challenges an individual SVYO has experienced developmentally. Freedman et al. (2015) theoretically have identified six casual and developmental SVYO pathways, which likely have importance to pro-social self-identity formation. They asserted that individual-case intervention programing should consider the primary cause of the SVYO trajectory in order to facilitate their pro-social development trajectory. Arguably, a pro-social self-identity transformation likely too can contribute to a life course change (Sampson & Laub, 1997). In effect, positive staff-SVYO interactions can fit the definition of a positive “turning point” construct.
6.5 Policy implications

Youth justice and the YCJA remain contentious issues for Canadian law (Bala et al., 2009). Under the Stephen Harper-lead Conservative government, the role of custody - especially the asserted need for increased pre-trial detention - was a key theme in reforming the YCJA (Bala, 2015). Conversely, there were policy concerns involving the continued disproportional custody sentences for Indigenous young offender (Department of Justice, 2010; Bala, 215). In effect, there was an intense political debate based on the custodial sanctions ‘get tough on crime’ perspective on SVYOs against the inherent negative consequences of this policy on multi-problem/needs SVYO policy perspective (Corrado & Peters, 2013). This debate was not limited to Canada and is especially exemplified when looking at the United States’ juvenile criminal justice systems where custody rates in states such as Texas and California typically were among the highest globally (Caputo & Vallee, 2008). In support of previous research, the current study asserts that to adequately address offending trajectories and criminal recidivism in general, a re-appraisal of the current legislature and resulting practices is required.

Related is the theme of negative self-identity and the implications of labelling an adolescent a ‘serious and violent young offender’. As a result, there is growing support in high custody states for restricting the use of custody and adopting a broader approach to sentencing young offenders and, instead relying more on a comprehensive needs community-based initiative (Caputo & Vallee, 2008).

This latter policy intervention focused on forgoing traditional custody-based punishment/deterrence approach to less severe SVYOs to an array of community program services that attempt to help adolescents and young adults in becoming pro-social self-identity and related behaviours in the community. From this perspective, the custodial environment was theorized to be less
effective for the provisions of needs-based services than the community.

According to Caputo and Vallee (2008):

“paradoxically, the dual images of young people as victims and villains dominate public images of youth. When considering youth crime and society’s response to it, the artificial dichotomy of youth as victims or villains often misses the point that many young people are both. Equally important is that the responses to young people in conflict with the law are often cast in terms of the characteristics and behaviour of the young people involved, with limited attention being paid to the social contexts in which they live and the root causes of crime” (final para).

The current study suggests that resources put towards interventions targeting social influences of deviancy, building mentorship programs, and encouraging pro-social ties could additionally reduce the number of adolescents who enter the formal criminal justice system and continue on to an adult offending trajectory. By diverting potential SVYO youth from the formal court system, this previous pathway likelihood was asserted to be diminished (Bala et al., 2009). Arguably, community intervention programs (including non-custodial facilities such as Maples in British Columbia with its focus on positive attachment pro-social, self-identity programs; see Moretti & Holland, 2002) facilitate the development of pro-social self-identities compared to the more problematic custody setting (Cesaroni & Peterson-Badali, 2005; 2013; Moretti et al., 2002; Moretti & Holland, 2003).

This study’s findings indicate that self-perception and self-identity are complex constructs -- especially regarding their application to SVYOs in custodial contexts. However, this study supports the importance of facilitating pro-social, identity-focused programs involving both peers and custody staff. Relatedly and very importantly for custody programing, self-identity based on SVYO perceptions of peers and staff perceptions of them are related to recidivism and trajectories. This key finding is consistent with Lussier et al. (2015) comprehensive (which focuses on community-based initiatives) trajectory-
research that asserted with greater specification of risk factors, comes greater specification of intervention and policy.
Chapter 7
Conclusion

7.1 Limitations, Future Research, & Final Thoughts

As the current study is exploratory and lacking known variables associated with criminal desistance, the findings have several validity limitations. Young offenders with divergent self-identity profiles in this study are not controlled for. This is important because it cannot be assumed that each individual is equally influenced by peer and staff perceptions of these multiple self-identities. Regarding gender generalizability, the study sample is overwhelmingly male (87.75%) and disproportionately Caucasian (50.23%). As discussed above, Indigenous SVYOs, especially females, typically experienced a distinctive self-identity pathway that many non-Indigenous SVYOs do not encounter. Therefore, an insufficient number of the former in the study sample may have affected the analyses outcomes.

Very importantly, changes in self-identity throughout the custodial experience were not examined, therefore, there was no base point to assess the change impact of peers and staff perceptions on SVYOs perceptions of these two groups. Future research on this relationship needs to include this study design component in order to validly measure the evolution of self-identity from entry into custody to re-entry into the community. Another limitation is that several important predictors of recidivism and desistance behaviours such as mental health disorders and personality disorders are not included in the current study. Future research would benefit from including other key risk variables that are known to be associated with reoffending, including: age at first arrest; all prior criminal behaviour; pre-interview and custody convictions; and, several well-known risk- and protective-factors (such as family support, finding a job on reentry, and attending school on re-entry).
As many of the SVYOs in the sample lack a consistent home environment prior to incarceration, a number of the participants were unable – or did not wish – to complete the peer and parent aspect of the questionnaire. Most of the adolescents do not come from temporally or structurally stable social and familial environments; often experiencing several, disrupted school and home institutions. As such, a number of the participants were unable - or did not wish - to complete the peer and parent aspect of the questionnaire. Similarly, a youth’s peer group may have changed entirely when entering into the custody centre or they may be in a city different from their hometown and were consequently unable to see their family as regularly as when they are in the community. Unstable living situations, in conjunction with criminogenic lifestyle and other at-risk factors, too likely influenced inconsistent, and, therefore, unreliable answers on the questionnaire. Due, in part, to the aforementioned factors, the relationship between custody staff members and a young offender’s self-identity formation and adult offending trajectories is an area to further explore.

Lastly, the dependent variable only measured violent and general offending outcomes and failed to identify specific offences. A suggestion for future research is to independently examine offence types with the ambition of providing a more theoretically- and methodologically-sound research. In parsing out offences (e.g. property, sexual, administrative, etc.), research may further elucidate the relationships between identity, institutionalization, and adult offending trajectories in incarcerated young offenders.

The current study sought to provide insights into the effects of custody on serious, violent, sexual young offenders incarcerated in British Columbia. Namely, this study adds to the growing literature that exists on the intersections between dynamic risk factors, sentencing outcomes, and offending trajectories on young offenders. The present study also supports the belief that environmental, sociological, and psychological facets interact to influence an offender’s likelihood to desist from crime. Summarily, this study’s findings indicate that self-perception and self-identity are complex constructs -- especially
regarding their application to SVYOs in custodial contexts. Consistent with established research, the findings of this study suggest that: with greater specification of risk factors, comes greater specification of intervention and policy (see Lussier et al., 2015)
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