

# **Narrating Stories of Desistance: Pathways to and from Criminality in the Lives of Prolific Male Offenders**

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## Ethics Statement



The author, whose name appears on the title page of this work, has obtained, for the research described in this work, either:

- a. human research ethics approval from the Simon Fraser University Office of Research Ethics

or

- b. advance approval of the animal care protocol from the University Animal Care Committee of Simon Fraser University

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## **Abstract**

Recent research and theory suggest that human agency and identity change are key factors that drive desistance from crime. However, precisely how offenders exercise agency and work towards a prosocial identity in the face of myriad structural barriers is an issue not yet settled. Further, the role of formal corrections in identity change and fostering capabilities to be agentic is not yet clear. This study explored these issues through a grounded theory analysis of data obtained from interviews with eleven once-prolific male offenders who had since given up crime. Results indicate that these men made a rational choice to give up crime and subsequently made agentic moves to change themselves and their surroundings. While formal correctional programming did not seem to play a large part in these changes, participants described more informal programs as beneficial. Recommendations for correctional policy are discussed in light of these findings.

**Keywords:** desistance; human agency; offender rehabilitation; prisoner reentry; narrative identity; psychological needs

# Table of Contents

Approval.....	ii
Ethics Statement.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Acronyms.....	vii

## **Chapter 1. Introduction ..... 1**

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review..... 5**

2.1. Theoretical Explanations of Desistance .....	5
2.1.1. Aging and Maturation.....	5
2.1.2. Social/Structural Factors.....	6
2.1.3. Subjective Factors .....	8
2.2. Identity Change and Desistance .....	12
2.2.1. McAdams' Theory of the Personality .....	13
2.2.2. Narrative Identity and Persistence/Desistance.....	15
Condemnation Narratives .....	15
Redemption Narratives .....	18
2.3. The Risk-Need-Responsivity Model of Offender Rehabilitation.....	21
2.3.1. Criticisms of the Risk-Need-Responsivity Treatment Model.....	25
2.4. The Necessity of Adopting an Integrated Approach to Understanding Desistance.....	26

## **Chapter 3. Methods..... 35**

3.1. Research Questions .....	35
3.2. Philosophical Underpinnings.....	35
3.3. Sample and Recruitment .....	38
3.4. The Interviews .....	40
3.5. Data Management and Analysis .....	42
3.6. Ethics and Establishing Trustworthiness and Authenticity.....	44

## **Chapter 4. Results ..... 48**

4.1. Pathways to Criminality .....	48
4.1.1. Trouble at Home.....	48
4.1.2. Making Sense of Offending Patterns .....	51
Comradery and Thrill-Seeking .....	52
It Felt 'Normal' or Justified .....	55
Feeding Addictions and Avoiding Emotional Pain .....	59
4.1.3. A Sense of Fatalism .....	61
4.2. Going Straight .....	63
4.2.1. Realizations of Caring for and Being Cared for by Others.....	64
4.2.2. Acquiring Clarity or Accepting Responsibility .....	68
4.2.3. Changing Priorities, Habits and Surroundings .....	70

4.2.4.	Generative Pursuits .....	75
4.3.	Reflections on Treatment and the Re-Entry Process .....	78
4.3.1.	Programs and Services Offered by CSC.....	78
4.3.2.	Informal and Voluntary Efforts .....	81
4.3.3.	Recognition, Support and Denigration in Treatment and Re-Entry.....	85
<b>Chapter 5.</b>	<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>89</b>
5.1.	Agency and Structure .....	89
5.2.	Unearthing the Core Self .....	97
5.3.	Wounded Healers and Recognized Redemption .....	101
<b>Chapter 6.</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>107</b>
6.1.	Approaching Rehabilitation from a Desistance Paradigm .....	110
6.2.	Limitations and Future Research .....	116
<b>References</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>119</b>
Appendix A.	Recruitment Letter .....	135
Appendix B.	Informed Consent Form .....	138
Appendix C.	Interview Protocol .....	141

## List of Acronyms

AA	Alcoholics Anonymous
AGSC	Age-Graded Social Control
AVP	Alternatives to Violence Project
COSA	Circles of Support and Accountability
CSC	Correctional Service of Canada
GLM	Good Lives Model
ITD	Identity Theory of Desistance
NA	Narcotics Anonymous
RNR	Risks-Needs-Responsivity
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
SFU	Simon Fraser University

# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

One of the most pressing concerns for criminology in terms of theory and its implications for policy is what leads offenders to eventually desist from crime. The risk factors for early onset offending are well-known and innumerable prevention programs have been developed to reflect this knowledge (Farrington & Welsh, 2008). Only within the last two and a half decades has research on desistance begun to flourish. In the most general sense, within the criminological context the term “desistance” refers to a long-term period of abstinence from criminal activity (Bushway, Piquero, Broidy, Cauffman & Mazerolle, 2001; Maruna, 2001; Kazemian, 2007). The definitions of “long-term” and “abstinence,” however, have not been without contention. Kazemian (2007), for example, presents definitions of desistance taken from 11 studies, each of which vary considerably. She notes that this lack of definitional consensus creates issues with the generalizability of desistance predictors. Further, Bushway et al. (2001; see also Loeber & Leblanc, 1990) question whether we should be concerned only with complete cessation of offending, or if analysis of reductions in frequency and/or severity of criminal activity is important to study as well. The current study does not attempt to assuage these concerns, as three participants had been crime-free for a matter of months and the others between two and 40 years. Rather, this study takes the view of desistance as a dynamic and ongoing process (Harris, 2005; Laws & Ward, 2011); therefore, insights from fledgling and seasoned desisters are worthy of exploration (see also King, 2013a).

In attempting to explain the movement between offending and non-offending, the useful distinction has been made between primary and secondary desistance (Maruna, LeBel, Mitchell & Naples, 2004). The former refers to any “lull or crime-free gap” in a criminal career, which is of little theoretical interest given that most offenders go through varying periods of abstinence from crime, only to return to crime again. Secondary

desistance, or “the movement from the behavior of non-offending to the assumption of the role or identity of a ‘changed person’” (Maruna et al., 2004, p. 274), is ultimately the concern of desistance research. The assumption here is that identity guides present action and future concerns (McAdams, 1994). Therefore, assuming the identity of a “changed person” should be (at least partially) constitutive of a crime-free life.

Theoretical accounts of how offenders eventually desist have historically focused on either subjective factors or structural<sup>1</sup> factors, both of which are informed to some degree by the well-established relationships between age, maturation and crime (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Moffitt, 1993; Rocque, 2015; Sampson & Laub, 1993). As Farrall and Bowling (1999) noted, this research tended to treat

individuals as either ‘super-agents’ who are free to act as they choose and can directly influence the outcome of their lives through their decision making, or as ‘super-dupes’ who react to wider social forces and situations rather than helping to create these situations through their own actions. (p. 258)

More recently, however, researchers have begun to tease out how subjective and structural factors interact in the process of desistance. For example, Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph (2002) found that structural forces act as ‘hooks for change’ that can help to change offenders’ identities, but also that receptivity to these hooks is dependent on their openness to change in the first place. One of the most consistent findings in the research is that human agency plays a significant role in going straight<sup>2</sup> (e.g., Cusson & Pinsonneault, 1986; Healy, 2016; King, 2013b; Laub & Sampson; Maruna, 2001; Shover, 1996). However, exactly how offenders exercise agency in the face of myriad structural barriers is an issue not yet settled (see Healy, 2013; King, 2013b; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009; Vaughan, 2007), and, as such, is one of the main topics of inquiry for the current study.

<sup>1</sup> The term “structural” is used throughout this thesis to refer to interpersonal relationships, employment, community, environment and broader societal forces that can shape the process of desistance.

<sup>2</sup> “Going straight” is a phrase used throughout this thesis synonymously with “desistance from crime.”

A related issue, and the second main topic of inquiry in this study, is what role formal and informal treatments play in offenders exiting a life of crime. Over two decades ago, Farrall (1995) wrote, “Most of the research suggests that desistance ‘occurs’ away from the criminal justice system . . . that very few people actually desist as a result of intervention on the part of the criminal justice system or its representatives” (p. 56). A growing number of researchers (e.g., Harris, 2005; McMurrin & Ward, 2004; Porporino, 2010; Ward & Maruna, 2007; Ward & Stewart, 2003b) contend that one potential reason for this is that risk-based treatment paradigms do not attend to the factors that actually motivate change (i.e., identity and basic psychological needs such as agency, competence and relatedness). Still, from my own reading of the desistance literature, no studies have specifically dealt with why desisters might hold prison and formal treatment in such low regard in terms of their potential for catalyzing change (see Kazemian, 2015 for a similar argument).

The study described in this thesis attempts to advance the state of knowledge on both (a) the interplay between subjective and structural factors in the desistance process, and (b) what role, if any, treatment plays in this process. This thesis presents the study through a total of six chapters, beginning with the current introduction. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature from three primary schools of thought pertaining to explanations of desistance from crime; that is, aging and maturation, subjective factors and social/structural factors. It is shown that more recent studies and theory point to a combination of maturational, structural and subjective factors in accounting for why some offenders eventually exit a life of crime. However, Chapter 2 also highlights the fact that there is still some ambiguity about the interplay between these types of factors, as well as about the role of formal and informal treatments in this process. In Chapter 3, the methods used to create the study and collect and analyze the data are described. This chapter includes a discussion of the epistemological and ontological underpinnings, a description of the sample and means of recruitment, data analysis philosophy and procedures, and the role of researcher reflexivity and establishing credibility for the study. Chapter 4 lays out the results from the qualitative analysis of the data collected for the study, and Chapter 5 contextualizes these findings within the broader literature on desistance, corrections and personality psychology. Finally, Chapter 6 provides a brief overview of the key findings from the research, a discussion of the limitations of the study and suggestions for future

research. Further, by way of this study's results and those from prior research, Chapter 6 also discusses recommendations for correctional treatment, centering on moving from a risk-focused treatment paradigm to a desistance-focused one.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1. Theoretical Explanations of Desistance**

Theoretical explanations of how and why individuals desist from crime have primarily fallen into three categories: (1) aging and maturation, (2) structural, and (3) cognitive. In the following section, historical and contemporary understandings of how each category helps to explain desistance are discussed.

##### **2.1.1. Aging and Maturation**

The relationship between age and crime has been referred to as the “most robust and least understood observation in the field of criminology” (Moffitt, 1993, p. 675). With age plotted against levels of crime, the general pattern of offending shows peak levels at age 17, followed by a sharp decrease with 50% of offenders desisting by their early 20s and 85% by age 28 (Farrington, 1986; Sampson & Laub, 2003). As the age-crime curve has been found to be seemingly invariant across time, place and culture, Gottfredson & Hirschi (1990) contend that the relationship cannot be explained by any single or combination of variables and leave their explanation of desistance as something that happens as a result of some unexplained process of maturation.

Despite the prevalence of the age-crime relationship, reducing explanations of desistance to a function of aging is not theoretically satisfying. Conflating age with the underlying developmental processes offers no meaningful insight into which causal mechanisms are actually driving change (Bushway et al., 2001, p. 492). Further, many offenders do not fit neatly within the bounds of the standard age-crime curve. Moffitt (1993) distinguished between adolescence-limited and life-course persistent offenders; other studies have noted different age-crime curves for at least six types of offenders, many of whom desist much later in life (Bushway, Thornberry, & Krohn, 2003; Laub & Sampson, 2003). For many of these offender types, aging simply does not satisfactorily explain their desistance, nor the zig-zag patterns of criminality that often precede it. As Farrall and

Bowling (1999) note, taking into consideration the various social, structural and personal factors involved in the process of desistance is much more likely to provide a complete theoretical understanding of how and why individuals eventually move away from lives of criminality.

Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, in a series of papers (e.g., Glueck & Glueck, 1937, 1940, 1974), contended, similar to Gottfredson & Hirschi (1990), that crime does generally decline with age. What separates the Gluecks from Gottfredson & Hirschi is that, while the latter argued no cultural or social variables in existence at the time change the relationship between age and crime, the former were of the opposite view. Specifically, the Gluecks believed that it was not age, but the process of maturation that usually occurs *with* age, that reduces one's criminality. Through their work, they pointed to factors such as "physical, intellectual and affective capacity and stability, and a sufficient degree of integration of temperament, personality and intelligence" (Glueck & Glueck, 1974, p. 170) to explain individual variations in crime over time. More recently, Rocque (2015) has further expounded upon exactly what might comprise the process of maturation by outlining five major domains of growth: psychosocial maturation (temperance, perspective, responsibility); civic/communal maturation (voting, volunteer work, paying taxes, generally being a good citizen); adult social role maturation (cohabitation, marriage, employment, children); cognitive/identity maturation (openness to change, changes in views of the self, changes in attitudes toward deviance); and neurocognitive maturation (changes in brain structure, improvements in executive function and intelligence). Many of the maturational elements involved in maturation, per Rocque's (2015) review of the evidence, have broadly been considered in prior research as falling within either structural or subjectively-based explanations of desistance, which are further discussed in turn below.

### **2.1.2. Social/Structural Factors**

In one of the most influential theories of crime, Hirschi (1969) proposed that individuals with weak bonds to conventional society will be likely to engage in antisocial behaviour. Indeed, in a sizable canon of subsequent criminological research, risk factors for criminal and antisocial behaviour have consistently included low parental supervision, harsh and erratic discipline, weak attachment to parents, delinquent peers and lack of

school involvement, among others (see Farrington & Welsh, 2008; Hawkins, Catalano & Miller, 1992; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986 for reviews). Sampson & Laub (1993) argue that not only can social bonds explain pathways to criminality, but also the eventual desistance of many offenders. In their reanalysis of Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck's longitudinal data obtained from 500 delinquent and 500 non-delinquent boys from Boston, Sampson & Laub (1993) found that informal social control in the forms of marriage, family, work, reform school and military service mediated social and structural risk factors in offenders' lives and led many of them away from lives of crime. In their theory of Age-Graded Social Control (AGSC), these informal social controls create "new situations that (1) knife off the past from the present; (2) provide not only supervision and monitoring but opportunities for social support and growth; (3) bring change and structure to routine activities; and (4) provide an opportunity for identity transformation" (Laub & Sampson, 2003. p. 149; see also Sampson & Laub, 2005).

One of the key insights from Sampson and Laub's reanalysis of the Gluecks' data is that desistance is a process which occurs gradually. As Laws & Ward (2011) noted, exiting a life of crime is "considerably more than simply stopping. . . . There may be intermittency, a combination of pauses, resumptions, indecisiveness, and ambivalence, all of which may finally lead to termination" (p. 16). In reality then, the absolute termination of offending is most often preceded by zig-zags between criminality and abstinence as individuals navigate through new relationships, roles and cognitions (Healy, 2010; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Maruna, 2001; Matza, 1964). Thus, while the theory of AGSC conceptualizes informal social controls as providing crucial turning points in the lives of many former offenders, their impact on the change from criminality to desistance is rarely instantaneous. Rather, a key aspect of bonds to marriage, peers, coworkers and the like is that the investment in these relationships grows over time. Laub, Nagin & Sampson (1998) found that marriages characterized early on by social cohesiveness had a preventive effect on crime that grew over time. This finding is consistent with the idea that as individuals invest more in relationships over time, there is more to lose if that bond is broken and a greater incentive to maintain desistance. In that vein then, Laub & Sampson (1993) maintain that the mere presence of social bonds is not enough to explain behavioural change. Rather, it is necessary to examine the nature and quality of these bonds. For example, Laub & Sampson (1993) argue that employment "coupled with job

stability, commitment to work, and mutual ties binding workers and employers” (p. 495) that will best exert social control and potentially to a reduction in crime.

Sampson and Laub’s theory of AGSC has made an invaluable contribution to the study of desistance, and to criminological theory in general. Still, many of their assertions have been met with contention. Perhaps the most prominent of these is their view that desistance is “not necessarily a conscious or deliberate process,” (Laub & Sampson, 2003, p. 278) but rather the result of exogenous “chance events” or side bets” that may act as turning points (Laub et al., 1998). In other words, they note that “‘good’ things sometimes happen to ‘bad’ actors, and when they do desistance has a chance” (Laub et al., 1998, p. 237). In support of this argument, Laub & Sampson (2003) reference prominent sociologist Howard Becker (1964), who once contended that

A structural explanation of personal change has implications for attempts to deliberately mold human behavior. In particular, it suggests that we need not try to develop deep and lasting interests, be they values of personality traits, in order to produce the behavior we want. It is enough to create situations which will coerce people into behaving as we want them to and then to create the conditions under which other rewards will become linked to continuing this behavior. (pp. 52-53)

In other words, Becker (1964) and Laub & Sampson (2003) believe that the only means necessary to bring about change are external to the individual and function as stimulus-response rather than through interaction and intentionality.

### **2.1.3. Subjective Factors**

On the other hand, a large body of work suggests that subjective changes in offenders are the primary driving factor behind their eventual desistance, even when informal social controls such as marriage and work are not present initially (e.g., Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009; Shover, 1996). Speaking directly to Becker’s quote offered above and in opposition to the propositions of Laub and Sampson’s AGSC theory, Paternoster & Bushway (2009) argue that “actors deliberately create change; they are not coerced into it by external structural events” (p. 1150). Earlier theoretical accounts took a somewhat similar rational choice position to explain why some individuals eventually leave a life of crime (e.g., Clarke & Cornish, 1985; Cusson &

Pinsonneault, 1986; Shover & Thompson, 1992; Shover, 1996). For example, from their study of desisting robbers and thieves, Cusson & Pinsonneault (1986) conceived of the decision to desist as resulting from one or several 'shocks' (e.g., a traumatic experience during offence commission or a severe sentence), and/or 'delayed deterrence' (e.g., a higher estimate of the cumulative probability of punishment, increased difficulty in doing time). As these shocks or delayed deterrence effects accumulate, offenders will eventually make an assessment of their current lives, envision what continuing down a criminal path will lead to, and make a conscious decision to change their behavior to avoid further negative outcomes (Cusson & Pinsonneault, 1986).

There is certainly merit in conceiving of at least part of the desistance process as involving a decision based on the acknowledgement that continued criminal behaviour has more costs than it does benefits. However, a growing number of studies have taken a more nuanced approach to theorizing the subjective factors involved in leaving a life of crime behind (e.g., Farrall & Calverley, 2006; Giordano et al., 2002; Healy, 2010; King, 2013a; King, 2013b; Maruna, 2001). Katz (1988) has argued that in order to understand why individuals are driven initially toward and sustain lives of criminality, we need to understand the "sensual dynamics" of crime, or, as Farrall & Calverley (2006) put it, "the personal attractions of crime for its participants, what they expect to gain and how they actually feel when doing it" (p. 100). Following this line of inquiry, several studies have sought to determine the emotional trajectories involved in the process of desisting from crime.

Drawing on life history narratives from 97 women and 83 men formerly involved in criminal activity, Giordano, Shroeder & Cernkovich's (2007) analysis highlights three key themes in the relationship between emotions and desistance. First, they note that many desisters had experienced a diminution of negative emotions that had originally led to their criminal activity. In Giordano et al.'s (2007) sample there seemed to be an eventual mellowing of anger that had arisen due to early aversive life circumstances such as parental abuse, bullying by peers or general family discord. Second, there was a diminution of the positive emotions associated with crime, such as the adrenaline rush of the crime itself or the positive sense of self they garnered from their peers' affirmation of their status as a "partier, risk taker, or a rebel" (Giordano et al., 2007, p. 1624). As

described above, several other studies (e.g., Cusson & Pinsonneault, 1986; Shover, 1996) have also addressed the fact that for many offenders the attraction of crime wanes over time as the costs become more difficult to ignore. Finally, Giordano et al. (2007) found that many of those who had successfully desisted had increased their abilities to regulate their emotions in prosocial ways. This meant not only being able to pinpoint their sources of stress, but also discovering new coping mechanisms such as discussing problems with friends and family.

As part of a longitudinal qualitative study of 199 probationers in England, Farrall & Calverley (2006) sought to outline the emotional trajectories of the desistance process. Based on the amount of time since participants had ceased offending, the researchers distinguished four phases of desistance and the various emotions associated with each. In the 'early hopes' phase, those who had recently decided to give up crime reported feeling happier and better about themselves. Farrall & Calverley (2006) report that these feelings were generally due to the diminution of negative emotions that often resulted from offending, such as "the fear of pending arrest, the inconvenience and trepidation associated with further court appearances and the general requirement of continually 'having to look over your shoulder'" (p. 108). Further, in this initial phase participants expressed a desire to achieve normalcy in their lives (e.g., reconnecting with family, securing employment and housing) and, importantly, the hope that achieving normalcy was doable (Farrall & Calverley, 2006). A number of other studies have similarly found that hope and optimism about living a 'normal' life early in the desistance process are positively correlated with reductions in offending (Burnett, 2004; Farrall, 2004; LeBel, Burnett, Maruna & Bushway, 2008; Shover & Thompson, 1992).

In Farrall & Calverley's (2006) analysis, as participants moved beyond initial hopes and into the intermediate stage of desistance, many experienced a "growing sense of internal disquiet" (p. 117) about their past criminal behaviour. However, as these individuals widened the temporal gap between offending and non-offending, they also began to feel an increased sense of self-esteem about their new crime-free lives, felt more confident in their ability to regulate their emotions and began to appreciate the lack of stigma associated with being 'an offender'. In the penultimate stage, where most participants had three of four years since their last offence, the emotions of shame and

guilt “appeared to motivate respondents into taking responsibility for their past and future actions” (p. 119). In this stage participants also reported the positive feelings of trusting and being trusted by others, as well as pride in their achievements made since deciding to give up crime. Finally, in the last stage, the participants in Farrall & Calverley’s (2006) study had achieved a sense of normalcy as their past lives as offenders seemed distant and the ‘normal’ goals of reconnecting with or building new families and securing employment had been achieved.

In addition to theorizing the emotional aspects of desistance, Giordano and colleagues (Giordano et al., 2002) have conceptualized several other interrelated cognitive transformations involved in this process. The first, and perhaps most fundamental of these transformations, is that individuals must have a basic openness to change. This concept holds true not only for the sample in Giordano et al.’s (2002) study, but in the research and literature on treatment of mental health disorders, addictions and the like (e.g., DiClemente, Schlundt & Gemmel, 2004). Importantly, and somewhat in opposition to the rational choice desistance theorists such as Paternoster & Bushway (2009) or Cusson & Pinsonneault (1986), Giordano et al. (2002) argue that the mere openness or motivation to change is often insufficient to bring about change. Thus, they contend that a second crucial type of cognitive transformation is exposure to one or more ‘hooks for change’. In their sample of 254 men and women, Giordano et al. (2002) found that many participants had built their stories of change upon experiences with formal organizational settings such as prison, treatment and religion, or with more intimate interpersonal relationships such as those with children or a romantic partner. Third, participants seemed to have crafted a ‘replacement self’ that supplanted the prior iteration of their identity that was associated with criminal activity. In an ideal progression of these stages, Giordano et al. (2002) note that the exposure to hooks for change can catalyze the development of a replacement self. As individuals begin to view a continued relationship with hooks for change (e.g., religion, children, spouse) as incompatible with a life of crime, the potential for a new crime-free identity that is compatible with these hooks increases. Finally, the fourth type of cognitive transformation that Giordano et al. (2002) found in their sample was that participants no longer had the same views on the criminal lifestyle. The positive emotions associated with offending have waned (see Giordano et

al., 2007) and the negative consequences of offending have become more salient (e.g., Cusson & Pinsonneault, 1986; Shover, 1996).

## **2.2. Identity Change and Desistance**

In step with the idea of a ‘replacement self’ highlighted above in Giordano et al.’s (2002) theory of cognitive transformation, one of the most consistent findings in the subjectively-focused branch of desistance research is that desisters, when compared with persistent offenders, have been able to craft for themselves a new identity that is fundamentally incompatible with continued criminality (Barry, 2011; Hundleby, Gfellner & Racine, 2007; King, 2013a; Maruna, 2001; Meisenhelder, 1977; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009; Rocque, Posick & Paternoster, 2016; Shover, 1983).

Some of the identity-focused desistance theorists (e.g., Paternoster & Bushway, 2009; Shover, 1983) view shifts in identity as the result of a rational weighing of the past and anticipated costs and benefits of their criminality. Paternoster & Bushway’s (2009) identity theory of desistance (ITD), for example, postulates that the ‘current’ or ‘working identity’ one has of being an offender will be sustained so long as it is successful. Over time, however, the types of shocks and delayed deterrence referenced by Cusson & Pinsonneault (1986) will result in a growing dissatisfaction with this working identity as a criminal. With the dissatisfaction, offenders will eventually project a possible self into the future, which can either be a ‘positive self’, or a ‘feared self’. According to the ITD, the imagining of a possible self, whether positive or feared, serves at least two functions. The first of these is that “when a person imagines a positive possible self achieved or a [feared] self avoided, his feeling about his self is enhanced,” and, as a result, hope and optimism about the future are increased (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009, p. 1114). Second, the possible self can also provide a roadmap for how one can either approach or avoid personally meaningful goals (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In summarizing their position on the possible selves, Paternoster & Bushway (2009) argue that

A possible self balance between what is hoped for and what is feared is thought to be more effective in reaching one’s ultimate goal because the consequent motivation is additive, combining both an approach and an avoidance mechanism. . . . Just as the motivation to move away from a self

that is feared is both enhanced and directed by the motivation to move toward the hope-for self, the motivation to move toward a desired self is strengthened by the image of the feared-about self that is incompatible with it. (p. 1119)

The bulk of the work connecting identity change and desistance has focused on the concept of the self-story, or narrative identity, as an artifact of both an individual's current identity and the cognitive and social mechanisms that led to that change. Given the breadth and depth of this subject, as well as its integration within wider models of human personality, the following section is devoted entirely to an exploration of the concepts of personality and narrative identity.

### **2.2.1. McAdams' Theory of the Personality**

According to Pervin (1996), personality can be defined as

the complex organizations of cognitions, affects, and behaviors that gives direction and pattern (coherence) to the person's life. Like the body, personality consists of both structures and processes and reflects both nature (genes) and nurture (environment). In addition, personality includes the effects of the past, including memories of the past, as well as constructions of the present and future. (p. 414)

From a time when personality theory was restricted to conceiving of temperaments as arising from black and yellow bile and other bodily fluids (i.e., the explanations offered by Hippocrates and Galen), there have been significant advances in personality psychology, both in terms of theory itself and the methods used to test and develop such theory. Since the early 1980s the work of a great number of researchers, especially that of Goldberg (e.g., Goldberg, 1981; Peabody & Goldberg, 1989) and McCrae & Costa (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1994; McCrae & Costa, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1999) has led to growing agreement within personality psychology that the 'Big Five' personality factors seem to be the best model to encompass the literally thousands of terms used worldwide to describe human personality. The Big Five (i.e., openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness and neuroticism) meet the basic tenets of trait theory, which requires that "individuals can be characterized in terms of relatively enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions; that traits can be quantitatively assessed; [and] that they show some degree of cross-situational consistency" (McCrae & Costa, 2008, p. 150).

Despite the widespread acceptance and cross-situational consistency of the Big Five, McAdams (1992; 1994; McAdams & Pals, 2006), while acknowledging the importance of trait theory in understanding some aspects of personality, argues that they do not “offer a comprehensive framework for understanding the whole person” (McAdams & Pals, 2006, p. 204). In a chapter entitled “Can Personality Change”, McAdams (1994) laid out a three-tier framework for understanding human personality that attempts to provide such a comprehensiveness. At Tier One of this framework McAdams places the type of dispositional traits accounted for by the Big Five and other similar trait factors. While using traits to account for basic personality differences between people is beneficial, McAdams (1994) contends that

trait psychology’s reliance on simple, noncontingent, and implicitly comparative statements about individuals-as contained in trait rating scales-essentially provides a psychology of the stranger, nothing more, nothing less. . . . To move beyond a psychology of the stranger, personality psychologists must move beyond traits. (p. 303)

At Level Two of McAdams’ personality framework are personal concerns, those goals, motives, strivings, plans and strategies that guide our lives (McAdams & Pals, 2006). In her own similar explication of personality, Cantor (1990) describes traits as the ‘having’ part of the personality, and the characteristic adaptations accounted for by terms such as ‘middle-level units’ or ‘personal concerns’ as the ‘doing’ part of personality. Studies by Thorne (1989; Thorne & Klohnen, 1993, as cited in McAdams, 1994, pp. 305-306) show that when people talk about who they are, they rarely speak in terms of dispositional traits (e.g., the Big Five), but rather, they speak to their personal concerns in terms of the things they want, what they value, how they seek out what they want and avoid what they fear, and so forth (McAdams & Pals, 2006). Further, McAdams (1994) notes that the ways in which people answer these types of questions are inherently episodic.

From a phenomenological standpoint, then, the decidedly storied framework of peoples’ recounting of experience and self-conception brings us to Level Three of the personality, the narrative identity. Bruner (1986) suggests that we think about the world we live in and ourselves in two primary ways. In the first, the logico-scientific or paradigmatic mode of thought, we employ a micro-version of the scientific method in our

own lives to deduce cause-and-effect relationships, search for empirical truths, to reason and to develop arguments. In the second, the narrative mode of thought, we bring coherence and reason to our experience by creating stories about ourselves. McAdams (1999) explains that, like a good novel, these stories “invoke plots, scenes, and characters to explain how and why it is that people do what they do” (p. 480). In functioning as an integrative life story, the narrative identity

reconstructs the autobiographical past and imagines the future in such a way as to provide a person’s life with some degree of unity, purpose, and meaning. Thus, a person’s life story synthesizes episodic memories with envisioned goals, creating a coherent account of identity in time. Through narrative identity, people convey to themselves and to others who they are now, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going in the future. (McAdams & McLean, 2013, p. 233)

### **2.2.2. Narrative Identity and Persistence/Desistance**

In his pioneering work on desistance from crime, Maruna (2001) suggested that using narratives to understand how and why individuals eventually leave crime behind has scientific merit for at least three reasons: (1) our narratives guide and shape our behaviour; (2) as opposed to static factors such as age, age of offending onset, childhood trauma and so forth, there is evidence that narrative identity is subject to change and, thus, to carefully-tailored interventions; and (3) because stories are inherently situated in a social and cultural context, the stories that former offenders share can teach us much about complex worlds in which both persistent offenders and desisters live. Indeed, since the publication of Maruna’s (2001) study, a large amount of research and theory (e.g., King, 2013a; King, 2013b; Healy, 2010; Healy, 2013; Laws & Ward, 2011; Liem & Richardson, 2014; Marsh, 2011; Stevens, 2012; Stone, 2016; Vaughan, 2007; Ward & Maruna, 2007) has explored the utility of using narrative accounts to explain factors leading to desistance from crime.

#### ***Condemnation Narratives***

Laying the groundwork for this body of research, Maruna’s (2001) study examined the life-history narratives of 30 desisters and 25 carefully chosen, similarly situated (i.e., in terms of their criminal histories, risk factors, etc.) persistent offenders. The narratives given by active, persistent offenders in the sample reflected what Maruna (2001) calls a ‘condemnation script’:

they are sick of offending, sick of prison, and sick of their position in life. . . . Yet, they said that they feel powerless to change their behavior because of drug dependency, poverty, a lack of education or skills, or societal prejudice. They do not want to offend, they said, but feel that they have no choice. (Maruna, 2001, p. 74)

In essence, individuals in this group felt that leaving crime behind was a goal well beyond their reach due to the myriad barriers that typically plague the lives of persistent offenders.

Given what we have learned about the developmental trajectories of offenders throughout the better half of the last century, the fact that many feel this way is not surprising. In their early years, offenders are often exposed to a host of risk factors which have likely played a significant role in their antisocial trajectories. Studies from the fields of developmental criminology and psychology have shown that the most significant predictors of antisocial and criminal behaviour include *individual factors* such as low intelligence, lack of empathy, aggression and impulsivity (Hogh & Wolf, 1983; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004; Lipsey & Derzon, 1998; Lynam, Moffitt & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1993); *family factors* such as low supervision, authoritarian or neglectful parenting styles, harsh discipline, criminal parents and negative sibling influences, and low socioeconomic status (Lipsey & Derzon, 1998; McCord, 1979; West & Farrington, 1977); *peer factors* such as having delinquent peers or experiencing peer rejection (Coie & Miller-Johnson, 2001; Lipsey & Derzon, 1998; Nelson & Dishion, 2004); and *school and neighbourhood factors*, such as high delinquency in a school, low school commitment, living in a high-crime neighbourhood, and low collective efficacy in the neighbourhood (McCord, Widom & Crowell, 2001; Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls, 1997; Thornberry, Huizinga & Loeber, 1995).

Young children who face one or more of these risk factors (and in the case of persistent offenders, it is often several) will likely experience what Sampson & Laub (1997) term 'cumulative disadvantage'. For example, a parent may react to a child with a difficult temperament using harsh discipline. The child reacts in-kind, resulting in a cycle of coercion and aversive interactions. The child then carries these behaviours into school, where they face peer rejection and, as a result, eventual engagement with similarly peer-rejected, antisocial youth. Together, this group participates in antisocial behaviour and crime, and members become ensnared in the criminal justice system.

Sampson & Laub (1997) importantly make the observation that early delinquency, especially that resulting in formal sanctions by the criminal justice system, will lead to the “knifing off” of future opportunities, such that labeled offenders have fewer options for a conventional life” (pp. 12-13). Indeed, the research on prisoner re-entry shows that prisoners returning to the community are met with significant barriers. Upon release, many former prisoners experience problems rebuilding their fractured relationships with family (Richie, 2001; Zamble & Quinsey, 1997). They also struggle with typically having low levels of education, little prior work experience and difficulties finding housing, often being forced to reside in low-income areas with few opportunities for gainful employment (Bradley, Oliver & Richardson, 2003; Holzer, Raphael & Stoll, 2002). These issues, coupled with the permanent stigma of a criminal record, lead them to struggle to support themselves and their families and cause significant stress in their lives (Breese et al., 2001; Nagin & Waldfoegel, 1998). A significant proportion of prisoners also return to the community with substance addictions and mental health issues, often co-occurring, which drastically raises the probability of parole violations or reengagement in criminal behaviour (Hartwell, 2004; Mallik-Kane & Visser, 2008).

Faced with these barriers, it is not surprising that the active offender group in Maruna’s (2001) sample felt that they were powerless to change. One of the key functions of the narrative identity is that the stories we create for ourselves serve to provide unity, coherence and some semblance of causal order to our lives (Giddens, 1991; Habermas & de Silveira, 2008). Viewing oneself as a victim of circumstance can solidify the perception of being an effect rather than a cause, thereby being freed of personal responsibility for one’s actions (Maruna, 2001; Matza, 1964). In such a situation, offending can become a way of trying to grasp some modicum of control over one’s life. As Maruna (2001) writes, “intentionally failing may be less stressful on a person’s ego than trying to succeed and failing anyway” (p. 78). Likewise, Braithwaite (2000) has argued that, in facing a threat to their identity, many offenders save face by rejecting their rejectors: “once I have labelled them as dirt, does it matter that they regard me as dirt?” (p. 287). Derogating and pushing back against the systems and society that have pushed them aside allows offenders to maintain a coherent narrative identity, however maladaptive it may be.

## ***Redemption Narratives***

Whereas the persistent sample in Maruna's (2001) study felt condemned to a life of crime, the desisting ex-offenders had managed to acquire a sense of control over their lives. The life stories provided by these individuals reflected what has been referred to as a 'redemption narrative' by scholars who take a narrative perspective on understanding the relationship between self-stories and identity (e.g., Grossbaum & Bates, 2002; Maruna, 2001; Maruna & Ramsden, 2004; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Stevens, 2012). One of the key aspects of the narrative identity is that our stories are not set in stone and are subject to re-evaluation as we encounter new life-course events, or find new ways to interpret events from our past. As McAdams (2006) observes

in life stories, redemptive sequences begin with the protagonist's experience of a negative emotional state such as fear, guilt, shame, or despair. The negative scene, however, gives way to the experience of happiness, joy, excitement, growth, or some other positive emotional state. (p. 89)

Maruna (2001) argues that crafting such a redemption script "allows the person to rewrite a shameful past into a necessary prelude to a productive and worthy life" (p. 97). In essence, a re-evaluation of the self-story enables good to come from the bad. Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson (1998) explain that following a loss or traumatic experience, individuals often engage in either sense-making or benefit-finding. In the former, they attempt to comprehend an event by finding some "relatively benign" explanation for it in order to ascribe some logic and predictability to their subjective world. In the latter, they attempt to minimize the negative implications of an event by searching for positive outcomes and inspiration for growth. The ability to do so is well-supported in the empirical literature as having a positive impact on psychological wellbeing. For example, Grossbaum & Bates (2002) used hierarchical regression models to determine the relationships between narrative themes (agency, communion, generativity, contamination, redemption) and six dimensions of psychological wellbeing in a sample of 49 midlife adults. Their results indicated that redemption narrative sequences were associated with self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, personal growth and environmental mastery. Similarly, Pals (2006) examined the impact of exploratory narrative processing and coherent positive resolution on ego-resilience and positive self-transformation using

longitudinal data obtained from 83 women at ages 21, 52 and 67. The data showed that those who had reflected on and found meaning in difficult experiences were later able to “crystallize an enduring sense of positive self-transformation within that person’s identity defining life-story” (p. 1100).

In achieving their own positive identity transformation, the desisting ex-offenders in Maruna’s study seemed to have gone through a similar process of mining past experiences for positive elements. Their narratives generally contained three key elements: (1) having established some set of core values, beliefs or virtues that characterized their “true selves”; (2) the perception that they were agents in their own destinies; and (3) a desire for generativity. Each one of these is discussed in turn below.

As discussed previously, the narratives we develop imbue a sense of purpose, meaning, and of causal order to our lives. In terms of establishing beliefs about the true self, Maruna (2001) observed that desisters told stories in which, despite their involvement in crime, an essentially good person existed beneath the chaos. They spoke of being men who looked out for their families financially, who were loving parents, local heroes, men with intelligence and innate talents. Perhaps equally important, in some circumstances when this ‘true self’ was not present, narrators described their criminal actions as being mere reflex to their environments, or the result of some alien force that they could not pinpoint. For example, in reflecting on these sections of the interviews, Maruna (2001) makes the distinction between their use of active versus passive voice. Desisters seemed to diffuse their responsibility by consistently using the language of passivity, referring to an “it” when speaking of their addiction or the draw of material goods, as opposed to the active-voice language of “I” when describing those episodes that reflected their true, good nature. Through this combination of emphasizing their redeeming qualities and diffusing responsibility for the bad, Maruna (2001) argues that these individuals were able to begin crafting a logical and coherent narrative that would justify their eventual desistance in terms of a return to the true self.

Of course, part of crafting such a story was that desisters were able to free themselves from the perceived external constraints that had previously relegated them to a life of crime. Maruna (2001) observes that “although it may be therapeutic for a person

to locate the roots of his or her problems in the social environment . . . successfully desisting people seem to internalize complete responsibility for overcoming these obstacles” (p. 149). Human agency, which is characterized by “intentionality, power, reflexivity, and the capacity for self-examination” (Paternoster, Bachman, Bushway, Kerrison & O’Connell, 2015, p. 211), has been found to be a crucial aspect of the narratives of desisting ex-offenders in a host of other studies (e.g., Farrall, 2005; King, 2013a; Liem & Richardson, 2014; Sampson & Laub, 2003; Shover, 1996). In some cases, the perception of having control over one’s life seems to be the primary factor distinguishing persistent offenders from those who have desisted from crime. Liem & Richardson (2014), for example, found in a sample of 67 paroled and re-incarcerated lifers that both persistent and desisting ex-offenders seemed to have both generative concerns and a belief that they had a good core self. However, consistent with Maruna’s (2001) study, those who desisted portrayed much greater self-efficacy, while those who returned to prison consistently diffused responsibility for their actions (Liem & Richardson, 2014). One of the key considerations in discussions of human agency is its relation to social and structural constructs, a topic discussed further in Chapter 2.4 of this thesis. For now, though, it is important to recognize that human action does not occur in a vacuum and is either limited or facilitated by the relationships we have with others, with institutions and with society as a whole.

The third essential element of the redemption narrative relayed by desisters in Maruna’s (2001) study was a desire for generativity. According to Erikson’s (1963) theory of psychosocial development, human beings progress through a series of distinct psychosocial stages throughout their life-course. While completion of one stage is not required to advance to the next, outcomes at each stage do have successive impact on those that follow. For example, at the first stage of development is the tension between trust and mistrust. If at this stage the child does not receive love and care from their guardian(s), they will move to the next stage lacking the virtue of hope, which will inevitably colour the outcomes of future psychosocial processing. The seventh stage in Erikson’s (1963) model involves the tension between generativity and stagnation. Generativity can be broadly conceived of as a concern for producing something of value, contributing to the wellbeing of others or leaving a legacy (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992).

In the study of narrative identity, generativity has been described as an essential component of the life-stories of well-functioning midlife (i.e., age 40 through 65) adults. Ackerman, Zuroff & Moskowitz (2000) have found that generative concern predicted subjective wellbeing in a sample of 49 midlife adults (see McAdams, de St. Aubin & Logan, 1993 for similar findings). Further, they also found that generativity increased in conjunction with narrative themes of agency. In describing the role of agency in concerns for generativity, McAdams & de St. Aubin (1992) write that “the desire for immortality would appear to be one manifestation of agency, as a tendency to assert, expand, and develop the self in a powerful way” (p. 1006). The narratives of desisters in Maruna’s (2001) study exemplified this notion in that many expressed a strong need to use their experiences of being down and picking themselves back up as inspiration for others. A wealth of prior research shows that individuals who give of themselves in mutual-aid settings experience such benefits as positive identity transformations, increases in self-esteem and self-worth, and in subjective wellbeing in general (e.g., Carlson, Rapp & McDiarmid, 2001; Copeland, 1997; Petrich & Morrison, 2015).

### **2.3. The Risk-Need-Responsivity Model of Offender Rehabilitation**

From the discussion thus far, it should be clear that process of desistance from crime involves many interrelated factors. These factors include the presence of prosocial bonds and structural supports; changes in emotional states and regulation capacities; openness to change; the effects of aging and maturation and shifts in identity. If one of the goals of social science is ultimately to develop evidence-based social practice, then we must continually evaluate whether practices are taking into consideration the full scope of the problems they intend to address. The following section is a brief, albeit poignant appraisal of the dominant risk-need-responsivity (RNR) model of correctional supervision and rehabilitation based on what we know about desistance, and human personality and wellbeing in general.

The history of corrections and the rehabilitation of offenders reflects an almost pendulum-like vacillation between the ideologies of “treatment works” and “nothing works.” Although a complete recounting of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this thesis

(although see Gaes, 1998; Cullen & Gendreau, 2001 for reviews), several points provide the necessary context for understanding the genesis of the RNR model. Prior to approximately 1975, the study of criminal justice throughout the previous century was characterized by empirical positivism, a focus on analysis of individual differences and an optimistic outlook on the potential for rehabilitating offenders. Sutherland (1939), for example, was a staunch critic of the idea that punishment and isolation of offenders have any positive effect on recidivism, further arguing that such an approach had been discarded by psychologists. Rather, he contended that interventions should be individualized and focus on attempting to reconnect offenders with prosocial members of the community and their families. Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (1950) discovered that parenting styles, personal temperament, family cohesion, attitudes and intelligence were the factors that distinguished between delinquent and non-delinquent men. As Cullen & Gendreau (2001) observe, the Gluecks were confident that these factors should be targeted in treatment settings, but that doing so would require more extensive research on individual differences leading to lives of crime.

In 1974, Robert Martinson published an article entitled “What Works? Questions and Answers About Prison Reform”, in which he presented an analysis of the results over 200 correctional treatment studies. Though not in such specific words, Martinson’s (1974) review suggested that the answer to the question “What Works?” in terms of offender rehabilitation was “Nothing.” Methodological problems aside (see Cullen & Gendreau, 2000; Gottfredson, 1979 for an appraisal), the once-prevalent scientific skepticism of the past century seemed to fade into the ether. The study of individual differences and the psychology of criminal conduct (PCC) gave way to wholly sociological explanations of deviance that had already begun to be ushered in by the ‘New Criminologists’ (i.e., Taylor, Walton & Young, 1973). These theorists argued that crime and deviance were largely the result of the social and economic inequalities brought about by capitalism. Though Martinson’s (1974) article certainly did not help, the change in criminological thought was largely the result of the skepticism of the state brought about by human rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and the wars on drugs and crime that followed (Ward & Maruna, 2007). Much of the subsequent research from criminologists in the era seemed intent on proving that prisons were ineffective overreaches of the state into the lives of the disadvantaged (see Cullen & Gendreau, 2001 for a review).

In the late 1980s, however, a group of primarily-Canadian psychologists (e.g., Andrews, Bonta, Gendreau, Hoge, Wormith) challenged the assumptions of the new criminology. Andrews & Wormith (1989), for instance, strongly argued that the new criminology's skepticism of the state and of correctional treatment in general was anti-empirical and anti-individual differences. They hearkened back to the findings of the Gluecks, Hirshi, and Thornberry, among others, to contend that delinquents and non-delinquents vary in ways that cannot be explained by social class and structural inequality. Enter the RNR model of offender rehabilitation, first formalized by Andrews, Bonta & Hoge (1990). The aim of the RNR framework was, according to Andrews et al. (1990), to counter the "antirehabilitation rhetoric of mainstream criminology" (p. 20) by returning to a focus on individual differences and empirical evaluation of treatment modalities.

The original formulation of the RNR model offered by Andrews et al. (1990) comprised three basic principles to be adhered to in the assessment and treatment of offenders: risk, needs and responsivity. In terms of the risk principle, Andrews et al. (1990) contend that the intensity of treatment should be matched to the risk of recidivism predicted of an individual. Those at a high or moderate risk of reoffending should receive the highest intensity treatment, while those at a low risk of reoffending will benefit equally or better from low intensity treatment. Indeed, a number of studies attest to this principle, in that high-risk offenders recidivate more with low-intensity treatment and low-risk offenders recidivate more with high-intensity treatment, and vice versa (see Andrews & Bonta, 2010 for a review of such results).

Drawing on theoretical and empirical knowledge from social learning, personality, differential association and biological perspectives, among others, the *need* principle holds that various criminogenic needs can be changed through treatment and, thus, reduce the likelihood of recidivism. In their latest reformulation of the RNR model, Andrews & Bonta (2010) lay out the 'Central Eight' risk/need factors that are the best predictors of individual differences in criminal behaviour and, as such, the most important to be addressed by corrections: (1) history of antisocial behaviour; (2) antisocial personality patterns, such as impulsivity, aggression or callousness; (3) antisocial cognitions, including anger, defiance, disregard for the law, diffusion of responsibility; (4) antisocial associates; (5) family and

marital circumstances; (6) education or work; (7) leisure and recreation interests; and (8) substance abuse issues.

The *responsivity* principle of the RNR model can be broken down into two related parts. With the first, general responsivity, Andrews & Bonta (2010) contend that cognitive behavioural and social learning approaches to changing behavior are far superior to other program modalities and should therefore be the primary means of providing treatment to offenders. The second part, specific responsivity, urges giving attention to the idiosyncrasies of individual offenders, such as their “personal sensitivity, anxiety, verbal intelligence, and cognitive maturity” (Andrews & Bonta, 2010 p. 50). Taken as a whole, responsivity within the RNR model allows treatments to be matched, not only to offenders’ criminogenic needs, but also their individual learning styles and preferences (Andrews et al., 1990).

Empirical support for the RNR model has been impressive. In a series of meta-analyses based on a set of 374 program effect sizes, Andrews and colleagues (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Andrews & Dowden, 2005, Andrews & Dowden, 2006) have evaluated each of the risk, needs and responsivity principles. Their findings indicate that, on average, adherence to the risk principle alone led to a 10 percent reduction in recidivism, adherence to needs led to a 19 percent reduction and adherence to responsivity led to 23 percent reduction. Importantly, programs that conform to all three major principles of the RNR model resulted in an average of a 26 percent reduction in recidivism (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Earlier meta-analyses showed that ‘appropriate’ treatments (i.e., utilizing cognitive behavioral therapy, addressing needs, responsivity) far outperformed treatments deemed as ‘inappropriate’ (i.e., deterrence-based models, non-directive client-centered approaches) (Andrews, Zinger, Hoge, Bonta, Gendreau & Cullen, 1990). Furthermore, the RNR models shows significant improvements over criminal sanctions alone or ‘inappropriate’ treatment modalities for various types of offenders, including females (Dowden & Andrews, 1999), violent offenders (Dowden & Andrews) and sex offenders (Hanson, Bourgon, Helmus & Hodgson, 2009).

### **2.3.1. Criticisms of the Risk-Need-Responsivity Treatment Model**

Despite evidence that the RNR model significantly improves recidivism outcomes, a fairly large chorus of scholars contend that a focus on risk levels and risk factors (criminogenic needs) does not attend to many of the lessons learned through desistance research over the past several decades. This position has been rather succinctly captured by Porporino (2010):

Unattended to in [the risk] paradigm is how exactly offenders go about constructing new pro-social identities for themselves, what might spark them to do this, what are the motivational pressures that might support this change, where these pressures come from, and how is a new identity (and the future pro-social self it implies) reconciled with the criminal past it is choosing to abandon. (p. 63)

Expounding on this argument, a number of interrelated concerns have been raised about risk/need paradigms (predominantly RNR). As noted by Porporino (2010), we typically arrive at our estimates of treatment effect sizes simply by noting that treatment occurred between time points A and B, and at time C, recidivism was lower; therefore, treatment works. The problem with this simplification is that there is no indication of how the change happened, only that it did, for some individuals (Maruna & LeBel, 2010). Without investigating why some offenders respond to the treatment and why others do not, treatment effectiveness is likely to remain at its status quo. Also, critics of RNR note that individuals, and ultimately crime, are embedded within wider social, cultural and institutional contexts (Ward & Stewart, 2003). However, because of the focus on individual-level risk factors, Ward & Maruna (2007) argue that little attention is paid to the interconnectivity of these broader contexts of offending.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, although responsivity is one of the three key constructs of the RNR model, the minimal level of elaboration afforded to it is “theoretically unsatisfying” and, as a result, stands to hinder the degree to which individual differences are actually attended to in practice (Polaschek, 2012, p. 8). While responding to the individual learning styles of clients is undoubtedly important, one of the key questions left unanswered by RNR is what actually motivates and sustains change. A number of key researchers in the desistance field (e.g., Harris, 2005; Maruna & LeBel, 2010; Porporino, 2010; Ward & Maruna, 2007; Ward & Stewart, 2003) have raised the concern that by

focusing almost exclusively on the elimination of risk factors, risk-based intervention models are ignoring the things that many offenders say have assisted their transformations. Farrall (1995) has noted that the bulk of desistance occurs 'away' from the criminal justice system. As discussed in previous sections of this report, desisters tend to cite factors such as becoming employed, establishing a romantic relationship, reconnecting with their children, being welcomed into the community, and perhaps most importantly, feeling in control of their lives. Unfortunately, risk-based programs do little to make these crucial connections. Ward & Maruna (2007) have argued that not tending to the internal capabilities and the external conditions necessary to foster and sustain change may unintentionally alienate and demotivate offenders.

## **2.4. The Necessity of Adopting an Integrated Approach to Understanding Desistance**

The previous sections of this thesis covered the social/structural and subjective factors found to influence desistance from crime, as well as the positive and negative aspects of the RNR model of offender treatment that is dominant across Canada and many other parts of the world. In the current section, links are drawn between these areas of research. As should become apparent, a number of questions about these links remain at least somewhat unanswered and provide the impetus for the current study.

A substantial amount of desistance research has tended to theorize exiting a life of crime as almost entirely either a subjective or structural process, with only minor credence given to other factors. For example, in response to a critique by Modell (1994), Laub & Sampson (2003) made the addition of human agency to their theory of AGSC, noting that "agency looms large in the processes of persistence and desistance from crime" (p. 280). Yet King (2013b) notes that their conception of agency is purely reactive, without any notion of the individual's commitment to change. Indeed, from their perspective, Laub & Sampson (2003) explain that desistance is "not necessarily a conscious or deliberate process", but more often the result of "side bets" such as work or marriage that serve to knife off one's criminal past (pp. 278-279). What actually motivates individuals to be responsive to 'side bets' in the first place is left unanswered by the AGSC theory. From the other side of things, theorists adopting a more rational choice point of

view have attributed a more minor role to the types of structural factors theorized by Laub & Sampson. Paternoster & Bushway (2009) have argued that desistance begins with an intentional change in identity, and that individuals will self-select the environmental and social/structural constructs that will be supportive of maintaining a positive future self. In both of these examples, as well as a number of other theoretical accounts of desistance, there is some acknowledgement of the other side of the equation, yet its role is rarely fleshed out in full. As Farrall and Bowling (1999) noted surprisingly long ago, much of the research on quitting crime “has treated individuals as either ‘super-agents’ . . . or as ‘super-dupes’” (p. 258). Accounts that theorize desisters as ‘super-agents’ argue that “one need only to decide to change and envision a new identity for oneself in order to go straight. . . . Once someone decides to desist, social factors such as unemployment are irrelevant” (LeBel et al., 2008, p. 138). In the case of ‘super-dupes’, good things simply happen to bad people (Laub et al., 1998). From this viewpoint, the “subjective mindset of the released prisoner is not important for going straight” (LeBel et al., 2008, p. 139).

A number of studies, however, have shown that desistance is a more interactional, reflexive process (Farrall & Calverley, 2006; Giordano et al., 2002; Giordano et al., 2007; Maruna, 2001). As such, a growing number of criminologists have called for theory and research that accounts for both subjective and social factors in a more nuanced manner (e.g., Crank, 2014; Farrington, 2007; Kazemian, 2007; Kazemian & Maruna, 2009; LeBel et al., 2008). Briefly describing what such a subjective-social account of desistance would look like, LeBel et al. (2008) argue that

with the right subjective mindset, the person may be capable of taking advantage of the good events in life that come along and/or will not be thrown off course by social disappointments. In other words, the subjective mindset is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for success after release from prison. (p. 139)

Of course, precisely how individuals navigate what should be taken advantage of and what should be forgotten in their pursuit of a crime-free life is a more complicated issue. Researchers have recently drawn on theory from outside of criminology to help disentangle how this process may work. For instance, King (2013b) uses Emirbayer & Mische’s (1998) work to describe the transformational aspects of agency in the desistance process. Emirbayer & Mische (1998) define agency as

the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments—the temporal-relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations. (p. 970)

Important to this definition, King (2013b) notes, is that agency is not defined as a static personality trait or “something which is possessed” (p. 323). Rather, its form and function changes based on how the elements of habit, imagination and judgment connect with structure on a case-by-case basis.

The first element of Emirbayer & Mische’s (1998) chordal triad, habit, is the iterational aspect of agency. As we move through the life-course, we develop a set of cognitive schemas or scripts that organize, provide meaning to and create expectancies for the various types of interactions we engage in. Engaging in habitual courses of action, according to Giddens (1991), can provide us with a sense of ontological security. The absence of such a sense of continuity can lead to an incoherent narrative identity and, ultimately, anxiety and insecurity about the self (Liddle, 2001; Melucci, 1994). The second element of Emirbayer & Mische’s (1998) triad is that of imagination, or more accurately put, the projective aspect of agency. In the face of a changing environment or the realization that old habits are no longer working, Emirbayer & Mische (1998) argue that individuals envisage alternative plans, goals and objectives that are in line with evolving desires and purposes. This prospective element is generally in line with Paternoster & Bushway’s (2009) conception of the disjunction between a (no longer) working self and a positive future self. The realization that drawing on old schemas and habits is unlikely to be conducive to meeting personal concerns motivates individuals to create new schemas and habits. Finally, in response to the realization of this disjunction, Emirbayer & Mische (1998) propose that there is also a practical-evaluative, or judgment, component to the expression of agency. As individuals contemplate their past experience and their hopes for the future, there must be a sense of practicality, of bringing oneself ‘back down to earth’ and to real-world circumstances (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 994), to avoid being disappointed when perhaps overly-optimistic goals are unmet.

In another fairly recent analysis, Healy (2013) also presented a nuanced theoretical account of the interactions between agency and structure likely to be involved

in going straight. Her article draws heavily from the identity capital model developed by James Côté (1997; Côté & Schwartz, 2002). To the anomic and chaotic conditions of social life in late-modern Western societies, Côté & Schwartz (2002) propose that individuals respond either through default individualization or developmental individualization. The term 'individualization', according to Côté & Schwartz (2002), refers to "the extent to which people are left by their culture to their own devices in terms of meeting their own survival needs, determining the directions their lives will take, and making myriad choices along the way" (p. 573). Successfully navigating potential barriers and pitfalls throughout the process of individualization requires a collection of tangible and intangible resources, collectively referred to as 'identity capital' (Côté, 1997). Tangible resources include elements such as financial resources, educational achievement, networks of relationships and social status. On the other hand, intangible resources include "psychosocial vitalities" such as ego strength, sense of purpose, moral reasoning, critical thinking and so forth that "give individuals the wherewithal to understand and negotiate the various . . . obstacles and opportunities commonly encountered" (Côté, 1997, p. 578).

Lacking the requisite resources to deal with the individualization process, Côté & Schwartz (2002) explain that individuals will acquiesce to their environment through default individualization. In such a process, one will likely focus on "culture fashions and trends to impress peers" without exerting much effort on "self-improvement in areas such as higher-order competency refinement, human capital skill accumulation, and credential acquisition" (Côté & Schwartz, 2002, p. 574). Conversely, those with high identity capital are more likely to engage in developmental individualization. The availability of both internal capacities and external supports allows these individuals to be agentic and reflexive with their environment. Such a disposition results in the desire to "explore their potentials, build personal strengths, and sustain some sense of direction and meaning" (Côté & Schwartz, 2002, pp. 577-578).

Both the chordal triad of agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; King, 2013b) and the identity capital model (Côté, 1997; Côté & Schwartz, 2002; Healy, 2013) offer valuable insight into the phenomena of persistence and desistance from crime. The concepts of iterational agency and default individualization, for example, may explain why many former

prisoners find it so difficult to stay on the straight and narrow. Issues such as poor education and employability, difficulties finding housing and strained family relationships undoubtedly cause myriad problems with successful positive adaptation to the outside world. Faced with such strain, King (2013b) found that persistent offenders often reverted back to behavioural patterns of habit. As Maruna (2001) noted, viewing oneself as a victim of circumstance, however maladaptive, is logical in the context of maintaining a sense of ontological security and being able to justify one's behaviour. King (2013b) also proposes that the tension between the projective and practical-evaluative dimensions of agency explain the 'bringing oneself back down to earth' that many desisters go through. For example, one of King's (2013b) participants, 'Ryan', believed that getting a stable, full-time job would help him go straight. However, given his lack of skills and criminal record, he had to fall back on working part-time for his step-father. He also knew that quitting marijuana would help as well, but that giving it up would likely result in a social isolation he was not prepared for. Evidently, Ryan is desirous of a different type of future, but his hopes and plans are stymied by the realities of his structural constraints. It would be here that Côté's (1997) notion of identity capital is worth considering. Without the requisite skills and connections, Ryan seems to be falling back into habit, despite his desires for something different (King, 2013b).

What is missing from these analyses by Healy (2013) and King (2013b) is some discussion of exactly how prisoners and those in the process of reintegrating acquire these tangible and intangible resources that allow people to be agentic. The Canadian government and CSC desire to play at least some role in the acquisition of these resources. For instance, the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA)* of Canada states that:

The purpose of the federal correctional system is to contribute to the maintenance of a just, peaceful and safe society by (a) carrying out sentences imposed by the courts through the safe and humane custody and supervision of offenders; and (b) assisting the rehabilitation of offenders and their reintegration into the community as law-abiding citizens through the provision of programs in penitentiaries and in the community. (CCRA, 1992, para. 3)

From the previous discussion of the RNR model that dominates Canadian correctional practice, it is apparent that programs offered by CSC that follow the model's core principles

offer a substantial reduction in reoffending. Still, Bonta, Rugge & Dauvergne (2003) have shown that the average two-year rate of recidivism between 1994 and 1997 was approximately 42.5%. Evidently, these programs do not work for everyone, nor can we be sure precisely which elements of the programs are most beneficial to current and former prisoners based solely on statistical analyses (Maruna & LeBel, 2010).

As Farrall (2002), and more recently, Kazemian (2015), noted, not much is known about what role correctional interventions play in the processes of identity change and its impact on desistance. Farrall (1995) argued that most of the process of going straight seems to occur outside of the system. He subsequently observed that what more often helps is “acquiring ‘something’ (most commonly employment, a life partner or a family) which the desister values in some way and which initiates a re-evaluation of his or her life, and for some a sense of who they ‘are’” (Farrall, 2002, p. 11). Indeed, the literature reviewed thus far in this chapter attests to the accuracy of that observation. Yet it is also clear that, lacking the necessary skills, cognitive capacities and social capital, offenders have an exceedingly difficult time leaving old habits behind and crafting a new, prosocial identity.

What we get from risk-based correctional paradigms such as RNR is the attention of treatment primarily directed at eliminating criminogenic needs, such as low self-control, impulsivity, antisocial associates, pro-criminal attitudes and so forth (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Certainly, acquiring the skills and strategies to reduce these criminogenic needs (risk factors) through intervention programs is inherently useful. However, absent from RNR and related models is much attention to the personal concerns of programs’ clients. According to McAdams (1994; McAdams & Pals, 2006), our personal concerns, or our projects, goals, plans and strategies, shape the way we live our lives and ultimately determine our narrative identities.

In a reformulation of his model of human personality, McAdams (McAdams & Pals, 2006) has added the consideration that “human lives are individual variations on a general evolutionary design” (p. 205). McAdams & Pals (2006) draw on the work of Sheldon (2004), who outlined a set of species-typical universals important to understanding personality; these include basic physical needs, innate social-cognitive mechanisms,

sociocultural practices and psychological needs. Of particular interest to the relationship between personal concerns and narrative identity are psychological needs. Perhaps the best-known explication of psychological needs is Deci & Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory (SDT). Their theory proposes that human beings are predisposed to strive for well-being through the satisfaction of the psychological needs to control and master their environments (competence); to have a sense of free will and have "activity be concordant with one's integrated sense of self" (autonomy); and to "feel connected to others – to love and care, and to be loved and cared for" (relatedness) (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 231). Whether or not these needs are met has significant consequences for our psychological health and vitality:

Social contexts and individual differences that support satisfaction of the basic needs facilitate natural growth processes including intrinsically motivate behavior and integration of extrinsic motivations, whereas those that forestall autonomy, competence, or relatedness are associated with poorer motivation, performance, and well-being. (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 227)

The satisfaction or forestallment of psychological needs has important implications for how we think about correctional interventions. Ward and his colleagues (e.g., Ward, 2002; Ward & Stewart, 2003; Ward & Marshall, 2007; Ward & Maruna, 2007) developed the Good Lives Model (GLM) of offender rehabilitation in close contemplation of these issues. Drawing heavily from SDT, Ward & Stewart (2003) outlined a set of ten primary human goods: life, knowledge, excellence in play and work, excellence in agency, inner peace, friendship, community, spirituality, happiness and creativity. The acquisition of some combination of these primary goods leads to a fulfilling, 'good' life. Conversely, secondary goods are concrete means of securing primary goods, such as work, leisure, relationships or the ability to communicate (Ward & Stewart, 2003). Within the GLM (Ward & Maruna, 2007), as well as positive psychology in general (e.g., Seligman, 2011), the notion of the 'good life' will vary between individuals based on the value they place on the various primary goods. Regardless, achieving personally valued primary goods should lead to fulfillment and psychological wellbeing.

According to the GLM, offending is the result of an individual lacking the internal (e.g., values, skills, beliefs) and external (e.g., social supports, opportunities, resources)

conditions necessary to achieve primary goods in socially acceptable ways (Ward & Maruna, 2007). In step with Côté's (1997) identity capital model, according to the GLM, lacking these conditions invariably affects the ability of an individual to craft an adaptive narrative identity. Reflecting on Maruna's (2001) study, for example, Ward (2002) observes that the persistent offenders perceived themselves as being unable to secure the primary goods of personal achievement or autonomy because they believed their lives were largely beyond their own control. As a result, secondary goods such as money, status or material goods were sought for their own right through criminal activity. While doing so may have provided some momentary solace, the persistent offenders in Maruna's (2001) sample had experienced no long-term fulfillment from such a lifestyle (Ward, 2002). Problems also arise when behaviour is oriented towards specific primary goods, but the secondary goods employed to do so are maladaptive. For instance, an offender may attempt to secure the goods of intimacy and mastery through sexual relationships with children (Ward & Stewart, 2003).

On the other hand, Ward (2002) observes that desisters in Maruna's (2001) study were active in trying to "make good" on their criminal pasts by crafting a new, adaptive narrative identity. These individuals were concerned with being in control of their own lives, (re)building relationships with family, finding meaningful employment, being respected and giving back in some way. Importantly, Ward (2002) also notes,

It was not enough to simply fashion a new conception of the self; it was necessary to learn new skills, identify and link primary goods, identify opportunities, seek and accept social support, and translate these changes into actions that reflected a new identity. (pp. 523-524)

In other words, those who had desisted from crime had not only identified the primary goods they value, but also found prosocial secondary goods through which they could be achieved. The combination of these two elements enabled a narrative that was consistent with making good on their past misdeeds.

As discussed above, others have argued that risk-based treatment programs are not truly responsive to the psychological needs (and associated primary and secondary goods) that individual offenders value (Ward & Stewart, 2003, Ward & Maruna, 2007). Further, this leads to a potential inability of these programs to adequately foster changes

in agency and identity, both of which have been strongly linked to desistance from crime. When prisoners are pressured into treatment and inundated with the notion that they are defective time and again, it may limit their response to said treatment as well. Qualitative desistance research investigating participants' experience of formal correctional programming is virtually nonexistent. If, as Farrall (1995) argues, the majority of desistance occurs away from the formal correctional system, further investigation of why this is the case is necessary. As well, only a handful of recent studies have examined informal, voluntary programs offered in institutions and upon re-entry such as AVP, AA, NA and COSA (e.g., Fox, 2015; Petrich & Morrison, 2015; Ronel, Frid & Timor, 2013; Stevens, 2012). The general consensus amongst these studies is that participants develop a sense of agency and construct adaptive narrative identities through participation in supportive communities that foster human and social capital. These types of programs show great promise in addressing the concerns raised about RNR, but again, require further research. The gaps in the research highlighted in this section were the impetus for the study described in this thesis. In the next chapter, I outline the specific research questions that guided this work, the philosophy underpinning the methods used, and the data collection and analysis practices themselves.

## **Chapter 3.**

### **Methods**

#### **3.1. Research Questions**

Based on some of the gaps in the research on desistance outlined in Chapter 2, the research questions that guided the current study were:

- 1) How do subjective and social/structural factors influence and interact in the pathways to and from criminality?
- 2) What are the impacts of various types of programs and services on these pathways (e.g., Correctional Service Canada programs, volunteer-run and community-based programs, parole)?

#### **3.2. Philosophical Underpinnings**

It is abundantly clear that desisting from crime is an inherently subjective process that can involve a range of emotional changes (Farrall & Calverley, 2006; Giordano et al., 2007), rational decision-making (Cusson & Pinsonneault, 1986; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009), cognitive shifts (Giordano et al., 2009; Shover & Thomsson, 1992) and identity transformation (Maruna, 2001; Liem & Richardson, 2014; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). That said, most of the past work on desistance acknowledges that social and structural forces shape the subjective experience and practice of going straight (Giordano et al., 2002; Healy, 2013, King, 2013b; LeBel et al., 2008; Maruna, 2001).

To answer the research questions listed above, narrative inquiry was chosen as a method of designing the study and thinking about the data because of the explicitly psychosocial nature of narrative itself. The stories we tell about ourselves help to answer the existential question of “Who am I?” and, as such, to create our identities. In a synchronic sense, these stories integrate disparate roles, relationships, goals, values and plans into the coherent and unified whole that is ‘Me’ (McAdams, 2001). In a diachronic sense, narratives integrate the Me across time; that is, “the Me of the past led up to or set

the stage for the Me of the present, which in turn will lead up to or set the stage for the Me of the future” (McAdams, 1996, p. 306). Like any other story, the self-narrative involves *tone* (e.g., pessimism, optimism), *imagery* (e.g., place, smell, taste, metaphor), theme (e.g., agency, communion, redemption), *ideological setting* (motivations of the narrator impacted by moral, religious, political and ethical beliefs), *nuclear episodes* (e.g., beginnings, endings, high points, low points, turning points) and *imagoes* (idealized versions of the self, acting as main characters in the story) (McAdams, 1996). Through the combination of these elements, we are able to organize our past experience into a coherent Me of the present.

Giddens (1991) wrote that “a person’s identity is not to be found in behavior, nor - important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going” (p. 54). Keeping a narrative going can be particularly difficult at times, and requires stories to be re-evaluated, events to be re-interpreted and new elements to be incorporated:

‘the whips and scorns of time’, mistakes, lessons learned from those mistakes, turning points, pleasures, triumphs and serendipitous incidents all life stories contain must be, consciously or unconsciously, incorporated, edited, evaluated and refashioned to reflect the desired overarching life story and adequately express the (it is to be hoped) wisdom, self-awareness, resilience and emotional maturity such significant life events will have conferred. (Stevens, 2012, p. 528)

In short, our experiences must be integrated so that they have some underlying and ultimate purpose in having shaped who we see ourselves as.

Narrative inquiry as a research methodology allows the researcher to investigate the landscapes of action and consciousness (Bruner, 1986) that narrators impart to their life stories. In doing so, narrative inquiry rests on two ontological assumptions. The first, from a constructivist perspective, is that knowledge is a “constructed reality whereby we impose meaning upon the actual world in ways that seem familiar and ‘understandable,’ in ways that ‘fit’ what we understand already” (Mildon, 1992, p. 34). In a sense, then, there are two worlds: the actual and the constructed. Yet, as Mildon (1992) notes, the constructed world is the only one we can claim to ‘know’. In analyzing the life stories of participants, narrative approaches recognize that, for example, “redemption sequences

are not real events in people's lives. They are instead ways of telling stories about the self, narrative strategies for self-making" (McAdams, 2006, p. 90).

From a constructionist perspective, narratives also reflect that knowledge about the world is heavily influenced by interactions with the world. The ways in which we understand the world, Burr (2003) writes, are not only "specific to particular cultures and periods of history, they are seen as products of that culture and history, and are dependent upon the particular social and economic arrangements prevailing in that culture at that time" (pp. 3-4). Narratives are inherently cultural in that the ways in which we structure stories and the elements we expect stories to contain are drawn from the norms and traditions of a particular society. For example, McAdams (2006) found that many highly productive and caring American adults narrate a redemption script in which, at a young age they develop a set of core values that eventually help them to overcome the struggles and vicissitudes that come their way later in life and to emerge a strong, generative citizen. While not all Americans have this story for themselves, most are familiar with the general formula and aspire to it (McAdams, 2006). Beyond cultural influences, constructionist researchers recognize that

though each person interprets the events he or she encounters in a somewhat distinct manner, he or she is likely, at the same time, to bring to bear the understandings held by peers, family, friends, coreligionists, or members of other groups to which he or she belongs. (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 29)

Thus, both our cultural and interpersonal ties influence our knowledge of the world and of ourselves.

From both a constructivist and constructionist perspective, the objective of the researcher is to "look for the specific and detailed and try to build an understanding based on those specifics" in order to ascertain how individuals view "their worlds, their work, and the events they have experienced or observed (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 28). From my perspective, the best way to elicit these views was through analyzing narrative accounts provided in semi-structured interviews. In the sections to follow in this chapter, the research procedures, ethical and philosophical considerations and analytical framework that guided these interviews and analysis are described.

### 3.3. Sample and Recruitment

In order to examine the processes of criminality and desistance, I selected participants using criterion-based or purposive sampling. This technique is most applicable in research projects when a particular type of person is best-suited to provide insight into the phenomenon of interest to the researcher (Palys, 2008). Being that I was interested in the experiences particular to former prisoners who had gone straight, probabilistic sampling did not fit the needs of this research. The criteria guiding inclusion in this study were that participants must:

- 1) Be male, over the age of 19;
- 2) Have a prolific history of interactions with the criminal justice system;
- 3) No longer be incarcerated at the time of the interview

These criteria were chosen for a number of reasons. With regard to the first, males make up 89% of admissions to sentenced custody provincially and 94% federally in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2015), making them of greater theoretical and practical value to research on prison and reintegration than female offenders. Within the lower mainland of BC, the pool from which to draw male participants from Community Residential Facilities (halfway houses) is also much greater. There are nine facilities offering 159 beds to former male prisoners and only three facilities offering 29 beds to former female prisoners. In terms of the age criterion, 19 years old is the age of majority in British Columbia. Interviewing participants younger than this would have meant far too much 'red tape' to navigate. Further, the vast majority of offenders desist by their early twenties (Moffitt, 1993). These individuals are adolescence-limited offenders and have not historically been of much theoretical interest to desistance researchers.

Regarding the second criterion, that participants must have been prolific offenders, several studies have shown that around 5 percent of offenders account for approximately 50 percent of crime (e.g., Farrington, Ohlin & Wilson, 1986; Home Office, 2001). As such, studying this group is of the most theoretical and practical value for desistance research. If we can develop an understanding of how a subset of the greatest-risk offenders eventually go straight, correctional programming and policy will benefit immensely.

The third inclusion criterion changed throughout the course of the study. When the Study Details were initially approved by SFU's Research Ethics Board (REB), I interviewed six individuals who were, at the time, on federal parole. The intent of interviewing parolees was that they would still have interactions with CSC on a fairly regular basis and could perhaps speak more accurately to these experiences given the proximity in time. However, approximately halfway through data collection, CSC contacted the School of Criminology at SFU and informed us that they have a 'long-standing' policy which does not allow outside researchers to interview parolees without CSC's prior approval. This approval process gives ownership and control of research data to the organization, which would effectively remove the confidentiality assured to participants by the researcher, and limit participants' willingness to be forthcoming. While none of our faculty could find any legal basis that legitimately gave CSC authority to adopt this policy, we were advised to cease interviewing parolees to avoid any legal complications for ourselves and the School. As such, I switched to interviewing former prisoners no longer on parole to avoid triggering CSC's approval process.

To find a sample that met the criteria outlined above I reached out to a number of contacts who work within or conduct research related to the criminal justice system in the lower mainland of British Columbia. After outlining the type of individuals I was interested in speaking with, these contacts circulated a recruitment letter<sup>3</sup> to potential participants that explained the nature of the study, risks involved and the measures in place to maintain their confidentiality. Interested candidates were asked to contact me to have any questions or concerns addressed and to set up a meeting.

The final sample for this study included six former prisoners currently on parole, three whose parole had ended and two who had never been on parole to begin with. At the time of being interviewed, participants' ages ranged from 32 to 65 years old, the average being 46. The total time spent incarcerated was between three and 33 years. While two participants had under five years incarcerated, I still consider them to be prolific offenders given the lengthy criminal histories described in their narratives that did not result in convictions. Crimes committed by members of the sample included property

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A

crime, drug trafficking, assault, robbery and homicide. There was a broad range in the time since participants' release as well; three had been released under six months from the time of the interview, while a number had been out of prison for over a decade. Finally, two participants were Aboriginal, one South-Asian and the rest were Caucasian. I have chosen not to include a descriptives table outlining these characteristics for each participant to protect confidentiality as best as possible.

### **3.4. The Interviews**

Interviews with each participant were conducted at a mutually agreed-upon location that was most comfortable and convenient for them to reach and to share their story in. The majority of interviews took place at participants' homes or the halfway houses they resided in, one was conducted in a coffee shop and one over the phone. Prior to beginning each interview, I provided each participant with a copy of my informed consent form<sup>4</sup> that explained the nature of the research, their role, the risks involved in participating and the plan for maintaining their confidentiality in any report or publication produced from the research. Consent to participate was given verbally, to ensure that there was no concrete paper trail of participant involvement.

The length of the interviews ranged from one to two hours. With the permission of each participant, a digital audio recorder was used to capture the audio from the interviews. In order to address the research questions for this study, I chose to conduct these interviews in a semi-structured format using a modified version of McAdams' (1995) Life Story Narrative Interview protocol.<sup>5</sup> The Life Story protocol has been used in past research on desistance from crime (Liem & Richardson, 2014; Maruna, 2001; Wilkinson, 2009) as it offers a straightforward and comprehensive means by which individuals can chronicle their own stories. It allows researchers to capture individuals' own perspectives about important events and relationships in their lives, as outlined in Section 3.2 above.

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix B

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix C

The modified version of the Life Story protocol developed for the current study consisted of four major sections. The interviews began by describing the overall purpose of the research to participants: "Criminal justice organisations are interested in why people stop offending. Lots of 'other' people (experts, community, etc.) think lots of things about why people stop offending - we want to find out what you think - you are the expert." From here, I asked participants to provide some basic demographic information (i.e., age, number of years in prison, age of first arrest, latest release date).

I then asked participants to give a broad, overview of their life story. This portion of the interview was generally the longest, ranging from 30 minutes to one hour. The broad overview was primarily self-directed by the participant, allowing me to understand what types of events and relationships the participants viewed as important in their lives as well as get a general picture of how they viewed themselves. There were, of course, times when probing questions were necessary to get participants to dig deeper into their stories. Some of these men talked at great length with minimal input from me, while others were quite brief and needed to be pushed to provide more detail.

Following the broad overview, several questions were asked about critical events in participants' lives, positive and negative influences, and their plans for the future. These questions were designed to get deeper into understanding the pathways to and from criminality. As noted by various researchers in the past (e.g., Maruna, 2001; Giordano et al., 2007), it is important to conceptualize offenders' views about the challenges and positive aspects of their relationships with family, friends and society if we are to understand what drives them to persist or desist from crime.

The final section of the protocol used in the study specifically asked participants about the impact that correctional programs and prison had on their lives, as well as what they perceived to be the factors that had led them away from or, alternatively, to go back to a life of crime. This section was designed to return participants to the idea that corrections workers, government, academics and the general public have a lot of influence on programs and policy, but that the perspectives of former prisoners are rarely heard. As such, in this section I asked participants to give their own opinions on the corrections

system and how various aspects either help them stay away from or drive them back toward crime.

### **3.5. Data Management and Analysis**

Following each interview the raw audio file was transferred from the digital recording device and subsequently transcribed with the aid of Express Scribe, a freeware transcription program. Rubin & Rubin (2005) suggest that transcribing immediately following the interview is good practice in qualitative research, as the process of re-listening to and being immersed in the text allows for preliminary analysis to begin. To the greatest degree possible, I tried to transcribe the interviews within one week, although in some cases my outside life pushed the timeline back a bit. All but one of the participants were assigned pseudonyms during the transcription process. A single participant requested that his real name be retained in the report due to his cultural heritage. After transcription, the audio file was deleted immediately to avoid any unintended use and ensure confidentiality was protected to the greatest degree possible. To that end, throughout the entire data collection and analysis process, all project-related files were stored in an encrypted partition on my hard drive and also backed up in an encrypted partition on a USB Flash Drive. Under the advice of Dr. Ted Palys, I used VeraCrypt to create the encrypted partitions on both drives.

After interviews were transcribed, they were imported into QSR's NVivo 11 qualitative data analysis software. While the analysis of narrative data can be done in a variety of ways (see, for example, McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; McAdams, 1994; Pals, 2006; Rosenthal & Fischer-Rosenthal, 2004), I chose to adopt a grounded theory approach (see Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to the analysis of narratives, as described by Polkinghorne (1995). Following Bruner's (1986) dichotomy of ways of thinking, Polkinghorne (1995) writes that

paradigmatic-type narrative inquiry gathers stories for its data and uses paradigmatic analytic procedures to produce taxonomies and categories out of the common elements across the database. Narrative-type narrative inquiry gathers events and happenings as its data and uses narrative analytic procedures to produce explanatory stories. (p. 5)

The latter approach is more suitable when the data collected are not already in storied form, whereas the former is more suitable in the opposite case. The data collected for the current study were, for the most part, in a storied form as offered by participants, thus, the paradigmatic type of analysis seemed most appropriate.

In this type of analysis, the objective is to “locate common themes or conceptual manifestations among the stories collected as data. . . . The researcher inspects different stories to discover which notions appear across them” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 13). From my perspective, the three-stage inductive grounded theory approach to coding outlined by Corbin & Strauss (1990) seemed the best-fit method for drawing out these “common themes or conceptual manifestations.” In the first stage of analysis, open coding, I went through the transcript of each interview line-by-line and identified concepts. As coding progressed, as advised by Corbin & Strauss (2015) constant comparisons were made to determine if these concepts held true within and between participants’ narratives. Fracturing the data in this way “forces examination of preconceived notions and ideas by judging these against the data themselves” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 423). By the end of the open coding stage, nearly 100 unique codes had been drawn out of the data.

The intent of the next stage of Corbin and Strauss’ (1990) coding scheme, axial or focused coding, is to move from a more literal level to a conceptual one (Bailey, 2007). This is primarily done by considering how concepts outlined during open coding might belong to more abstract categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). For example, one of the categories from my own analysis in the current study was “A Sense of Fatalism.” This category enveloped a number of ways in which participants described their lack of agency in offending, including that criminality was a part of who they were, that an alien force seemed to be driving their actions, good influences had come too late and that some had resigned themselves to being a criminal for the rest of their lives. At the end of axial coding, 37 categories were identified, and several of these were further collapsed during the writing of Chapter 4 of this report.

Through selective coding, the final stage of grounded theory analysis, Corbin & Strauss (2015) propose that categories developed during axial coding be brought together and subsumed under a core category. The core category is a main theme that is

broad enough to be representative of all participants in the study. . . . It is the category among others that seems to have the greatest explanatory power and the ability to link the other categories to it and to each other. (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, pp. 188-189).

For the current study, two interrelated core categories were identified: the roles of personal agency and of relationships in both the pathways to and from criminality, which are discussed in Chapter 5.

### **3.6. Ethics and Establishing Trustworthiness and Authenticity**

In their piece on ethics in the research process, Guillemin & Gillam (2004) distinguish between procedural ethics and ethics in practice. The former generally refers to the process of submitting and getting approval for a research project through an institutional review board or other similar ethics committees. While many view this requirement as simply an arduous set of hoops to jump through, Guillemin and Gillam (2004) note that this initial step can provide researchers with a checklist of ethical issues to be mindful of as they collect and report their data. In the case of the current study, after approximately five months, two full board reviews and three versions of study documents, the research was approved by SFU's REB on March 9, 2016. Further amendments regarding the type of participants to be interviewed were approved through delegated review on October 14, 2016. While this process was indeed arduous, and sometimes frustrating, it was ultimately valuable in outlining steps for maintaining confidentiality of the data, the consent process, recruiting participants and thinking about the risks and benefits involved.

In terms of actually engaging in the research process itself, Guillemin & Gillam (2004) write about the dilemmas researchers face in deciding how to respond in "ethically important moments." They use the example of a participant disclosing that her husband has been sexually abusing their daughter. In this case, beyond deciding whether or not to breach confidentiality and disclose that abuse to the authorities, there are a number of other micro-ethical decisions to be made:

Does the researcher let the disclosure pass or take it up in some way? And in what way—what words to say, what tone of voice to use? Turn off the tape recorder or keep it running? Abandon the interview plan or try to return to it? Offer to discuss the situation or offer to help in some way? (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 264)

Unfortunately, such dilemmas are not typically addressed by ethics committees and, thus, there is often a gap between procedural ethics and ethics in practice.

Guillemin & Gillam (2004) suggest that one way to bridge this gap is through the practice of reflexivity in research, which involves thinking about the ways in which knowledge is actually constructed during the research process. Describing her own assumptions about knowledge-creation in narrative inquiry, Charmaz (2008) writes,

(1) Reality is multiple, processual, and constructed—but constructed under particular conditions; (2) the research process emerges from interaction; (3) it takes into account the researcher's positionality, as well as that of the research participants; (4) the researcher and researched coconstruct the data—data are a product of the research process, not simply observed objects of it. Researchers are part of the research situation, and their positions, privileges, perspectives, and interactions affect it. (p. 402)

Two things are evident here. First, interview-based research is an inherently interpersonal process. Accordingly, scrutiny must be applied to interactions between researcher and participant. Guillemin & Gillam (2004) caution that “in these interactions lie the possibilities of respecting the autonomy, dignity, and privacy of research participants and also the risks of failing to do so, thus perhaps causing harm to the participants in various ways” (p. 275). In the practice of my own research, I made efforts to give this respect to participants both during the interviews and the analysis and writing stages. I came to interviews with a list of free support services in case any participants were re-traumatized by recounting their early lives, and made sure to allow them time to either regroup or move to a new topic if they became overwhelmed. At times it was extremely difficult to listen to their stories and when listening to the audio during transcription I noticed my awkward responses in emotional moments. In subsequent interviews I tried to be more responsive and comforting, but, for me, this is an area that still needs improvement for my future qualitative inquiry.

A second element of responsivity, evident in Charmaz's (2008) quote highlighted above, is that knowledge in the research process is co-constructed. This means that researchers' biases, assumptions and beliefs can influence knowledge-creation if they are not cognizant of these beforehand (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Without doing so, Creswell & Miller (2000) contend the data may become imbued with the views and presuppositions of the researcher rather than being reflective of participants' own views. Before and throughout the current study, I reflected on my own views of how the desistance process works and CSC. For example, prior to beginning the project, I recognized my preconceived belief that desistance would be sparked by the support of some outside force, which caused a re-evaluation of prisoners' identities, goals and so forth. The constant comparison method outlined by Corbin & Strauss (1990) helped to avoid imparting this belief upon the data, and I think that the results provided in Chapter 4 support this, as it became clear that the desistance process is not straightforward and often began without much outside influence at all.

Reflexivity is part of a larger desire for the results to be credible. In that regard, Corbin & Strauss (1990) note that "the usual canons of 'good science' should be retained; but they require *redefinition* in order to fit the realities of qualitative research" (p. 418, emphasis in original). The usual measures of good science from a positivist framework are external and internal validity, generalizability and reliability. These measures, however, are not congruent with how knowledge is acquired and relayed in qualitative inquiry (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). As such, evaluation criteria specific to qualitative research are necessary. Lincoln & Guba (1985) have outlined alternative measures for establishing validity to include trustworthiness and authenticity; for example, by aiming for credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In establishing validity for my own study, I utilized three strategies suggested by Creswell & Miller (2000). First among these was to be reflexive throughout the research process, as described above. Second was to search for disconfirming evidence within the data. For each theme, I looked for examples of participants who deviated from the majority. Doing so, according to Creswell & Miller (2000), "provides further support of the account's credibility because reality, according to constructivists, is multiple and complex" (p. 127). Finally, I relied on the use of 'thick description' in presenting the results of the study. For Denzin (1989), a thick description

does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard. (p. 83)

Using thick descriptions provides credibility to a study in that it allows the voices of participants to be at the forefront, and allows the reader to appreciate the realities of participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Ultimately, the goal of narrative inquiry research is to provide rich description and analysis of participants' experiences and the meanings they attach to them. In the current chapter, I have described the specific methods and philosophy used to provide such description and analysis in this study. The next chapter presents main themes that emerged from interviews conducted with the men who participated in the research.

## **Chapter 4.**

### **Results**

The life stories relayed by participants in this study were generally broken into two broad phases. In the first, labelled here as the pathways to criminality, they spoke of their relationships with family, school and the broader social contexts in which they were raised. Participants described their perceptions of how these contexts shaped their views of the world, who they associated with and their trajectories towards criminal behaviour. In the second phase, interviewees spoke about the process of going straight, their decision-making processes behind it, and the skills and support systems required to bring about change. In the following sections, the subthemes presented for both of these phases illustrate the commonalities and differences among participants in terms of the continuity and change in their offending behaviour. Finally, I elaborate on participants' reflections on the impact of both formal correctional and more informal (e.g., volunteer-based, voluntary participation) treatments.

#### **4.1. Pathways to Criminality**

##### **4.1.1. Trouble at Home**

While the form and extent varied, each of the participants described their early lives as being characterized by some combination of physical, verbal, or sexual abuse, neglect and general family discord. At the age of five, for example, Bill's mother unexpectedly passed away and he was subsequently placed in the foster care system. For the rest of his childhood and adolescence, he bounced from home to home and intermittently spent time in youth correctional institutions. Recalling his experiences of abuse while in foster care, Bill commented,

Self worth was taken away from me when I was in foster care. I was treated like a dog. I remember that in the foster home I had to go upstairs and drink out of the toilet because the lady wouldn't give me anything to drink because she said I went to the bathroom too much. So you lose a lot of your self worth when you see also how they treat

their own kids and they're basically in it because there's money there. They don't care.

Similarly, Jack had been beaten consistently by both his mother and father. When he went to school with the bruises from this abuse, he was taken into the custody of the Ministry of Social Services and cycled between various foster and group homes until age 17. Later, in his 40s, Jack was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, which he attributed to "the sexual abuse, the traumas of like the stuff I've seen in my life. Men being shot, their faces beaten off, at a young age. Having my hands burnt over a gas burner stove, that kind of thing. Stabbed in the face when I was 3 years old. Pretty rough, violent life."

For some participants, parts of the torment they faced during their early lives was more psychological in nature. In Randy's case, he was denied love and respect by his father and uncle. He recalled that his uncle refused to refer to him by his birth name, but instead used a slang word from their home country that roughly translated to "dumber than a Russian boot." This refusal of recognition was pervasive over the course of Randy's relationships with his family. In another prominent scene from his life story, Randy remembered asking his uncle if he could sit on his knee and have a hug. To this, his uncle responded by throwing him across the room and telling him that if you hug a young boy you turn him into a homosexual. Needless to say, that was the last time Randy asked his uncle for any affection.

In other cases, the actions of participants' parents or guardians were not abusive, per say, but perhaps equally as psychologically damaging:

I had a crushing thing with my dad. . . . I was like 14. He was coming out of jail and I was visiting him. I had a girlfriend. He was hammered that night. We were drinking in a bar and had a motel room. I guess he got too drunk. I kind of dozed off. He called my girlfriend into his bed and he was trying to fuck her. . . . He tried to pick her up because he was hammered and he wanted to get lucky, I guess because he just got out of jail. But I mean, like, that was a hurting fucking time. I hated my dad for a long time for it. I ransacked his house, smashed things. I did a lot of things that I'm not proud of. But that's just not a thing I accept. He was an old man at that time and she was only 16 too. Just for the disrespect to me. He disrespected me that way. He'd never admit it. Even to this day he won't admit it. He knows that I know and we never kind of made an end to that. I'm sure it eats him up a little bit too. But I'm able to let it go now, but that held me for a long time. That kept the

stupidness in me, the addiction. My father disrespects me that much, I guess other people probably disrespect me that much, so what am I? A piece of shit? That's the way I felt. (Terry)

It is clear from this passage that Terry views the lack of respect his father showed him as playing some role in the lack of respect he felt for himself. As he states above, this feeling fed his addiction to painkillers, which he continued to struggle with until his late 40s.

Many of the men interviewed for this study also spoke about the impact of being neglected during their formative years. In some cases, participants' perceptions were that their parents seemed more interested in pursuing their own needs than in raising their children. One participant, for example, recounted that his mother would "go out and she would stay at her boyfriend's. She'd be gone for days, partying or whatever" (Aaron), leaving him and his brother in the care of neighbours or friends. As a result of this fractured and intermittent relationship, Aaron distanced himself from home when his mother returned, spending his time wandering the streets and getting into trouble. Another participant, Cory, had similar experiences with his alcoholic mother. He remarked that when he began getting into trouble at a young age, his mother

threw me out and I was so much smarter than that. She just gave up on me, so I gave up on myself. Said 'fuck it' and I didn't care about anything. When you're a kid and you don't care about anything it puts you in a rough spot. (Cory)

As a result, his antisocial behaviour intensified and he spent the majority of his adolescence moving from group homes to youth corrections institutions and vice versa.

While the majority of participants perceived their parents' neglect as self-centered, one participant, Matt, described it as being well-intentioned. In their early lives, Matt's parents had lived through times of severe economic depression. Never wanting their own children to be deprived as they had been, they worked six days a week to provide a good life and a home in an affluent neighbourhood. Matt described his parents as loving and supportive, but also recognized that their being away from home so much created in him a deep yearning for attention:

I was kind of like this Jekyll and Hyde. At home I was this perfect little angel kid. By the time I was 9 years old I was cooking dinner for my parents, who both worked. When they'd come home I'd have just about everything ready for them. I was always on time and I did house chores, all that kind of stuff. But when I left the house I turned into this little monster that did everything that he could to be disruptive. I got attention from it. Again, back to this probable cause of [being] neglected in a sense. They loved me and everything but they weren't around enough and so I felt neglected and sought attention. My easiest way of attention was bad behaviour, so I became the worst bad behaved kid.

In other cases, instances of abuse and neglect interacted in more drastic ways. From the age of five through to age fourteen, Shane was sexually abused by three separate individuals who were considered close to the family. Despite countless attempts to have someone in authority step in and protect him, Shane described simply being ignored when trying to turn in the worst of the three abusers:

I went and told the police that this was happening and they said, 'The guy owns his own business, he's a respectful person in the community and he wouldn't do that.' My mom knew, my stepdad knew that I was being molested. My teachers knew, the principal knew, at the school I went to. Almost everybody knew about that.

Fed up with being abused and having it brushed off by everyone he considered close, he left home at age fourteen: "I wanted to get away from that so I told [my mother], I said, 'I'm leaving. Don't look for me,' and nobody came and looked for me" (Shane). As a result, Shane spent his adolescence living on the streets and was in prison for armed robbery with violence by age 17.

#### **4.1.2. Making Sense of Offending Patterns**

Through listening to and analyzing participants' accounts of their offending behaviour, several types of motivational forces became clear. In the following section, three overarching themes that capture precisely what these men got out of engaging in crime are presented.

## ***Comradery and Thrill-Seeking***

The most consistent motivations for offending, highlighted by 10 of the 11 sample members, were feelings of comradery and belonging amongst criminal associates, and the thrills of learning and committing crimes with these associates. In the absence of parents and guardians to model prosocial behaviour and provide care, many participants instead learned from older, antisocial peers. For instance, at the age of 12, Terry's father went to prison and his mother ran off. While his brother was placed in a group home, Terry somehow slipped through the cracks and avoided the Children's Aid system. To support himself, he began working under-the-table part-time jobs, but soon realized that the menial wages he was offered were not enough and that more could be made stealing and fencing. Describing how he became ensnared in such a lifestyle, Terry noted that he "learned from older people. I always hung around older people, mostly criminals, because that was the kind of people I could relate to, because I was a criminal myself." Hanging around with more experienced criminals allowed participants to learn the 'tricks of the trade' and to become more successful themselves. Beginning around age nine, Aaron began spending a lot of his time with guys in high school:

They would boost me in through the window. I would go in and open the door for them. They used to use me to commit the initial crime, because I couldn't get charged. Then they would come in afterwards. They taught me how to start cars with a pair of scissors and just, like, whatever. So I would go start a car, get it going for them. Then they would come hop in and they'd usually drop me off not too far. They'd give me money too.

Evidently, Aaron not only acquired skills from associating with older, antisocial peers, but also status. The perceived admiration that participants received for engaging in criminal behaviour, or from the money and material goods that were the spoils of such behaviour, was a major impetus for many of the men in this study. Cory remarked that one of the reasons he began stealing and dealing drugs is because the group homes he lived in did not provide residents with any spending money. As a teenager, the realities of dating and partying made him feel that crime was his only means of living a 'normal' teenage life, at least in terms of the social expectations. Recalling a similar dynamic during his teenage years, another participant found theft, shoplifting and robbery particularly useful because "we always had money and always had booze. We were the type of people that you'd want to hang out with because we always had something" (Jack). In both of these cases,

and indeed for others in the study, offending provided a sense of being valued and socially sought-after.

Perhaps the best example of the value of receiving respect and admiration for doing what would conventionally be considered 'bad behaviour' comes from Randy. As described previously, Randy was denied any affirmation by his family, including the refusal to call him by his birth name. Despite being physically, sexually and psychologically abused by both his father and uncle, Randy still, albeit unsuccessfully, tried his hardest to get their recognition by obeying their commands and doing hard work around the farm. The opportunity for respect and affirmation did, however, come later down the road when he began associating with a local biker gang. Randy recalled hanging out one day in their favourite bar, when one of the older bikers instructed him to "go take care of" another patron that had been mouthing the gang off. After a bit of an altercation with the individual, Randy said that something snapped inside of him and he bit the man's ear off. Rather than being met with horror from the bikers, he received praise:

You can imagine what it was like when I bit the guy's ear off and these guys are coming in and hugging me, these bikers are hugging me, 'That's our brother,' kind of thing. They were proud of me. I harm a human being and they're proud of me and I get my kudos. I'd been good and get nothing. Guess what, I used to have this saying: 'If I can't be good and get something, I'm going to be the best bad you ever saw.' I used to joke about it, but you know, I did become that. I became very violent. I went overboard (Randy).

Realizing that he could receive this type of a response from behaving badly, as opposed to the non-response or abuse he had received as a child, Randy continued to grow closer to the gang and became heavily involved in their day-to-day activities.

From the stories provided by several of the men interviewed, part of the allure of co-offending seemed to be that engaging in risky behaviour was inherently thrilling. Aaron, for example, recalled a period of his life where he was

stealing lots of vehicles and hanging out with these girls and showing off. We would go and break into shit together. I got caught up in this nonstop stealing all kinds of different vehicles. I would steal a car, drive around the corner and half a block down, get out, dig through it and see

a better truck or something that I wanted and I would steal that. I had usually a couple of other people.

When asked what was going on in his mind during these escapades, he responded that he

just went off. I don't know how to explain it. Every day was like a different adventure of me going out and breaking into something. Grabbing money out of cashier's hands while she's trying to give somebody change and running. I did all kinds of shit. (Aaron)

Likewise, Jack described similar sequences of events when co-offending with his friends, noting the excitement of dares and the dynamic of one-upmanship. Again describing his motivations for crimes such as break-and-enters, he said,

It was like a shopping store basically. That's how I thought of it. At that time I didn't feel I was doing anybody any harm. Not at all. To me, it was filling my needs, my wants. My friends' wants too. (Jack)

Four of the participants in the study also spoke about co-offending with their siblings. Coming from neglecting or broken families, where participants and their siblings were often split up in the foster care system, this co-offending seemed to be a way to maintain their relationships. As discussed earlier, Bill's mother passed away when he was five years old and he and his brothers were subsequently split up in foster homes. As a teenager, Bill reconnected with his younger brother. He recalled that his brother

smoked his first cigarette with me, he smoked his first joint with me, probably drank his first beer with me, stole his first car with me. I'm pretty sure he punched out people first with me. I wasn't always the best influence and . . . we started doing time together. (Bill)

Other participants looked up to their siblings who had become criminally involved and had achieved status for doing so. Matt recalled that he and his older brother were in a competition of sorts as young boys to see who could get into the most trouble. At a point when his negative behaviour surpassed his brother's, he said that he "kind of felt proud that I was more bad than him" (Matt). Later, when Matt received a five-year sentence for armed robbery, he was sent to the same penitentiary where his brother was also

incarcerated at the time. He commented that serving time with his brother was a welcome sentence, since

my brother was a big huge guy and had lots of friends and status in prison. Because I was his brother I kind of fell right into the ranks no problem. I felt like I belonged there and I had friends there. (Matt)

### ***It Felt 'Normal' or Justified***

A second overarching theme present in the narratives of the study participants was a sense that, at the time, offending was seen as either normal or justified. Given the abuse, deprivation and perceptions of institutional and societal injustice faced by the men in this study, it is not surprising that they found ways to neutralize their behaviour in these ways. The following exchange illustrates how Matt justified his antisocial leanings based on what he had once believed to be a miscarriage of justice:

Matt: Me and two guys and this girl were out collecting money. We had some stuff in the car and they ended up charging us with housebreaking tools, but we weren't housebreaking. I thought I was going to beat the beef but I ended up getting convicted. Felt like I was so abused. . . . I had revenge on my mind and I felt very abused and thought that society now owed me for the 9 months I got for something I didn't do. Even though I was breaking the law every day. At the time it just seemed to be such an injustice.

Damon: So you had a feeling of revenge for society in general?

Matt: Yeah. . . . And I think I'd [already started to have] that already. I saw such a disparity. I was hanging around with kids that were kind of marginalized when I was young, but I was brought up in an affluent neighbourhood. I had friends that their parents were millionaires and I had other friends whose parents were on welfare. I saw that and didn't think it was fair. I started thinking right there that crime was the answer and working for a living was a stupid way of doing things.

Here it is clear that Matt's observance of a stark division between the haves and have-nots had already begun to sour his opinions about society. When he experienced these injustices himself it further solidified this view and his alignment with antisocial culture and behaviour.

While the views of injustice held by Matt are perhaps best-described as philosophical in nature, another participant viewed his crime as justified because of the intensely personal impact of his earlier abuse:

There was 3 people that molested me. One was my aunt and one was an owner of a pool hall, and my victim. . . . One of the times while he was molesting me, I told him, 'You'd better kill me or else I will come back. I'll be bigger and stronger than you and I will get my revenge.' It kept on going on and on and on. I always thought about that. So when I was in Spy Hill in Calgary, I asked a couple guys if they wanted to do this with me. What I didn't tell 'em was that I was molested. I didn't tell them that was the reason I wanted to go and see him. And I told them that he has his own company, he has a lot of money and they agreed. When I got out I waited for them and we got together once they got out. I told them, I said, 'This is what you'll do: Two people stand outside. I will go into his apartment. I will do whatever I have to do and after I'm done, then they could have the rest'. . . . We made the plan that I was going to go in and do what I had to do. . . . I kicked the door in and we looked for him and he was hiding in his closet. I punched him and I kicked him. That's when he died, from all that beating. I wanted to make sure that he was dead, so I had a shoelace in my pocket and I took that out, I tied it around his neck and I drug him around his apartment by that shoelace. I still wanted to make sure that he was gone. I drug him into his apartment. I hoisted him up by that shoelace and I tied it around the doorknob of his bedroom, 'cause I took him and drug him into his bedroom. . . . I knew that he had pictures of kids that he molested. Hundreds of pictures. 'Cause he wanted to take a picture of me. I wouldn't let him. I looked for those pictures, I found them and I put them all on his bed face up. The anger was just too much. I couldn't...The anger that I had towards him... I can't express how much anger, hate, I had for this guy because of what he did and all the kids that he...The lives that he ruined for what he did. So I went into his kitchen, I grabbed a chair. I put it right beside him, I stood on that chair and I jumped on his neck. I said, 'I hope that you are gone now and that you will never, ever hurt another child again' (Shane).

From this passage and other portions of his narrative, much insight can be drawn about Shane's motivation for murder. It is clear that being sexually abused as a young boy was deeply psychologically damaging. Elsewhere in his story, Shane spoke about his inability to engage in romantic relationships, a strong aversion to substance abuse given that one of his abusers had drugged him, and a deep-seated disdain for sex-offenders. The strength of these feelings is evident in the modus operandi of the killing, including the bludgeoning with his fists and the displaying of the photographs of abused children on the bed. When he was finally arrested and charged, Shane remarked that he felt at peace.

Several other participants justified their crimes as being necessary for survival. One participant, Darren, described the realities of growing up in a tough inner-city neighbourhood in the United States where gang violence was prevalent. Over time and repeatedly being outnumbered in altercations with gang members, he learned that using weapons was his best way to survive. This technique carried over into his adult life. In his first time in trouble with the law, Darren “got into a fight with my neighbour and then he wouldn’t leave my house after that. He threatened my wife and me. So, I took a knife and stabbed him up about 15 times.” Several participants described their crimes as being necessary for survival on more economic terms. After catching his father cheating on his mother, Wayne was kicked out of his home at age 14 with 75 dollars and a backpack full of clothes. He spent the next decade or so hitchhiking across the United States, mostly stealing to get by: “When I was hitchhiking, if I needed something I would just go and shoplift something at Radio Shack and turn around and sell it and have money for two or three days. I’d carry on, go state to state” (Wayne). As described earlier, Terry had the same type of experience after his parents ran off and he slipped through the cracks of the foster care system, left to fend for himself. At such a young age, with little education and no stable accommodation, it is not surprising that these individuals resorted to crime to support themselves.

As a result of being abused or being left to support themselves at a young age, several of the interviewees had grown up to believe that hurting others or offending to make ends meet was ‘normal’. Jack, for instance, commented on some realizations about his power/control issues recently garnered through therapy:

What’s very obvious to some is not to me. I don’t see your fear as fear, I feel it as normal. That’s normal. That’s the way you should be. I grew up in an environment like that, being yelled and screamed at all the time, so me seeing you cower makes me feel that you’re weak. . . . That’s basically what it all boils down to is the control. If I get you upset, then I win. That’s like a game, but I don’t think of it as a game. It’s been my life.

These types of cognitive distortions extended even to situations where some members of the sample had tried to go straight. The following exchange illustrates this phenomenon quite well:

Wayne: I wanted a job for Radio Shack up in the States. I wanted to be a rep for them. I wanted to do shoplifting control in their stores. I had made a proposal. I went to two stores a week studying nonstop. I wanted \$50,000 a year in my bank account and I wanted credit cards for expenses and my car paid for and I would do that job. . . . I told them I would save them a hundred thousand dollars per year, per store. He gave me a second interview and when that day came, I went up to his office and I put about \$3800 worth of stolen goods on his desk. The guy flipped, freaked, had me thrown out, security, he wanted me arrested...

Damon: Were you doing this to show him that there were security flaws?

Wayne: To show him how stupid they were. He did not take it. I got carried out of that fucking building. It was unreal. I told him, 'If I could do that in two days, look how much you're losing. I'm Joe Nobody here. Some people do this for a living. Just imagine how much you could lose.' No, he did not take it. That was kind of weird, I thought it would've been effective, but not at all.

It is evident here that, despite being well-intentioned, Wayne's years of stealing and scamming to survive had skewed his ability to appreciate the norms of conventional society.

While the majority of the nine participants who fell under this theme had justified or normalized offending itself, one participant said the correctional institutions restored his feelings of normalcy. Recall that Bill spent much of his adolescence cycling between foster care and group homes, where he was sexually and physically abused. During the times that he was not in these homes, he was being held in youth correctional institutions and psychiatric facilities. When asked why he thought he went in and out of the correctional system and back to the criminal lifestyle so frequently, Bill responded that he thought

it was more wanting to go back where I was safe, which was in the institution. . . . I never got abused in the institution or in the psychiatric hospital. For me, being in the institution was a safe place. Prison, for me, was just another institution. So basically what happens is my crimes were done to go back to prison

For Bill, then, the reality of spending time in prison was less terrifying than the prospect of being sent back to a foster home and being abused. As Jack noted during his interview, as long as you get “three hots and a cot”<sup>6</sup> inside, you can survive.

### ***Feeding Addictions and Avoiding Emotional Pain***

The final theme that captures the motivations for engaging in criminal behaviour was that, for nine of 11 participants, crime was a way to fund their addictions to drugs and alcohol. Aaron quite succinctly summed up that mentality in his own case, and it seemed to capture that of many of the other participants as well:

So yeah, I did meth and basically if it wasn't bolted down, I would steal it and if it was bolted down or locked up, I would figure out a way to break the lock, manipulate it. That's what I've done. I never paid for anything in stores. Instead of stopping at the till and talking to the cashier, I would just go out the door. That's been my life. Never had any desire to work or be responsible or anything (Aaron).

For Aaron and other participants in the study, it was commonplace to hear them speak about it being far easier to steal jewelry or a computer and sell those items than it was to get a job and earn that same amount of money for working an entire week. The lack of desire for a normal job was especially true considering that a majority of the men interviewed had never finished high school, and in some cases even elementary, and thus had bleak prospects for legitimate employment in the first place.

It was quite apparent that behind engaging in substance abuse itself were myriad unresolved emotional traumas. Getting intoxicated provided a momentary escape from these traumas. As one participant noted, “it got to a point in my life where crack was basically my life. That's all I wanted. That's the only thing that took away everything, my reality” (Jack). The reality that many of the interviewees were trying to take away was the lingering effects of childhood abuse. Speaking about his own issues with drugs and alcohol, Rick remarked that

As I kid I was in a lot of pain from all the beatings and stuff like that from my father. He used to use this big strap. He'd strip me down naked

<sup>6</sup> “Three hots and a cot” is terminology used in prison to refer to the fact that you are always provided three hot meals a day and a bed to sleep in.

so he wouldn't hit any cloth and he'd take this big strap and literally I'd have welts covered from head to toe. When I drank the alcohol it numbed my, it made me forget about everything, which is what I was looking for at that point. Because I was in so much pain and frustration. When I drank, I'd just become oblivious. I didn't care. It just progressed and progressed and progressed.

As addictions did progress for many participants, using substances to numb oneself became its own trap. 'Using' to avoid dealing with early trauma led to 'using' to avoid the negative side-effects of substances themselves. Wayne, for example, spoke at length about the difficulties of quitting heroin because of the intensity of the withdrawal. Without getting the prescription for methadone 10 years ago, he believed that

I'd be a statistic today. If I was on heroin now I could've cared less about whether they say there was fentanyl in there. I'd still do it and hopefully I wouldn't die, but I still would do it. It's that strong. (Wayne)

It was not only trying to mask childhood traumas that fuelled substance abuse, but also strain faced during adult life. Darren entered into an arranged marriage at a very young age at his mother's request. While he wanted to pursue a career in academia, Darren's wife was more interested in having children and a nice house. Trying to appease his wife, he began working a job he did not like and gave up on his own dreams. After ending up in prison for a stabbing-related incident with an irate neighbour, Darren did some soul-searching and realized that "my whole life was fake. I didn't do anything I wanted to do in my life. I was just kind of living for her and her dreams." When he was released from prison, Darren left his wife, and she responded by filing for sole custody of the children. The combined pains of a strained marriage and not being able to see his children any more sent Darren into a "downward spiral" of drug use, living on the streets and violence, which eventually landed him back in prison again. Other participants had similar experiences:

All of a sudden you lose your job or something happens, you couldn't manage, nobody is there to help, so you have to forfeit everything. You have to start over again. That kind of stuff would throw me back into it. (Wayne)

For Terry, the pains of his mother's passing caused him to go on a drug-fuelled binge, spending \$3000 on cocaine in a few days. When you go through your life without proper role models and social interactions, Rick explained that you do not have the tools to deal with emotional traumas, and that substance abuse provides at least some modicum of temporary relief.

#### **4.1.3. A Sense of Fatalism**

Perhaps the most striking and informative characteristic of the majority of participants' offending-phase narratives was the overwhelming sense of fatalism. As a result of being abused and neglected, these individuals spoke as if becoming involved in antisocial behaviour was inevitable. For example, Rick reflected on the impact of his father continuously beating him with a leather strap:

He'd get drunk and he basically beat the childhood out of me. . . . I never thought I could ever possibly love in my life. I guess I'd become numb to everything. Any kind of emotions or feelings, basically I just stopped developing. Any kind of coping mechanisms for anger, fear, love, it all got beaten out. I felt nothing. A lot of times, growing up, they would sort of classify me as being a psychopath or being psychotic. They'd ask me, 'Well why do you do what you do?' I couldn't give them answer.

When asked later in the interview about whether or not he got any sort of excitement out of committing crime, Rick said that there were no thrills, no emotions; his property crimes were simply a way to earn money and buy drugs or alcohol that would mask that pain. In a somewhat opposite, although equally deterministic vein, Jack said that his early experiences of being beaten shaped his own behavioural scripts. At a point in the interviews when participants were asked to recall a high point in their lives when they had been most happy or proud of themselves, he responded:

I've never analyzed my life in that aspect before. I don't think I've ever been happy. I've always had lots of turmoil and chaos in my life. I don't see how anybody could have happiness going through what I've lived. I struggle with it all the time. I love chaos. (Jack)

The tension between loving and struggling with chaos was clear through the rest of Jack's life story; he almost fondly recalled getting into altercations with corrections staff and fellow

residents at halfway houses, and intentionally goading on police officers with his brother, yet he also had enrolled himself in therapy several times, even after his warrant-expiry.

As Randy told his story, the pain and anger he felt from being abused by his family was anthropomorphized as what he termed a “hate demon.” Describing a scene from his life in which he had been provoked and this alien force took over, Randy said:

I call it the “black forest.” Inside the black forest, every hurt that happened to me, every time my dad molested me, every time my dad raped me or beat me, my uncles beat me, kids bullied me every day in school. Every time something happened it went into the black forest and turned into what I call a hate demon. As I started running out the guy said something and the hate demon popped out. My arm went around his head and I bit his ear off. . . . All of this stuff that happened to me, all this hate, these demons, as soon as they popped that coke on my lap. . . . The cocaine took the lid off the hate demon pit and now the sky is black. Now somebody else is going to get hurt. And so I hurt people. . . . [I would] bang somebody in the head so hard that the skin rolls off the side of their head.

While Randy did not believe there was a literal demon inside of him, his metaphor aptly summarizes the connection between years of frustration and his displaced aggression. He had never been able to fight back against his father or uncle, but then, as a stronger and drug-fuelled young man, he felt compelled to take out his anger on anybody that crossed his path.

A number of participants sensed that, for a certain period of time, the pains of incarceration or the introduction of a positive influence would have had no impact on their lives. Once a person has traveled down a given path for so long, he/she may resign themselves to believing that it is their only choice. For instance, Matt recalled having a bleak outlook on life after being sent to prison for what he believed to be an unjust charge. He said that, while in prison, he remembered

knowing at that point in my life that I was going to end up doing life. I had no doubt that I was going to end up back in jail and that was going to be the consequences of the choices I was going to make. (Matt)

Not long after being released, he was picked up again for an armed robbery and received a five-year sentence on the day his wife gave birth. Matt and his wife soon split, and he

was not able to see his kids any longer while inside, which drove him into prison culture. Another participant, Aaron, pondered whether,

maybe if my dad knew me when I was younger he would have had his influence on me and I would've learned the values of a work ethic and whatever. Maybe things would've been different, but this is all I know.

Aaron's mother took off with the kids when he was five years old and he had no contact with his father until, at age 12, his mother was fed up with his behaviour and shipped him away. While he now is able to see value in the things his father taught him while they lived together, he did note that

by the time I met my dad I was already on this path of just like no one can tell me what to do. Super pleasant. A good kid when I was around, but I would just take off and go and do stupid shit. Whether it was breaking into things, doing crime and whatever else. (Aaron).

In other words, he felt that he was too far-gone at the time for help to have had any effect.

## **4.2. Going Straight**

Evidently, none of the men interviewed for this study believed they were indeed too far gone to change themselves, as they had all either stopped offending long ago, or were actively striving to do so in the present. For all but one participant, primary desistance was not the result of changes in routine activities, nor acquiescing to the demands of social controls. Rather, the initial move towards a crime-free life was an active choice brought about by the accumulating pains of incarceration and criminality. In some cases, this resulted from the realization that continuing down the path of criminality would have dire effects in the future:

Basically where the change came, where I think initially I'd had enough, I was in Kingston. I spent 4 years in there. I was just starting my sentence out and I'm sitting there thinking. I had about 2 in, I had 12 to go. I'm thinking like, I'm going to be 40 when I get out and what kind of a life am I going to have? It was at that point where, it was either, because I was just tired. It was kind of like a soul thing. In AA they talk about hitting your bottom. I suppose that was my bottom. Here I am sitting, doing this big sentence. My sentences up to that point, they

weren't that substantial. So now I'm doing a double-digit sentence and I'm going to be 40 when I get out. I've got no skills, never really worked, no education because I got expelled out of grade 8 for punching a teacher out. I couldn't talk. Every other word was profanity (Rick).

Through the types of epiphanic moments described by Rick, participants underwent a re-evaluation of their past lives, their goals and the types of internal capacities and external conditions that they could build or take advantage of to lead normal lives. In the following section, I elaborate on several emergent themes which speak to these processes, and how participants were eventually able to go straight.

#### **4.2.1. Realizations of Caring for and Being Cared for by Others**

Perhaps the most crucial factor in the majority of participants' initial steps toward desistance was their realization that they were cared for by others, or that they had shirked their responsibility to others that depend on them for too long. At a point in the interviews when participants were asked to think about a turning point in their lives, one participant recalled his quite vividly:

it was a cold night and it's a couple days before Christmas. And you know, we always say there's no Christmas in prison, that it doesn't matter, who cares. But you know what, deep down it does matter, missing your family. Even if I don't have any fond memories of Christmas, your heart is still there. So, what happened is I started to think, that's when I decided to change. I realized that the person in the cell next to me was my younger brother. And I know that Mark<sup>7</sup> was there because of me. Because I hadn't always been the best influence. . . . In 1986, we started doing time together. That robbery with violence, Mark got two years and I got 3 years added to my sentence and we both end up [prison]. I started to realize...Mark was involved [with me in another homicide in prison] and I know if I wouldn't have been there, Mark would have never got involved in the murder. . . . Mark got charged for the murder also, but fortunately he got 8 years. . . . So, funny thing, we were happy. That's when I realized that my actions actually affected other people. I always had the mentality that, believed that if you can't do the time, don't do the crime. I could do the time. But I lived in the institution so long, even as a child, I felt safe in there. I also believed I was the only person affected by the crime I did, it's okay. That's a very egocentric way of seeing things because you forget the people that you hurt on the way. Me, I was mostly into violent crimes. That's when I started to realize that my actions affected other people, because it

<sup>7</sup> pseudonym

affected Mark. I lost all my family. I don't care for the rest, but Mark I did care for (Bill).

Later in the interview, Bill said that despite his love for his brother, they mutually decided to split up for the promise of each getting a fresh start to a new life. However, the light-bulb moment of self-reflection described in the above quote did catalyze Bill to quit using drugs and alcohol, to change his prison associates and to begin getting involved in programs to better himself.

In a similar vein, a number of participants in this study spoke about reflecting on how much of their children's lives they had missed, and that wanting to be there for them in the future was an important motivating factor in their decision to go straight. For example, Jack expressed a deep guilt over not being there for his children. Their mother, a sex worker and addict, was unable to handle the boys and both had spent the majority of their childhood in foster care while Jack was serving a decade-long sentence. When asked about what motivated him to quit doing crime he said that he

didn't want to lose more chunks of my life. I have two boys that really love me a lot and need me in their lives. I've got [my girlfriend] too. She doesn't want to see me go back in either. (Jack)

Using his boys and girlfriend as inspiration, Jack had sought help to overcome his addictions through therapy and rehabilitation programs, even after his parole had ended. Likewise, Aaron, who had only been out of prison a few weeks, expressed a strong desire to enroll in parenting courses so that he can be there for his son and prove he could be a capable parent to the child's grandmother.

In some cases, the care of a complete stranger prompted participants to change their lives. In the passage below, Randy reflects on a near-death experience that changed the course of his life:

I guess your life flashes before your eyes when you die, they say. None of the bad stuff flashed before my eyes. What I remember is I was soaring around, fuck it felt good. The best feeling I've ever had. There's no high on this planet that could ever give me that feeling, it was so incredible. . . this picture came to me, this time when I was in grade 7.

Mr. White<sup>8</sup> was writing on the blackboard and kids were throwing chalk brushes at me. Blood was running down my face. Teachers didn't do anything, because teachers hated my guts. This kid, this jock, his name was Bob Smith<sup>9</sup>. . . He was a really good looking kid and all the girls just loved him. He was good at sports and all kinds of stuff. This day, he walked up to the front of the class, stood beside my desk and looked at all the kids and said, 'If anybody is going to tease him, they're going to have to tease me too.' A random act of kindness. Bully boys kept at me again, but still. Some of the girls stopped teasing me because they didn't want to be in bad faith with him, I guess. Didn't change much, but for a brief moment, it just felt okay, somebody of that stature standing up for me. But it went back to shit after. And then a cowboy at the cattle auction. My aunt used to make pies and cakes and sell them at the cattle auction. I'd help her pack them and she'd tell me to get lost. She fuckin' hated me. She'd molest me at night but cold as ice and hated me during the day. . . . So she told me to get lost. I didn't have any money or anything so I'd go in the ring where they were selling horses and cows and whatever and the auctioneer is yacking off. I'm sitting there and this cowboy says, 'Hey kid, you want a burger and a pop?' He bought me a burger and a pop and he didn't feel me up like all the other fuckin' pedophiles in my life. I never knew his name. Over a period of two, three, four years he bought me a burger and a pop here and there, never asked for anything. A burger and a crush, I still remember that.

These are the things I remembered when I died. I thought, "What the hell was that?" Why did Bob Smith do that? He never asked me for anything. For the four days I was in the hospital before I died, they were doing tests and shit. Each day I would come back and on my pillow was an apple, an orange and a banana. I thought, 'What the hell does somebody want now? Fuck. I have nothing to give. What does somebody want now.' Nobody came and took anything. I thought some gay guy would come and start feeling me up in the middle of the night or something. Never came. The fourth day I felt like screaming, like, 'What the fuck do you want?' I had nothing left to give anyway. No teeth left, scraggly beard. I had lice so bad my head was a big scab. They had to cut all my hair off to quarantine me. The fourth day I came back, saw the apple, orange and banana and I felt weird. That's when I collapsed and died. They put me on the gurney and all that stuff. 'Maybe that apple, orange and banana is someone caring like Bob Smith did, and this cowboy? They didn't take anything. What is that? Is that what love is? Is that what it's like when people care about you?' I didn't know. 'I've got to find out who put that apple, orange and banana there.' As soon as I thought that, it was like boom, I was back in my body. It felt like I was an elastic band, like I was way out there and all of a sudden I was back in my body. The doctor said, 'I've never seen that before. I pronounced you dead.' She had ordered a body bag. She said, 'You

<sup>8</sup> pseudonym

<sup>9</sup> pseudonym

should be dead. You have 7 percent of your liver left. Your stomach is full of blood. You're bleeding to death.' . . . She said, 'Why'd you come back?' I said, 'Cause I had to find out who put that apple, orange and banana on my pillow.' She started to cry and said, 'It was me. You're a kid. What the hell happened to you? You're worse than the 45 year-old alcoholics that come through here. You're a wrecked kid. How the hell did you get so wrecked? You have to promise me, if you live, and that's a big if, you have to promise me to find out how you got so wrecked.'

From this and other portions of Randy's interview, it was clear he felt that up until the point of nearly dying in the hospital, his experiences of being cared for by others were extremely scarce, yet those handful of times had a powerful effect. Whether or not he actually experienced the life-flashing-before-the-eyes phenomenon, this extremely descriptive scene is a key part of his life story and frames his goals and beliefs today. Randy made it very clear that he had spent the several decades since devoting his life to speaking out at schools, correctional institutions and whatever policy platforms he could to try and save other children from going down the same path he did.

Importantly, Randy was not alone in terms of having these types of experiences. For instance, Shane described a scene from one of his stints in prison in which he and another inmate were out in the yard searching for a sex-offender to beat up. Winding up in the chapel, one of the volunteers approached Shane and said that he wanted to get to know him and become his friend. Shane was adamant that he wanted nothing to do with the volunteer, or with religion at all; however, one day he wound up back in the chapel and started talking to the volunteer again:

We became friends. A few months later he brings his family into chapel, because once a month they have family service and families can come in and have a service with the inmates. I met his wife and his daughter and his two sons. His daughter was 7 years old and she told me, she said, "We know you have no family. My dad told us all about you and you have no family around. We want you to be part of our family." He became one of my biggest supporters.

Shane later noted that for a long time he had harboured a great disdain for a god of any kind, and had asked himself what kind of a god would allow him to be abused like he was. Yet, it is clear here that the chapel volunteer and his family's kindness were of great value to him during a dark time. The next time Shane's group of friends on the inside attempted to hurt a sex-offender, he responded by protecting the individual and leaving his 'friends'

behind. While he did not speak of this experience in terms of making a clear decision to move towards living a more prosocial life, it was evident that it certainly changed his behaviour nonetheless. Many other participants had these same types of experiences later in the desistance process with volunteers inside the prison and upon re-entry into the community, which are discussed further in section 4.3.2 of this thesis.

#### **4.2.2. Acquiring Clarity or Accepting Responsibility**

Related to the notion of caring for others, a crucial part of many participants' stories was accepting responsibility for their past actions. As discussed above, the majority of the men interviewed expressed a certain sense of fatalism about past events, that crimes were committed because they felt normal, justified or that they were necessary to survive or to feed their habit. At the outset, accepting responsibility for one's actions while also minimizing one's own role seem to be at odds with each other. However, this passage from Aaron's interview illustrates how these two frames of mind were generally reconciled in participants' narratives:

Damon: Do you think there's anything else behind [your lack of desire to be responsible or work]?

Aaron: It's all I know. My mom tries to blame the way I am on herself, but the way I look at it, I've been making conscious decisions to just be this way ever since I've been able to make up my own mind. Sure, maybe if my dad knew me when I was younger he would have had his influence on me and I would've learned the values of a work ethic and whatever. Maybe things would've been different, but this is all I know.

Damon: What made that change, do you think?

Aaron: I just realized that I was a piece of shit. That's on me. That's not who I wanna be. So I changed.

On the one hand, Aaron talks about antisocial behaviour as the only way of life he knows, and that growing up without a father may have exacerbated this. Yet, he also recognizes his own role in his behaviour, particularly in making the decision to travel a different path moving forward.

A large part of participants' efforts to pick themselves back up was voluntarily engaging in therapy. A number of these men at some point became aware that their

cognitive and emotional deficits led to their offending, but they could not correct these on their own. Jack frequently spoke about his issues with using fear as a tactic to control people. Part of the problem was that he suffers from borderline personality disorder, which was only diagnosed in his mid-forties. After being questioned about where he had received that diagnosis, he responded,

I've just done that on my own. I needed to know what was going on so my doctor sent me to a psychiatrist. They evaluated me on it and found out I was. It was a relief to find out. It explained a lot of my behaviour inside too. (Jack)

Through engaging in this therapy of his own volition, Jack had gained insight into his past behaviour and was active in changing himself for the better. The perceived benefits of similar types of voluntary therapeutic efforts are further discussed below in section 4.3.

These efforts to change oneself were often accompanied by a growing sense of guilt over the damage done to victims of participants' crimes, whether they be specific persons or society in general. To illustrate, Matt recalled that

I'd come to a point where my guilt was so overwhelming, when I started to face who I'd been and how I'd hurt so many people. I'm charged with murder, but I'd hurt lots of people physically and emotionally. My victims would number in the dozens, maybe even the hundreds. A lot of people were impacted by my bad behaviour. . . . Once I realized I had this guilt on me and had an outlet to get rid of it, I started to open up in a way. I started to see the world and life differently.

Earlier in the interview he expressed concern over one specific victim, a young associate of his who was caught up in a murder plot under Matt's direction inside. Without his direction, Matt was confident that this young man would have never helped carry out the murder and, as a result, would not have received extra time tacked onto his sentence. The accumulation of guilt about this and a multitude of similar instances led Matt towards becoming involved in social justice efforts, both inside and outside the prison walls, which are further elaborated upon in section 4.2.4.

Part of the process of atonement was participants simply making sure that they stayed on the straight and narrow. Both Matt and Randy spoke about always having to be

vigilant about doing so. Despite having been out of prison for well over a decade, they were cognizant of the fact that crime and violence had also been a part of their makeup for many years. Being realistically mindful of the past while forging ahead was a key component of how participants took responsibility for their lives. Rick commented that

the only way I can make things right to a lot of people, because I mean when you commit a crime against somebody you're not just committing a crime against everybody around them. Because it affects everybody. People don't realize that, right, but any kind of violent situation or crime, it not just affects that person, but it affects everybody in their life. And it has an outflow. It's like throwing a pebble into a lake. The initial splash is small, but as it goes out it gets bigger and bigger and bigger. You don't realize that when you're doing that stuff. When you think about it, it does affect other people, not just you. How can I stop that from happening is by doing what I'm doing today. To not allow myself to get into that situation again. No more pebbles in the lake.

Rick, like many of the other interviewees, cannot repay or apologize to his specific victims. However, these men believed that by going straight and contributing to the community in other ways, they were making their amends as best they could.

#### **4.2.3. Changing Priorities, Habits and Surroundings**

One of the many problems with participants' accounts of their offending careers was that their goals had been overly-hedonistic in nature; they primarily pursued excitement, pleasure and money during this period. In contrast, interviewees' descriptions of going straight often involved moving away from these pleasures and toward priorities and habits that would lead to a greater sense of fulfillment. The starting point for this transition seemed to be simply wanting to lead a 'normal' life:

Cory: I'm just tired of it. It's not cool anymore. I appreciate different things than I used to. I don't appreciate cars, the money. That's not the shit that I like anymore.

Damon: What do you like now?

Cory: I just want to go to work, come back and have a pretty girl at home, waiting, smiling, makes me smile when I walk in the door. That would be it. I'd be happy with that.

A large part of Cory's life as an offender had been in pursuit of money and status, but after spending his 30th birthday in prison and later being unable to attend his grandmother's funeral, his priorities had changed. With regard to the money he said, "I've had it. I've spent it. It's over. I'm past that" (Cory). As evidenced in the exchange above, he now desires a simpler, stress-free life. Other participants such as Darren, for instance, echoed Cory's sentiments about leading a normal life:

Damon: What sort of factors do you believe will help you to stay away from crime best?

Darren: Being able to be a regular human being again. Because that's a very hard thing to hit when you get out of prison, is to go back to being a regular human being. Having your basic needs, your basic shelters, a good job, being able to spent time with your family. If you don't have any of that stuff you're going to get yourself in trouble.

Damon: How likely do you think you'll be able to be to get to that place?

Darren: I don't think it will take me long. I could go work in Alberta right now and make 150k a year to start and then be at that fake place, where again I'm making all this money, have cars and a house and whatever, but I'm not going to be happy inside. So, I'm happy with going to school and working on myself, so that's the way I'm going to go.

Prior to serving his last sentence in prison, Darren had been in a failing marriage and felt forced to work in the Alberta oilfields. Despite earning a lot of money there, he felt as though he was living a "fake life," which ultimately caused the stress that sent him into a downward spiral of drug abuse, trafficking and violence. Rather than returning to the lifestyle that originally caused that type of stress, Darren now desires to return to school and to be an emotional support for his children.

Being able to reconnect with and provide for their families was an essential part of the redemptive portions of participants' stories. Many of these men had long been estranged from their families as a result of their offending. For example, when Wayne's ex-wife left him in the early 1980s while she was pregnant, he spent the next two decades traversing North America, addicted to heroin and primarily stealing to get by. However, in the last few years, he has reconnected with his daughter and expressed great pleasure in now building that relationship, as well as with his grandchildren. Other participants, while

unable to reconnect with their kin, took satisfaction in building new families of their own. Bill proudly remarked,

I spent Christmas with my fiancé's family, which was very interesting. Two grandchildren and all that. We have a nice dinner and all that. It was really interesting seeing people in that kind of setting, which I've never experienced.

Growing up in foster homes and having tumultuous relationships with his blood relatives, Bill had never experienced a proper Christmas before. Forging ahead with his new family was something he seemed genuinely proud in being able to accomplish.

A crucial component of leading a more fulfilling life also meant that participants had to change their daily habits. Unsurprisingly, for many of them this entailed becoming sober. According to a number of these individuals, getting clean after decades of drug abuse was, and often continues to be, one of the greatest struggles in their lives. Jack was able to avoid personal and property crime since his release from prison five years ago, yet still returns to using from time to time:

Jack: I'm trying to get back into recovery. I don't want to back. Trying to get my shit in order. There's obviously something I'm not doing right that I'm not applying to my life.

Damon: Have you had problems using recently?

Jack: Yeah. Just smoking weed and having a drink here and there. My biggest thing was speed. I was on speed for awhile. Once I realized I was going back to that I just said, 'Fuck this. I can't do this no more.' I don't want to go there. I get the thoughts of hurting people and wanting to get more money.

While drugs and alcohol are evidently triggers for Jack, he is now cognizant of that fact and actively seeks guidance when he feels himself slipping back into old routines.

At the beginning, giving up the habit of substance abuse requires sacrifice. Rick recalled having to break ties with many of the friends he made in prison who were still using to get sober himself. Leaving these relationships behind was particularly difficult, because "being around people that didn't drink or do drugs was really strange. Because these were people that couldn't stand me before. They were the weak, they were the

sheep. I wasn't around weak people" (Rick). So not only was he struggling with the addiction itself, but also the social component. As time moved on, however, sobriety became part of who Rick and other participants perceived themselves to be, especially with regard to being strong-willed. For instance, in the following passage, Bill emphasizes the importance of choice and self-esteem:

I stopped drinking back in 2001, 2002. I never drank again because I decided. If I decide to do something, I'm very stubborn. When I decided to change, I changed. . . . It's not because I've never had any struggles since. I got divorced since. The last thing on my mind was to go back to drugs or alcohol because I knew that it wouldn't have helped at all. The last thing I wanted to do is to start over and say, 'Oh boy, it's been a week,' especially after all these years now. I don't miss it at all.

Several participants also spoke about changing their day-to-day practices and finding new, productive ways to spend their time. Some became involved in religion or spirituality, which provided them with a supportive community. As previously discussed, one of Shane's turning points was befriending a volunteer in the chapel while in prison. Since his release, he joined a new church, was accepted into their community and, through his honesty about the past, is supported in his journey towards going straight. Matt, who had the same experience of acceptance by the congregation after confessing his misdeeds, also spoke about the value of religious practice itself. He recalled that

I started to practice the discipline of being a Christian. I fasted and I went to church all the time and became highly engaged with other people's lives. I became other-centered. I really believed what Jesus was preaching. (Matt)

Through engaging in this new routine and trying to live his life in the image of Jesus, Matt became further involved in the church community in prison and has carried on with a number of endeavours aimed at helping others after being released.

With regard to discipline, a related aspect a handful of participants touched upon was taking better care of themselves physically. Involvement in violent altercations and years of substance abuse eventually takes its toll on one's body. For instance, after decades of heroin use, Wayne suffers from joint problems, hepatitis C and a number of other health-related issues. Further, he noted that he has remained on methadone for

nearly 10 years because he fears the withdrawal effects would be too difficult on his body at his age. To combat these types of problems, some men took initiatives toward self-care. Cory found that going to the gym and practicing martial arts not only keeps his body strong, but also has a humbling effect, knowing that there is always more to learn. Likewise, in addition to giving up drugs and alcohol, soon after deciding to go straight Randy gave up coffee, cigarettes, meat and junk food. To him, these indulgences had the same effect as substance abuse and he commented that

as soon as you stop medicating yourself with [that stuff], guess what happens? All of the feelings that you're hiding that you drank and did drugs to keep down and then cigarettes and caffeine can do the same thing. (Randy)

No longer covering these feelings up, Randy dealt with them instead by enrolling in therapy.

For some participants changing their habits included changing their surroundings. Several individuals were aware that a large component of their offending was due to environmental influence. As such, going straight also included taking themselves out of those contexts. For some participants this required moving to a completely different city. Rick, for example, had spent several of his offending years living in Ottawa. After being released from prison in Ontario and beginning to feel some of the same temptations again, he recognized that he needed a change:

When I moved out here I was only 4 months sober. I needed to get away from that stuff because I'm weak. I'm a weak person. It was my environment that would've been my downfall. I think that's what happens to a lot of people out here, is that they get thrown back into the same environment they come out of. It's so difficult to change in that same environment you've come out of, right. (Rick)

Moving to a completely new city allowed Rick to cut himself off from the associates, the bars, the dealers who had once facilitated his criminal behaviour.

Other participants stayed in the same cities after release, but still found ways to keep themselves in check and avoid old situational influences. Terry had been off of parole

for over two years, yet kept living at the halfway house to avoid temptation. He remarked that

I need to know that. . . somebody is watching me 24 hours a day. I could be piss tested any time. I have to keep a tight reign on myself. Just because I know myself. I'm very impulsive. (Terry)

Further, he noted staying clear of the downtown area for at least a year after his release to avoid being drawn in by the open-air drug market. This concern was echoed by others like Aaron, who also kept himself occupied at home as much as possible:

I don't like to go out and wander around and not have things to do. If there's downtime, I spend it at home, 'cause it's safe here and I'm not left to my fuckin' retarded mind. I would wander around and want things to do. Then I would be associating with these people that would just bring dope around and whatever.

Evidently these men were well-aware of their own triggers and voluntarily placed limits on their activity to steer clear of losing the progress that they have made. Over time, as Rick commented, you begin to feel more secure in yourself and are able to be in the situations that were once tempting without falling off the wagon.

#### **4.2.4. Generative Pursuits**

One of the essential components of the narratives provided by nine participants in this study was a desire to be generative, that is, to leave something behind or to enrich the lives of others. This desire not only builds one's connections with the people around them, but also serves to provide a sense of accomplishment. At the point during interviews when participants were asked about future goals, hopes and dreams, Cory expressed that he would like

to get like a dog rescue kind of thing going on. I just want to do something. All you have when you're gone is the footprints you've left, right? I'd just like to leave a footprint. Maybe help some people not go through the shit I did. . . . It would just make me feel better about myself at the end of the day. Instead of feeling like I'd fucked everything up, I could do something good.

While the means by which Cory would accomplish these goals were not fully fleshed-out at the time of the interview, it was clear that his desire was strong.

Part of participants feeling better about themselves involved a need to receive positive affirmation of their efforts from others. To illustrate, Aaron had been estranged from his son for the majority of his life. Because his son was in the care of the grandmother at the time, Aaron wanted to take parenting courses so he could prove to her and his son that he had indeed changed. He proclaimed that he was going to “bombard her with people that see me do well, so that she’s not just hearing it from me” (Aaron). Reflecting a similar goal, Darren wanted to finish his post-secondary degree so that he could show his children, “sure, I’ve been to prison twice, but that doesn’t stop me.” Both of these individuals, among others in the study, clearly want to be part of the upbringing of their children; they spoke proudly of the changes they were making to do so. Yet, it was also evident that when those close to them acknowledged their efforts it was of great value to their own identities.

There was also a strong sense among participants that engaging in generative pursuits was important to their identities in that it gave their past struggles and misdeeds some modicum of purpose. Speaking about going to schools to share his story, Bill remarked, “I don’t mind doing this because it’s a shame to let all this knowledge go to waste. It was a harsh experience at times; however it wasn’t a waste of time because I’ve learned a lot.” Being able to pass this knowledge on meant participants felt they were making a difference, and that maybe some of the young children they spoke to would hear their stories and avoid going down the same path. Shane became involved in a local Toastmasters group to perfect his public speaking skills, as he was passionate about speaking to issues of racism and the impacts of substance abuse. Likewise, Randy has spent several decades speaking to at-risk youth at correctional institutions and schools about his experience. During the interview, he was extremely proud of being a resource for these youth over the years, even reading off some of the text-messages that he had exchanged with adolescents who had reached out during times of crisis.

Several interviewees were also involved in working with current and former prisoners to provide support, guidance and a sense of community. In some cases, this

work began while participants were still incarcerated. Again, doing so provided them with a sense of personal achievement, but also of working towards something greater than themselves. Matt spoke about “having a knack for connecting people,” helping to catalyze an institutional culture shift towards respect and empathy between prisoners, as well as between prisoners and staff. Reflecting on this period of his life, he said that

In those days I wasn't thinking too much about parole. It's interesting, but in many, many ways I'd found my life. I wasn't all that dissatisfied with being a prisoner and doing what I was doing. I felt like I was contributing every day. Instead of stealing and robbing and being a delinquent or whatever you want to call me. For all those years trying to do that every day, now I was trying to do the right thing every day and I found so much more gratification and satisfaction in that. I'd never had that kind of reward. It was such a rewarding thing. Honestly, I really didn't think about whether I was going to get out of jail or not. I wanted to just live for the day and do the best I could. Be the best guy I could. . . . I didn't know if I was going to be like this when I got out onto the street. I knew I was like this now and I was real happy about that. I wanted to stay like that, and if that meant staying in jail forever, that was okay with me. (Matt)

The satisfaction that Matt got out of bringing people together has stayed with him for all of these years. Since his release, Matt and his wife have run a community-based organization that raises funds for victims of crime and helps long-term offenders reintegrate into and contribute to their communities. Other participants also noted their desire to do in-reach work with prisoners. Four were involved in a volunteer-run program in prison called the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP), which is further discussed in Section 4.3. Briefly, the program teaches prisoners skills in emotional regulation, communication skills and community-building, and was highly regarded by participants. For instance, Rick believed that AVP was one of the biggest influences in his behavioral and identity change process while incarcerated. As a result, he was getting involved in going back into institutions to participate in the program with current prisoners because he wants to “let these guys know that whatever you find yourself in, there's hope. Don't give up. Look at me, I couldn't stay out of prison” (Rick).

## 4.3. Reflections on Treatment and the Re-Entry Process

### 4.3.1. Programs and Services Offered by CSC

Of the eleven men who participated in this study, nine had participated in programs formally offered by CSC. Among these individuals, only three had anything moderately positive to say about these programs, and these views always included some type of caveat:

I took them because I had to, but in a sense I somewhat related to a bit of it. Overall, it was more or less to appease my parole officer. I learned the self-talk thing, and then the ABCs. They've got the ABCs. C is consequence and B is behaviour. A is action. Actions, consequences, behaviour. (Jack)

I think they're good but the problem with programs of CSC is CSC has to redefine the meaning of "volunteering", because you have to do it willingly, be willing to do the program. But the thing is, is that if you don't do the program, you're punished in the sense that you won't get transfers and stuff like that. With that you have a problem. (Bill)

In both of these examples, the potential positive benefit from CSC programs is tempered by the fact that they did not feel participation was truly voluntary. Technically speaking, CSC is not forcing or coercing inmates to take part in these programs, however, it is evident from the above quotes given by Bill and Jack that having the prospect of early release dangled in front of them increased the feeling of pressure to participate.

One of the major themes apparent throughout all facets of participants' stories, including treatment experiences, was personal choice. The problem with being pressured into taking part in programs inside was that participants' sense of agency was effectively removed. As Rick commented,

I just think for anyone to get any help out here or inside, it's all about personal choice. It's like anything in life, you can study the shit out of it and be no further ahead unless you want to change. It's actually wanting to change.

Others echoed Rick's sentiments about the importance of personal choice in treatment. For example, Matt remarked that if inmates are not buying into programs,

you might get 25 percent success out of that, but you're hopeful. You can't force people into changing. You have to somehow convince them that's what they should be doing, rather than that's what they have to do.

Ultimately, the realization that self-improvement was something participants felt they needed to do to live a happier, crime-free life seemed to be better-achieved through voluntary endeavours offered inside and in the community, which are further discussed in section 4.3.2.

Several of the men interviewed commented that, because of their own and other inmates' lack of buy-in to CSC programs, the treatments lacked an atmosphere conducive to learning or change. Bill explained that regardless of whether the material taught was good, a single person not wanting to be there can disrupt the learning experience of the entire group. On a more personal note, a number of participants noted that the realities of the expectations of institutional culture necessitated covering up their true feelings within programs:

I think it's a fucking waste of money. Seriously. Programs in jail like that. You're not getting the true responses that you should be getting. There's so much stigma. You have another person in jail sitting beside you and you're trying to do a program with other people from jail. You'll never get anybody to be completely honest. Because you have to have a façade of toughness in jail. You have to survive so nobody else screws with you or something like that. It's just so much bullshit in jail. It's another lifestyle that you've got to make up. (Terry)

The thing is, trying to become different or become more open to feelings, you've got to be careful because people play on vulnerabilities in there. I did it myself. So here I am trying to change myself, but also you have to not be taken advantage of. There's wolves and there's sheep in there, I was a wolf. I didn't want to be a sheep. But then again, I was trying to do all these things without becoming a sheep, you know what I mean? It was difficult. (Rick)

In both of these examples the participants felt a very real sense of tension between wanting to take something away from treatment and not wanting to be seen as weak. As others explained, maintaining your reputation is crucial to survival inside; if other inmates perceive you as weak, you become their prey. Unfortunately, this problem was

compounded in CSC-run programs because of the feelings of pressured participation and the resulting lack of buy-in.

A handful of interviewees also simply believed they had nothing to learn from programs in general. For instance, when Cory was asked what he had been learning in a CSC-mandated re-entry program, he responded, "There's nothing they can teach me, is what I'm telling you. I know what I need to do. I'm not a stupid person. Maybe for some people who are dumb and don't know how." Cory was sure that he could desist from crime permanently on his own, but his plans for accomplishing this were limited to getting a job and a stable girlfriend, and potentially setting up an animal shelter down the line. Similarly separating himself from the 'average' inmate, Darren remarked,

Well like in my situation, for example, I'm able to get out and go get a job and do whatever but I think the world is your oyster, you know what I mean? But a lot of people don't think that way, so they just finish 6 years, the world has changed so much. They don't even know how to talk to people anymore. There's no social skills. . . . The programs they got out here should be more integrated in the prison system so you're already halfway prepared for the street when you get out, instead of just kicking you out.

Like Cory, Darren did not believe that much could be learned from these programs, at least in his specific case. Both participants did see potential benefits for some, just not for themselves. What separated the two was that Darren had more specific goals and plans for helping himself to go straight; for example, he had enrolled himself in post-secondary school, had made an appointment to see a psychologist in the weeks after our interview took place, and used his children as a source of motivation to change.

While Cory did not believe that current CSC programs had much to teach him, he did offer a suggestion for how this might be improved:

If it was a little more individual than what it is. I don't have the same needs as the next guy does. Some guy may need to learn the tools and do this. . . . Different people need different things, for sure. They have to individualize it a lot more. Not just say, 'Here's a group. This works for 60 percent of them, so let's do it.'

Several other participants shared the view that treatment options should be more responsive to the needs and goals of individual inmates. A recommendation offered by two of them was for more one-on-one counselling opportunities. In that regard, Jack's was of the opinion that he would be more trusting and willing to open up in a one-on-one setting with a psychologist than he would be in a group setting surrounded by murderers and rapists. Likewise, Terry believed that meeting alone would be more conducive to individualizing treatment and lead to better outcomes.

#### **4.3.2. Informal and Voluntary Efforts**

The overwhelming majority of participants were wary of CSC-run programming because of the perception of pressured-participation, an atmosphere not conducive to learning and a lack of responsivity to their individual needs. Given this, it was not surprising that they attributed the most value to informal programs that they entered into voluntarily. A sense of guilt or weariness always preceded decisions to participate in these programs. Rick explained, "I was just tired of everything. It was a soul thing. My soul was in pain. I'd had enough." The "soul thing" that Rick refers to here was an accumulating sense that his life had been wasted through nearly 20 years of going in and out of prison. From Rick's perspective, his crimes were largely the result of his alcoholism and the related unattended emotional traumas from his early life. When he finally hit rock bottom and realized he needed a change, he joined an AA group inside in hopes that he could deal with these issues:

The easiest thing to do is to quit drinking. It's about everything else. So, basically it was free therapy. Drinking is basically, they have the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and through the steps it helps you deal with your past and your fears. It looks at your part in things and you deal with the harms to other people and try to understand it and what part did you play. And about making amends to them, real amends, like, 'Look, I'm an alcoholic and I shouldn't have done what I did. I'm sorry. How can I make it right' That's where that kind of goes, you know what I mean? And that's the kind of thing I was looking for. I knew that I needed to change my thinking inside my head and this was one of the tools that I was able to take away from there and start learning about changing my thought processes. Changing my attitudes toward other people, it was slow. They have a thing called 'progression, not perfection'. We all fail, we all struggle, we all have hard times. Through the ups and downs, I was able to come out ahead. It was very, very beneficial (Rick).

Through his participation in AA, Rick took responsibility for his actions and his future, and by doing so, he believed that leading a crime-free life was the best way to make amends for his past.

Being cognizant of their cognitive and emotional problems, several other participants sought out one-on-one therapy after release from incarceration. Jack had what he felt were overwhelming problems with power and control for most of his life. After seeing a number of psychiatrists since his re-entry, he feels he is more aware of and able to manage these issues. Further, he voluntarily enrolled in a recovery house to deal with lingering issues with addiction that he thought were damaging his relationships with his children and girlfriend. Similarly, Darren located the root of his violence and addictions as being unresolved emotional issues from his childhood. Lacking the proper tools to deal with these emotions, stressful life events had often propelled him back into that lifestyle. He commented that “I could have the best job in the world, but if I’m not emotionally stable, I won’t be able to follow through fully with everything, you know?” (Darren). With this recent realization, Darren made an appointment to meet with a psychologist and was positive about the treatment aiding in his process of personal change.

One specific voluntary program that was highly regarded by four study participants was the AVP. Workshops in this program take place over the course of three days inside the institution and involve both prisoners and outside community members. Participants engage in a variety of experiential exercises and discussions aimed at fostering skills in communication, emotional regulation and relationship-building. For Bill, one of the most important aspects of the AVP was that “we were all equal and we all help each other, which was very interesting because it really gave us a new view on people from outside.” Feeling equal to members of the community gave participants the impression that they would be accepted and have a support system upon re-entry. Indeed, as is further discussed in Section 4.3.3, these supports can have an invaluable impact on participants’ successful reintegration and desistance from crime.

The content and delivery within AVP workshops was especially valuable to participants. Rick, for instance, commented,

That was probably one of the bigger things that helped me with a lot of communication. I've done a lot of workshops, and they're very emotional. Because it really digs down deep into your emotional state, you know what I mean? Anger, fear, communication, learning how to become assertive as opposed to being aggressive or passive aggressive. To express yourself. I had a huge anger problem. I used to say that I had an anger problem that I could barely control sober. Then I started drinking and it was out of control. That helped me be able to channel that into some more positive things. Learn to think about the other person. They have a mandala, like think before reacting, expect the best, ask for a nonviolent solution. These are all things that are all on the transforming power mandala that they have. It's one of the core things of AVP. So, doing the different things and the trust, having those weekend workshops, because they're long workshops, and having that bonding with other people. Constantly being positive as opposed to negative. Everything is about positivity. It's really heartwarming that you can get that kind of feeling of love inside.

Evidently, through this program Rick conquered some of the emotional traumas and schemas that fuelled his past offending and addictions. Other participants' stories aligned with Rick's statements about these introspective and practical lessons taught in AVP workshops. Shane believed that participating in this program allowed him to be more considerate of not only his own wellbeing, but others' as well. Bill said that the workshop activities made him feel comfortable opening up to others and being vulnerable. The skills learned by both Bill and Shane provided them with the confidence to speak publicly about their experiences with crime and imprisonment and to hopefully dissuade at-risk youth from going down the same paths they did.

Beyond the curricula of programs and the insight garnered from therapy, some participants attributed some of their success at going straight to acquiring new skill sets. While in prison, the only program that Aaron took willingly was a construction course, mainly because the instructor was extremely inviting and supportive. Since his release, Aaron took additional courses to acquire certification for various types of construction equipment and safety measures. Knowing his limited formal education and large gaps in his resume, he thought having all of these courses under his belt would give him a leg up on getting a job to support himself and start providing for his son. Likewise, soon after deciding to start making changes while incarcerated, Rick gave up smoking cigarettes to save up money to buy a computer. He knew that staying on top of technology would improve his employability down the road and taught himself to build, repair and write code

for computers over the next few years. Rick's efforts eventually paid off, and he has stayed gainfully employed in the tech industry since his release over a decade ago.

Applying themselves to learning new skills provided these participants with a sense of hope about the prospect of living a 'normal' life. As evidenced by the stories of Aaron, Terry, Wayne and others, when offending is the only way one knows to get by, the prospect of normalcy is foreclosed quite quickly. However, when some were exposed to the right opportunity, they seized it and got great satisfaction from doing something different for once. Consider, for example, Matt's experience with learning to cook while in prison:

The best thing that happened probably in my prison experience really was I learnt to cook in jail. Not so much the cooking part. I mean it was, at the time. I'd never really applied myself to anything in my life. And so, I was really this kid that had some potential but had never really tried to challenge himself. I did whatever I wanted to do. . . . I became the best student in the class. I had about a 95 percent average on both practical and the book stuff. . . . They gave me parole to go out and finish the course. It was to be finished on the street. 6 months inside and 6 months outside. So I got day parole to finish the course on the street. I went to the cooking school, and this is how brainwashed you get in prison: I was the best student in the class and that made me feel pretty good I guess. But I also realized I was just a prisoner and when I got out to this cooking class school I had that feeling. It really blew my mind when I became the best student. I didn't expect that where there were real people, not just a bunch of losers. That really impressed me, not that I was really even trying. I just like doing what I was doing. I got a lot of affirmation for it so I just got into it. I did really good and I had a couple of part time jobs.

This passage provides valuable insight into how Matt and other participants viewed themselves in the early stages of desistance. Matt's belief that he had untapped potential was tempered by the fact that he was a career criminal and the associated perception that he was somehow beneath the rest of society. However, after biting the bullet and applying himself to learning a new skill, he not only got job offers, but also an increased sense of personal efficacy and empowerment.

### **4.3.3. Recognition, Support and Denigration in Treatment and Re-Entry**

A final theme that characterized participants' prison and re-entry experiences was the presence or absence of social support and its impact on their outlook on life. Over half of the men interviewed for this study recounted negative experiences with judges, correctional officers or parole officers. This finding is not surprising, given that these groups both figuratively and literally held the keys to participants' freedom. A number of them spoke about the impact of prison assessments. For instance, Rick was given a low probability to succeed upon release based on CSC's risk-assessment algorithm. He was dead-set on defying the odds and used this report as motivation to beat the system. However, the majority of participants who received negative assessments or who had strained relationships with parole officers did not have the same experience. Jack spoke about receiving poor assessments from prison psychologists that led treatment groups he had been placed in, remarking that

they tell you one little good thing about you, but the rest would be all negative in the report. It's like why am I doing these programs then, if you're finding all this bad shit about me. There's nothing good I'm doing in this? That's how we feel, right?

The fact that participants knew that everything they said in treatment would be relayed back to CSC officials often dissuaded them from participating in these programs in the first place. But, when they finally did agree to take part, reports that focus almost wholly on the negatives made them feel as though they were making no progress and that there was no point in attempting to open up in the first place.

This dynamic often continued after participants were released from prison. Cory said that on a previous release from incarceration he left with a positive attitude about going straight and leading a normal life. However, his relationship with a parole officer tainted that optimism:

He just looked for everything. Anything you'd do wrong. I'd tell him where I was going and he constantly thought I was lying. I don't lie. He was just constantly looking, looking. He opens the door one day and I was having a wicked day. Got a new job, new girl. I was just fucking happy. I was like, 'Good morning. You having a good day?' He's like, 'I

was until I seen you.' I was like, 'What? You see me smiling?' He's like, 'Yep.' I was like fuck, from that moment on I just knew. And from the first moment he met me he told me that 'When I suspend you.' I asked him, 'What do you mean, when?' I told him, straight up, I'm going to do everything properly. Then he sends me back for three months when I only had. . . I was out for four, he sent me back for three and I only had a month left to figure it out. What kind of fucking stupid shit is that? . . . He was a piece of shit. They don't understand the ripple effect that has. I told him if I go back I'm going, I'm close to giving up.(Cory)

It seems clear that Cory's relationship with his parole officer was strained from the outset, despite his progress. While he did commit a minor violation of his conditions, Cory knew that getting out with only a month left on parole would not be enough. In other words, he was well aware that he needed guidance in helping to change his life and that with only a month of supervision, this would be unlikely. Matt's experience dealing with the parole board was similar, however the outcome slightly more pronounced than in Cory's case. As previously discussed in section 4.3.2, Matt had taken up cooking while inside and, following his release, was doing quite well in the field. However, after getting into an altercation at a bar while defending his girlfriend, he was revoked and sent back to the correctional institution. The next time he went before the parole board

they told me I was a psychopath and said they wished I was doing life because I should never get out of jail. Shit like that. I thought about that and I ended up agreeing with them. I ended up thinking, 'You know what? They're right. That's true. I'm just kidding myself.' (Matt)

Following this interaction, Matt said that he just "gave up" and fully embraced the criminal lifestyle. The next time he was released on a day pass, he went unlawfully at large and went on the crime spree that culminated in receiving his life sentence.

On the other hand, the majority of participants also had positive, supportive relationships that they developed while incarcerated or during the re-entry process. The most common were relationships with community members or staff at halfway houses. Two benefits of these connections were practical and emotional support. Recall that Bill spoke very highly of the volunteer-based AVP program that he participated in while inside. Many community members who came into the institution to volunteer with the AVP became Bill's friends and helped ease his struggles with reintegration. He commented that

it gives me somebody to call if I'm overwhelmed with something. . . . At the beginning, I would have panic attacks when I was in stores or things like that 'cause it was overwhelming. All the choices, all the colours. A prison is not really a colourful world. Having people help me to budget, 'cause that's a whole different thing. (Bill)

The type of anxiety described by Bill was not uncommon amongst other participants in the study. Some spoke of having similar panic attacks when in malls or around other large groups of people, while another said he could not handle sleeping in a queen-sized bed and had to sleep in the bathtub for several weeks after his release. Having someone there to help ease this transition was invaluable to these men.

In many cases this support meant not expecting participants to be perfect, but to give them a second chance and help them overcome their mistakes. For example, Terry recalled spending a large sum of money on cocaine and winding up living on the street shortly after his parole ended. One day, the manager from his old halfway house saw him downtown, homeless, and invited him to come back to live in the house and get sober again. Knowing that someone cared for him and that he would have the proper supervision, Terry has remained clean since. Similarly, Jack recounted having struggled dealing with his emotional and anger issues while on parole. One worker at the halfway house provided opportunities for Jack to vent and talk through his issues:

[Dennis<sup>10</sup> is] an awesome guy. He was the only one in the house I actually talked to. Him and Craig<sup>11</sup> and Barb<sup>12</sup>. The only 3 staff members I actually can talk to in there. Dennis I've talked to the most. I know I can vent without him causing me any repercussions like sending me back for any stupid reason. He lets me vent and he will sit there and break it down and figure out what it is. I'll still be mad for a few days, but I'm not as mad as when I first got in.

Another positive impact of supportive relationships highlighted by a number of participants was having those around them acknowledge their change. Many of these men did not receive praise or recognition early in their lives, but in recounting when it did finally happen they showed great pride. When he was asked about the process of going straight,

<sup>10</sup> pseudonym

<sup>11</sup> pseudonym

<sup>12</sup> pseudonym

Aaron recalled getting out of prison with a bad attitude, but then something clicked and he knew he needed to make a change. From there, he said that

instead of phoning one of the people that don't give a shit about me, one of the hundreds of people I could've called, I phoned my best friend. She brought me to an NA meeting. I decided that day to do 90 meetings in 90 days. Completely changed my whole attitude. People that are here that saw me in jail are like, 'Who the fuck is this guy?' 'cause I'm so positive and I'm doing so good. (Aaron)

Several things are noteworthy in this passage. First, Aaron recognized that most of his old friends would lead him back down the path to criminality and, therefore, reached out to the one he knew would support him. Second, this relationship opened him up to working through the steps in NA. Finally, Aaron's attitude being unrecognizable to fellow residents in the halfway house increased his self-esteem and sense that he was making progress. Likewise, during the interview with Rick, he went to his bedroom and retrieved a stack of certificates of program completion and support letters he had received over the years from program facilitators and correctional officers. When he was asked how those letters made him feel, Rick responded that it helped him to solidify the knowledge that he had changed and that others were in his corner.

To briefly summarize, participants' descriptions of their pathways both to and from criminality were heavily bound up in the relationships between structural influences and personal choice. As children and adolescents, these men experienced physical, psychological and sexual abuse, family disruption and neglect. Participants spoke of these early experiences having foreclosed their abilities to lead a 'normal' life. Rather, they had resorted to antisocial and criminal behaviour as a means to achieve comradery, fulfillment of a need for excitement, to mask emotional vulnerabilities, or simply because criminality itself felt 'normal'. As these men grew older, constant returns to prison became psychologically and socially painful, and the overwhelming nature of these pains catalyzed a desire to change themselves. Participants made conscious decisions to change their associates, surroundings, habits and pastimes in efforts to become crime-free. While many had taken part in formal correctional programming offered by the CSC, the fact that participation was pressured largely negated positive treatment effects. Instead, these men found more benefit in informal means of change that fostered their sense of agency.

## **Chapter 5.**

### **Discussion**

This purpose of undertaking this study was to understand how a sample of once-prolific offenders eventually went straight. Specifically, I was interested in how subjective and structural factors interplay in this process, and what role participants assigned to formal and informal programs in their processes of desisting. In the previous chapter, the results from a grounded theory analysis of the data were presented. In the current chapter, the core categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) from that analysis are contextualized in terms of their adherence to prior knowledge on desistance, as well as the new insights they provide.

#### **5.1. Agency and Structure**

One of the most important questions in desistance research is how former offenders make the initial transition away from crime. Laub & Sampson (2003) contend that desistance most often begins by responding to informal social controls that come about by happenstance, often without any real change in identity. However, the bulk of recent work suggests that desistance begins with a subjective desire to go straight and subsequent or contemporaneous exposure to/selection of structural supports (Giordano et al., 2002; Healy, 2016; Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Perhaps one of the most well-developed is Giordano et al.'s (2002) symbolic-interactionist theory, which suggests that desistance must begin with an openness to change. Absent such a mindset, offenders who are exposed to hooks for change (i.e., social supports, employment, etc.) are unlikely to take full advantage of them and are much more likely to return to the habits that they know (King, 2013b).

However, Giordano et al.'s (2002) theory does not adequately explain how openness to change comes about in the first place. The work of Paternoster, et al. (2015) is instructive here; they write:

After the linking of failures, projecting of these failures into the future, and the attribution of failures to one's own shortfalls, offenders begin to contemplate their futures. The feared self is literally what offenders do not want to become and fear becoming—a homeless drug addict, imprisoned for long periods without seeing children or other family—and it is this fear that provides motivation for crafting what [Giordano et al., 2002, p. 101] have called a “replacement self,” a more positive identity based on what the person wants to be. (p. 12)

This notion of a ‘feared self’ (see Paternoster & Bushway, 2009 for a detailed discussion) that arises from the accumulation of the negative fallout from crime held true for the current study. For 10 of 11 participants some initial realization of these consequences preceded their efforts to go straight. Take Matt, for example, who was partway through a 21 year-to-life sentence when he had a sort of ‘light-bulb’ moment of clarity, realizing that

if I wanted to live the life that I’d sort of chosen, it meant probably killing people. Stepping up to the plate a few times. I was just sick of myself. I had these kids that I couldn’t see.

Clearly the future that Matt envisioned for himself was something to be feared, and he recognized that something needed to change to avoid doing more time and missing out on his children’s lives.

The growing disenchantment with criminality and doing time common amongst participants is consistent with Shover’s (1983) notion of incommensurable time. During processes of self-reflection, Shover (1983) writes that those who desist become “acutely aware of time as a diminishing, exhaustible resource. . . . Not only would another prison sentence subject them to the usual deprivations, but it would expropriate their few remaining, potentially productive years” (p. 212). In the current study, the somewhat cliché phrase “I’m getting too old for this shit” accurately describes how many participants began to feel when they were on the cusp of deciding to attempt a crime-free life. For example, Jack commented that he “didn’t want to lose more chunks of my life.” Similarly, two years into a 12-year sentence, Rick realized that he would be getting out of prison in his forties with little education, a lengthy criminal record and few skills to boost his employability. The prospect of being released at that age and having no alternatives to crime acted as what Cusson & Pinsonneault (1986) called delayed deterrence. In their study of former robbers in Canada, they found that as time wore on, the accumulating pains of punishment (e.g.,

higher estimate of punishment probability, increased difficulty of doing time) gradually wore down the “criminal drive” and forced them to consider alternatives (Cusson & Pinsonneault, 1986). Rick realized that he would need to take courses in prison, learn marketable skills and solve his emotional issues to avoid these pains and the feared self he had envisioned.

Of the six participants in this study who had children at the time of their decision to go straight, five cited missing out on their children’s lives as motivation to desist. The exception to this rule was Wayne, who was estranged from his daughter shortly after her birth and had no relationship with her until a number of years after he gave up crime. For the other five participants it was not the birth of their children brought about some new sense of responsibility (Sampson & Laub, 1993). Instead, the catalyzing effect happened when their children were in elementary or high school. In describing the impact of being a mother for participants in their study, Giordano et al. (2002) observe that

motherhood creates possibilities for a change in self-conception, but the internalization of this new status is far from automatic. . . . Even if respondents have imagined for themselves a different kind of self, and more generally a different kind of life, it is necessary that they come to “see” the old deviant behavior as fundamentally incompatible with this new persona. Thus, loving one’s children will not on its own be sufficient as a catalyst for long-term behavioral changes, unless this connection has been forged. (p. 1040)

Indeed, in the current study, the motivational effect of fatherhood was not automatic either. It was only after participants realized that they had missed large chunks of their children’s lives or the negative impact of their actions, due to their criminality, that the responsibilities of parenthood entered into the rational calculation to desist. Both Aaron and Jack, for instance, expressed deep regret over spending so much time in prison and leaving their kids to be raised by unfit mothers or foster parents. The potential pains of repeating these patterns in the future were motivation to change (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). In taking steps toward desistance, then, participants took action to work towards a desired self that would be successful or a support for their children.

One of the criticisms of Paternoster & Bushway’s (2009) conceptualization of agency in the desistance process, offered by King (2013b), is that their model fails to take

into consideration how one's desired self may need to be altered in the face of structural barriers. Drawing on the work of Emirbayer & Mische (1998), King (2013b) suggests that when there is a disjunction between the projective element of agency (akin to the desired self) and the realities of structural constraints, future expectations are brought back down to reality by the practical-evaluative component of agency. Before embarking on this study, I anticipated that participants might speak to similar processes of re-evaluation that had taken place while going straight. While minor instances of this emerged, to paint the sample with a broad brush, most remained committed to their desired selves throughout. Perhaps this is due to the fact that King's (2013b) sample was composed of individuals in the very early stages of going straight. However, even amongst the three participants in the current study who were recently released from prison (i.e., less than three months from the interview date), little evidence of significantly altering their expectations about the future when faced with structural barriers appeared. Rather, they altered their strategies for achieving the goals they actually sought. For example, Aaron expressed that his strained relationship with a parole officer made it difficult to feel trusted or to get together with friends. Instead of arguing with his parole officer, Aaron was trying to build up a rapport with her so he could eventually earn that trust and freedom. While there is an evaluative component to this action, it did not rise to the level of tempering Aaron's expectations about the future.

The future-oriented selves theorized in similar fashions by Paternoster & Bushway (2009), Emirbayer & Mische (1998; see also King, 2013b) and Giordano et al. (2002) are instructive about how would-be desisters envision a crime-free life. However, the real test is putting vision into reality. In Paternoster et al.'s (2015) conceptualization of agency in their ITD, the "newly emerging pro-social identity or possible self then triggers a change in the person's preferences for things like quick and easy money . . . or the "party life" for more pro-social things like conventional employment and social relationships" (p. 6). These changes in preferences are key to Paternoster & Bushway's (2009) ITD in terms of explaining how the desired self translates into agentic behaviour. People's views of who they are or would like to be (i.e., their identity) inform their beliefs, desires and preferences, which, ultimately, drive their behaviour (Aguilar & de Francisco, 2009; Archer, 2000; Boudon, 2003). Changes in beliefs, preferences and desires were quite common for my participants. When I asked Cory how his thinking had changed after having an epiphany

of sorts while incarcerated, he responded, "I'm just tired of it. It's not cool anymore. I appreciate different things than I used to. I don't appreciate cars, the money. That's not the shit that I like anymore." Many others still desired money, but realized that the way they had been going about it was not working anymore. Giordano et al. (2007) similarly noted in their study that desisters underwent a diminution of the positive emotions associated with crime such as excitement or status. As many offenders age, the magnetism of the criminal lifestyle wanes as friends mature, social reinforcement is less and the social/personal costs of that lifestyle increase. Likewise, participants in this study had come to want a quiet life and a stable job as opposed to the sometimes thrilling, but overly consequential ways of the past. Thus, part of the transition towards a crime-free involved a desire for normalcy (see Farrall & Calverley, 2006).

As preferences for a normal life increased, the men I interviewed steered clear of influences that may have thwarted that goal. As Kiecolt (1994) writes, "the decision to change oneself requires awareness of and access to some means of self-change" (p. 55). One of these means includes prosocial supports such as friends, family or a romantic partner. Engaging in relationships with these supports can provide fledgling desisters with a cognitive blueprint (Giordano et al., 2002) or skeleton script (Rumgay, 2004) that lays out the behavioural norms, expectations and activities that are associated with leading a prosocial life. Giordano et al. (2002) note that within their sample, a general openness to change is necessary, but "by itself it is often insufficient" (p. 1001). Rather, a desire to change must also be accompanied by exposure to one or more hooks for change (e.g., a prosocial friend, a good marriage, children, gainful employment).

Paternoster et al. (2015), in their explanation of the ITD, postulate that the changes in preferences that come along with the desired self drive would-be desisters' involvement in prosocial relationships. In other words, an active pruning and seeding of old and new relationships fosters the desired self into becoming reality. The overwhelming majority of participants involved in this research spoke about doing exactly this. For some, this process began while incarcerated. Following his involvement in an in-prison homicide, Matt realized that he needed a change if he ever wanted to be released. After accepting God into his life, he began to associate with other Christians inside, knowing that this change of associates would keep him on the right path. A number of participants who

sought out new friends in prison noted that it was exceedingly difficult, due to the importance of maintaining one's reputation. Rick, for instance, commented, "so here I am trying to change myself, but also you have to not be taken advantage of. There's wolves and there's sheep in there. I was a wolf. I didn't want to be a sheep." While painstaking at first, these men eventually sketched out a new identity as a prosocial leader in prison, retaining their status as a "wolf", albeit in a new light. These active changes in associates continued on the outside; as one participant proudly noted:

I didn't even go and get laid yet, 'cause my priorities are to stay clean and not associate with all these fuckin girls I know that would put out like that. . . . Because I did a 180 and I changed my attitude and whatever else, my priorities are in a different place. There will be lots of time to find a nice healthy girl. (Aaron)

Aaron knew that by going out with the types of women he used to hang around with, he would return to habit, stealing cars and so forth to impress them, and that these activities would eventually land him back in prison. The finding that fledgling desisters consciously change their social networks echoes those of Giordano, Cernkovich & Hollands (2003). They observed that one major benefit to distancing oneself from antisocial peers and associating more with prosocial ones is that it "affords a concrete way of enhancing one's own identity as a respectable person" (p. 311). Thus, these new relationships have an inherent value in terms of moving one towards fulfilment of the desired self.

The intentional selection of relationships prevalent amongst participants in this study stands in contrast to the previous findings of Sampson & Laub (1993) and Warr (1998). The former, for instance, suggest that informal social controls such as finding a cohesive work environment, and particularly a good marriage, are chance events. In a later article, they wrote that "'good' things sometimes happen to 'bad' actors, and when they do desistance has a chance" (Laub et al., 1998, p. 237). With regard to friendships as well, Sampson & Laub (1993) and Warr (1998) contend changes in peer networks occur naturally, as the supervision, altered routine activities and commitment to maintaining the marital bond knife off contact with antisocial associates by default. In this study, changes in friendships or romantic partners were rarely happenstance. Only one participant, Shane, conveyed a behavioural change that occurred following a chance encounter with a prison chapel volunteer. For the rest, the relationships that had a positive effect on their

desistance were entered into purposely, and most often, this took place without a prosocial romantic partner driving that choice.

Drawing on the work of Kiecolt (1994), Paternoster & Bushway (2009) also contend “intentional self-change is unlikely to be successful” without structural supports, which may include “self-help groups and professional changers, such as psychiatrists and social workers” (p. 1129). As previously noted, Farrall (1995) contends most of the desistance process seems to happen outside of the formal correctional system. The bulk of the research on desistance thus far has focused primarily on these ‘outside’ factors, mostly revolving around intentional and unintentional changes wrought from interpersonal relationships, employment and the power of a strong will (e.g., Giordano et al., 2002; Healy, 2016; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Maruna, 2001; Shover, 1983; Warr, 1998). Notable exceptions include the works of Farrall (2002) and Rex (1999), both of whom examined the impact of probation of desistance. Yet, despite previous research highlighting factors outside the formal criminal justice system, as Kazemian (2015) recently noted, not much is known about factors within or peripheral to that system.

In their article *Coerced offender rehabilitation – a defensible practice*, Day, Tucker & Howells (2004) claim strongly that, regardless of offenders’ antitherapeutic attitudes prior to treatment, these attitudes may change over the course of treatment and lead to therapeutic gains. Certainly, participation in formal prison rehabilitation and re-entry programs that correspond to established treatment principles (e.g., RNR) can have significant impacts on reducing recidivism (see Andrews & Bonta, 2010 for a review). With that said, nearly half of the participants in these programs eventually return to prison. Others argue (e.g., Maruna & Ward, 2007; Porporino, 2010; Ward & Stewart, 2003b) that the failure to attend to the agentic and identity-based changes involved in going straight may indeed alienate offenders and limit program effectiveness. One of the most consistent findings in this study was that participants were extremely skeptical of formal correctional programming run by CSC. This wariness primarily revolved around two issues. First, many interviewees felt that being pressured into participating in these programs limited their own buy-in. Second, even when they were at least somewhat open to the experience, the lack of buy-in from other inmates created an atmosphere not conducive to learning or sharing.

When we consider that many offenders felt that their early lives were largely out of their control (Liem & Richardson, 2014; Maruna, 2001), their lack of responsivity to what they perceive to be coerced treatments is not surprising. This is not to say that formal correctional programming had zero impact at all, however. Three participants noted gaining some valuable knowledge from these programs. Crucially though, the positive benefits only began to accrue after they had made a conscious decision to attempt going straight. As Aaron commented, “if I would’ve done it while I was in I would have never benefited from, ‘cause I had a horrible attitude.” After only a few days out of prison, Aaron phoned one of the only friends who “actually gives a shit about me” and went to an NA meeting with her. Once he bought into the 12 steps of NA and started to adopt a desistance-oriented mindset, Aaron was open to the experience of a CSC re-entry program that he actively avoided while incarcerated.

Most often, though, the structural supports that assisted participants in going straight were not found in the formal correctional system. In her article chronicling the results of a study of 73 probationers in Ireland, Healy (2016) found that highly agentic participants developed various cognitive, emotional and social coping mechanisms to work towards their imagined identities. In the current study, the majority of participants cultivated these coping mechanisms through actively seeking help from mutual-aid groups or “professional changers” (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Four participants sought out groups like AA and AVP of their own accord while incarcerated because they knew they needed guidance. As Rick recalled, “I knew that I needed to change my thinking inside my head and [AA] was one of the tools that I was able to take away from there and start learning about changing my thought processes.” An important part of participating in these programs was that engagement with community members or other inmates already on the path to desistance provided participants with a skeleton script (Rumgay, 2004) for ways to solidify their own identities as desisters (see also Cain, 1991; McAdams & McLean, 2014; Petrich & Morrison, 2015). A handful of participants also came to recognize that they were not responsive to group-based programs and, as such, sought out one-on-one therapy after release from prison. Darren, for instance, had come to the realization that “I’ve got to heal all the wounds from childhood and work with a psychologist and then evolve myself from there.” In other words, he knew that without getting the proper guidance, his life would fall right back into old habits and derail him from going straight.

## 5.2. Unearthing the Core Self

In the previous section, I argued that Paternoster & Bushway's (2009; Paternoster et al., 2015) theorization of desistance as an agentic endeavour accurately describes the experiences of participants in the current study. Following some contemplation of the accumulating pains of criminality and incarceration, a disjuncture between the feared self and the desired self seemed to drive these men to begin changing their behaviour, cognitions, associates and surroundings. An important part of this dynamic, however, was that the act of 'becoming' the desired self was not instantaneous, but a gradual process. For those in the midst of "normal-smithing" (Lofland, 1969), a complete abandonment of one's past identity can lead to a disorienting state of identity nakedness, which can "provoke a deep sense of worthlessness, a sense of a deeply blemished being" (p. 282).

One of the key features of narrative is that it imparts a sense of ontological security, that is, coherence, unity and purpose, into the seemingly chaotic and random events we experience (Giddens, 1991; McAdams, 2006). The ontological security provided through a well-constructed narrative protects against the kind of identity nakedness Lofland (1969) describes. As opposed to wholly rejecting one's past self and becoming a completely new 'Me', Maruna (2001) contends that past negative experiences must be connected to the present so that "the present good seems an almost inevitable outcome" (p. 87). Within the study of narrative, one of the commonly observed ways that individuals story themselves is through the crafting of redemption sequences. In these sequences, the storyteller "depicts a transformation from a bad, affectively negative life scene to a subsequent good, affectively positive life scene. The bad is redeemed, salvaged, mitigated, or made better in light of the ensuing good" (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten & Bowman, 2001, p. 474). By depicting oneself as redeemed, the past is not forgotten, but rewritten as a "necessary prelude to a productive and worthy life" (Maruna, 2001, p. 87).

In McAdams' (1993) conceptualization of redemption sequences, stories often begin with narrators describing some set of core values, developed at a young age, that allowed them to successfully weather the dangerous terrains (e.g., sin, bad health, addiction, stagnation, poverty) encountered across the life course. Though there are many 'downs', a return to those core values allows redemptive storytellers to convey how they

overcame and became who they are in the present (McAdams, 1993). In Maruna's (2001) juxtaposition of persistent and desisting ex-offenders, one of the key differences between the two groups was that desisters established some set of core beliefs about their true selves. Describing this further based on her own study of redemption narratives amongst desisters, Stone (2016) observed stories which "emphasize the teller's inherent goodness or normalcy while attributing past deviance to bad circumstances or a corrupting force" (p. 963). With respect to conveying their "inherent goodness", each of the men interviewed for the current study spoke to some redeeming qualities from their pasts. Take Randy, for example:

I just want to say for the record that I was a good kid. Up to 12 years old I never got in trouble, never stole. . . . I did everything the adults told me to do. If they told me to go and clean the barn, I'd clean the barn. Trying to get kudos, trying to get someone to say, 'Thank you Randy, for doing that.'

Randy's break from being a "good kid" occurred after his uncle forced him to drown a dozen puppies. This trauma caused anger to build over time and eventually led to using violent crime as some form of catharsis. Consistent with the results of Maruna (2001) and Stone (2016), though, after describing his lengthy journey going straight, Randy commented, "I am now back as I was before, when I was a kid." In a similar vein, Matt recounted having a "Jekyll and Hyde" personality, in which he was a helpful and caring kid at home, but, received little attention from his parents due to their heavy work schedules, he sought out attention through antisocial behaviour when he left the house.

Other participants described their past crimes as part of necessity or some version of heroism. For example, when describing murdering his former abuser, Shane recalled placing photographs on the bed of the naked children that the victim had molested and, prior to leaving, saying aloud, "I hope that you are gone now and that you will never, ever hurt another child again." The brutal manner in which Shane killed his victim is clearly indicative of revenge, but he also made it clear that he wanted to prevent other children from going through the same hell he experienced. In less dramatic terms, some sample members also spoke about having to steal and scam in order to survive. Being left to fend for himself at a very young age, Terry developed an aptitude for committing crime, as he could not make enough legally to support himself. As an adult with a family, Terry was

ashamed to say that, despite working in the construction industry, he would sometimes get dragged into doing “scores” to help provide a little extra for his wife and children. Similar themes of ‘heroism’ are seen in Maruna’s (2001) study. For example, Maruna describes one participant who, despite knowing it was wrong, began his offending career by stealing coal to provide heat in the family home.

As Stone (2016) observed in her study, redemption scripts often portrayed the narrators’ crimes as the result of some outside force beyond their own control. Certainly, the need to provide for oneself and one’s family, as evidenced by a number of my participants, satisfy this criterion. In this case, the factor driving offending is exclusion from ‘normal’ society due to a life of abuse, neglect and degradation by ‘the system’. For many participants, too, the outside force was addiction. Reflecting on his past escapades stealing and scamming, Wayne commented,

Every place I worked, I cased it. I saw extra money, I just took it. But that was, you know, to pay for my drugs. I tell you, fuckin’ when it grabs a hold of you, that shit is harsh. It’s harsh.

For Wayne and many others in the study, substance abuse was a form of escapism used to avoid dealing with the emotional traumas in their childhoods. Likewise, in Liem & Richardson’s (2014) research, one participant noted,

I did what I needed to do for my substance abuse; . . . I did it because I wanted to do it and it made me feel good even though I thought it would help with the problems that were going on and what I dealt with. (Male, 57, as quoted in Liem & Richardson, 2014, p. 699)

In section 5.1 I reported that the majority of sample members eventually went through a period wherein they contemplated their past failures related to offending; missing out on the lives of their children, the realization of a lack of accomplishments or simply growing tired were common factors in this process (see also Cusson & Pinsonneault, 1986; Shover, 1983; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). As these pains accumulated and overwhelmed them, participants began to envision a desired future self that, through desisting from crime and leading a ‘normal’ life, would be free of these pains. In this section, I argue that they were able to either locate some core beliefs about their

true selves, or attribute their criminality to forces beyond their control; in some cases, interviewees reported both phenomena. Maruna (2001) writes:

Although it may be therapeutic for a person to locate the roots of his or her problems in the social environment (disadvantage, inequality, victimization), successfully desisting people seem to internalize complete responsibility for overcoming these obstacles. (p. 149)

In the process of becoming the desired self, assuming control over one's life for those in this study often meant repurposing old skills, values and attributes, or breaking free of the manacles of addiction and the lingering effects of abuse. As an example of the former, Matt noted that he had always had a knack for connecting people. In his former, criminal life, he used this skill to organize complex scores and to run prison gangs. Since leaving that life behind, Matt used those skills to create a cultural shift in prison and to start a social justice-oriented organization upon re-entry. Others like Rick, Jack, and Darren sought help in therapy to deal with addiction and emotional problems that they believed led to their offending. Overcoming these problems, they were able to return to normalcy through education, employment and relationships with family. Maruna (2001) contends that discovering these core beliefs about the self, allows desisting ex-offenders to fashion a narrative of redemption that is believable not only to others, but more importantly, to themselves. Ricoeur's (1992) explanation of sameness and selfhood in personal identity provides valuable insight into this phenomenon. Sameness, according to Ricoeur (1992) implies stasis, that is, people tend to remain essentially the same over time. On the other hand, selfhood implies that identity is variable and dynamic across the life-course. Reflecting on this dynamic, Vaughan (2007) observes, "Ricoeur suggests that the tension between notions of sameness and selfhood can only be resolved by conceiving the self as constituted through narration that relates disparate events into a relatively coherent whole" (p. 396). In other words, the self of the past must be constitutive of the present identity and the desired self of the future to provide individuals with a sense of ontological security (Giddens, 1991; Ricoeur, 1992). Through the fashioning of a redemption narrative, then, participants in this study bring meaning to past events and a sense of inevitability to their present selves as desisters.

### **5.3. Wounded Healers and Recognized Redemption**

The work of McAdams and his colleagues show that individuals who convey in their narratives some variation on the theme of a redemptive self tend to be highly generative (see McAdams, 2006 for a review). Building on the work of Erikson (1963), McAdams & de St. Aubin (1992) explain that once adults consolidate a strong sense of self (i.e., their identity), they often become concerned with pursuits in which one generates something of value that will serve to uplift or empower the next generation. Drawing further from Bakan (1966), generativity can be conceived of as arising from the motivational tendencies of agency (i.e., “the desire to assert, expand, and develop the self in a powerful and independent way”) and communion (i.e., the desire to be needed by and “relate to others in loving, caring, and intimate ways”) (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992, p. 1005).

In the previous two sections I discussed that the majority of men interviewed in my study (a) actively sought out ways to forge their way towards a desired future self that was crime-free, and (b) through these agentic endeavours, were able to either break free of the forces that had confined them to a life of crime in the first place, or return to the values, beliefs and skills that had been overshadowed by that criminality. The culmination of the newfound sense of agency and an uncovering of the true self was, for a large number of participants, an inclination towards generativity. In the prototypical redemption sequence, “the bad is redeemed, salvaged, mitigated, or made better in light of the ensuing good” (McAdams et al., 2001, p. 474). As Maruna (2001) found, desisters find a way to turn a life that would ordinarily be construed as a waste into a source of wisdom or a cautionary tale for others. They frequently sought out paid or unpaid work in which they could put this knowledge to use as drug counselors, mutual-aid group participants, youth workers or community volunteers.

In addition, of the eight participants who had desisted longer than two years, six were actively involved in the type of generative pursuits Maruna (2001) found in his study. For the other three ‘fledgling desisters’, the primary concern was some combination of reconnecting with their children, getting a job and settling down into a ‘normal’ life. Given that these three were all in their early- to mid-thirties, the desire to establish themselves in relationships and achieve normalcy is consistent with Erikson’s (1963) sixth stage of

psychosocial development, in which humans face the dilemma of intimacy versus isolation. However, even within the narratives of these early desisters, inklings of generative desire existed. For instance, while Cory was just looking for stable work and a stable woman, he also spoke of wanting to open an animal shelter or help at-risk youth, noting that “all you have when you’re gone is the footprints you’ve left, right? I’d just like to leave a footprint.” Darren, as well, was going back to school so he could be an example to his boys that going through hard times does not have to hold you back in life. Despite being early on in their paths to desistance, these individuals showed a clear desire to both assert and expand the self, and to be needed by others (see also McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). Lofland (1969) wrote that

transformed deviants tend to become not merely moral but hypermoral. They are not simply ‘reformed’ or ‘rehabilitated’ into regular people with regular jobs and regular lives. They become extraregular people, have extraregular jobs (even if the job is not the way they make a living), and have extraregular lives. (p. 282)

Indeed, the men interviewed in my own study held down regular jobs as landscapers, worked in the technology industry or were on disability. In their spare time, however, they spoke at schools and at youth correctional institutions, worked in organizations that help prisoners reintegrate into the community or did prison in-reach volunteer work. While outside observers might consider this work to be ‘extraregular’ or ‘hypermoral’ (Lofland, 1969), it did not seem that participants viewed their generativity in such a light. For example, Matt commented about his social justice work he began while still incarcerated:

I’m not special or anything, but some opportunities came my way and I’m not stupid. So, I used those opportunities to help others and do the best I could to make the prison a better place for people to live in.

In Matt’s case, and for many others as well, these endeavours were simply something that they felt compelled to do, regardless of financial benefit. LeBel, Richie & Maruna (2015), in their study of formerly incarcerated individuals working in prisoner reintegration services, note that “staff members do not appear to be engaged in helping others for the money,” (p. 117) with over 80% earning less than \$2500 USD per month. On that point, later in our interview Matt remarked that “we don’t make any money. I’ve never been as

poor as I am today, but I feel very rich too. I believe that we're doing the right thing, and the right thing often is the hardest thing."

Doing the 'right thing' seemed to be one of the motivations for participants' engagement in giving back to society. Expressions of shame over past actions were common themes running through participant narratives. For example, when Jack was asked how he felt about his more violent crimes, he responded,

I feel ashamed of what I've done. I've hurt a lot of people in my life and I understand the fear and torment they go through. One of my counselors basically put it, it's like what I'm putting them through, my predator put me through. They didn't have to live with me, but for a short, brief moment, I understand their fear and what they went through.

Through various avenues of treatment and self-reflection, many came to similar realizations about the direct and indirect victims of their crimes. Maruna & Ramsden (2004) argued that in the absence of victims to make direct amends to, generativity can serve as a way for offenders to constructively manage their shame over past misdeeds. Considering all of the people he had hurt, Bill said, "I think it's my responsibility to share what I've learned." Through speaking at schools and engaging in volunteer work, he believed he could help to prevent others from becoming offenders and damaging others' lives as he had. Similarly, although Rick knew he could not possibly make amends to his dozens of victims over the years, he felt that doing in-reach work with the AVP and leading a 'normal' life were his way of paying back what he had taken from society.

Braithwaite and Mugford (1994) explain, "the gesture of restoration. . . even if it is modest in comparison to the enormity of the crime, enables the offender to seize back pride and reassume a law-respecting, other-respecting and self-respecting identity" (p. 148). Clearly, participants in this study received great psychological benefit from their generative endeavours. Shane spoke about it being great to express himself in front of an audience and to feel he was making an impact. Randy glowed with pride when he showed me text messages and emails received from kids he had helped through struggles over the years. In general, too, giving back allowed participants to be secure in the fact that they were doing something good "instead of feeling like I'd fucked everything up" (Cory). LeBel and his colleagues produced similar findings studying the impact of generative

behaviour amongst former prisoners. For example, LeBel (2007) found that for those working in reintegration services, thinking of oneself as a 'wounded healer' led to higher self-esteem and greater life satisfaction. Expanding these analyses in a later study, LeBel et al. (2015) also found that former prisoners working in reintegration services were more likely than program clients to believe that their debt to society would be paid and less likely to perceive personal stigma from society. From both within and outside the field of criminology, a wealth of research similarly shows that helping others has widespread benefits, including greater psychosocial adjustment, increases in self-esteem, self-esteem and confidence, and an overall positive identity (e.g., Aresti, Eatough & Brooks, 2010; Carlson, Rapp & McDiarmid, 2001; Copeland, 1997; Hutchinson et al., 2006; Maruna, 2001; McIvor, 1998).

In terms of explaining the nature of the desire for communion (Bakan, 1966) in generative and agentic action, it is important to consider the reciprocal dynamic of identity construction. Paternoster & Bushway (2009) argue that would-be desisters craft a desired future self and, through their various expressions of agency, work towards that goal. As evidenced earlier, this certainly characterizes the narratives of the men included in the current study. However, it is not the complete picture. As McAdams (1994; McAdams et al., 2001; McAdams & Pals, 2006) has long argued, our narrative identities are largely psychosocial constructions, borne out of interpersonal and cultural interactions, norms and traditions. Drawing from the work of John Braithwaite (Braithwaite & Braithwaite, 2001; Makkai & Braithwaite, 1994), Lofland, (1969) and Meisenhelder (1977), Maruna and LeBel (2012; Maruna, LeBel, Mitchell & Naples, 2004) argue that labeling theory may be of value in explaining at least part of the identity transformation process involved in desistance from crime. They contend "desistance may be best facilitated when the desisting person's change in behavior is recognized by others and reflected back to him in a 'delabeling process'" (Maruna et al., 2004, p. 274). Certainly, this dynamic occurred when participants in the current study spoke of their motivations for generativity. Speaking in front of an audience as an exemplar of true transformation from 'bad' to 'good' and receiving that audience's recognition as someone worth listening to seemed to solidify their own perceptions of being 'changed'. For instance, Rick was asked why he still goes back to correctional institutions to do in-reach work with prisoners:

Rick: My reasoning for wanting to get back involved in AVP in the prisons is to show these guys that there is hope. I've been where you've been, I've done the time. I've been out this long. If you think that there's no hope, there is hope. You can survive out here, you don't have to go back to prison. It's only by choice. I just want to let these guys know that whatever you find yourself in, there's hope. Don't give up. Look at me, I couldn't stay out of prison.

Damon: So kind of carrying a message forward?

Rick: Well yeah, exactly. Just to say that this works. I was helpless, I was hopeless. They wrote me off. I was written off. They gave me a low survival rate out here, didn't think I'd make it.

It is evident here that Rick has a strong desire to help others, but there is also the element of "look at me"; like others in the study, he believed that others recognized the legitimacy of his transformation.

The desire for others to recognize genuine attempts at going straight was also clear beyond what would be considered generative pursuits. As Shover (1996) observed in his study of thieves, "the change process . . . is an interactional one" (p. 143). Many of these interactions do not take the form of the extraregular (Lofland, 1969) activities described above, but in the more mundane day-to-date exchanges. For example, Aaron, in wanting to prove to his son's grandmother that he could be a good parent, said that eventually he was "going to bombard her with people that see me do well, so that she's not just hearing it from me." While Aaron, an early desister, expressed this future-directed desire for recognition, others than had walked the straight path for longer spoke fondly of instances when they had received it. Matt described getting out on a day pass, going to the local church and spending several hours confessing all of his sins to the congregation. When he returned the next day, "there was people lined up man (*begins crying*), shaking my hand and telling me I really moved them. They were real thankful that I came. I felt really a part of something" (Matt). These findings echo those of Farrall & Calverley (2006), who noted that the existential and emotional changes involved in desistance were heavily bound to participants' relationships with others. For example, one of their participants noted that he "no longer had to handle his own feelings of anger generated by what he saw as the presumptuous judgments of others" (Calverley & Farrall, 2014, pp. 87-88).

Unfortunately, though, labeling runs in both directions and has the potential to derail one's efforts at going straight. Maruna & LeBel (2010) write that

the fact that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour does not necessarily mean that some individuals are permanently or somehow 'naturally' deviant. The continuity in criminal behaviour over time may instead be accounted for through predictable environmental interactions or 'cumulative disadvantages' enhanced by criminal engagement itself. (p. 74)

Through repeated interactions with police, the courts, corrections and society in general, many offenders internalize the stigma of being 'an offender' (Erikson, 1962; Lemert, 1951). Braithwaite (1989) argued the stigmatic shaming and feelings of exclusion brought about by these interactions can lead offenders to seek respect and inclusion in criminal subculture. A similar dynamic was evident in the narratives of several men who participated in the current study. Cory recalled an interaction in which his parole officer began their meeting by saying "When I suspend you...." Reflecting on this encounter, Cory said, "They don't understand the kind of ripple effect that has," noting that he told his parole officer that, "If I go back. . . I'm close to giving up." Echoing this, Matt remembered being called a psychopath that should spend the rest of his life in prison by the parole board. Despite Matt previously thinking he was on the path to going straight, their comments resulted in a quick turnaround in his mind: "You know what? They're right. That's true. I'm just kidding myself." As discussed in Section 5.1., optimism and a clear vision of a better version of oneself can catalyze desistance. However, as evidenced here, the reverse is also true. Supporting this, LeBel et al. (2008) found that feelings of stigmatization, social exclusion, and a lack of hope significantly predicted recidivism amongst 130 male repeat offenders over a 10-year period. The reverse was also true in terms of predicting desistance.

In the current chapter of this thesis I have demonstrated how the results of my study fit within and add to current knowledge on desistance from crime. The final chapter briefly summarizes the results of this study and their contextualization, in addition to a discussion of the limitations of the research. Given my belief that criminological research should ultimately inform policy, the final chapter also discusses how the results of the study provide further insight into how we should think about *helping* offenders to desist from crime, rather than simply *imposing* treatment on them.

## Chapter 6.

### Conclusion

The aims of this study were (a) to better understand how subjective and structural factors influence, as well as interact in, the pathways to and from criminality, and (b), on an exploratory basis, to tease out what the roles of formal/informal programs and services are on these pathways. When reflecting on their criminal careers, participants' motivations for engaging in crime were diverse, but centered around the common theme of fatalism. In line with previous research (e.g., Halsey, Armstrong & Wright, 2016; Maruna, 2001; Matza, 1964), early lives constituted by abuse, neglect, poverty and repeated negative interactions with the criminal justice system left participants with the feeling that their destinies had been set. Phrases like "this is all I know" and "it just feels normal" were quite common responses from these men when asked where they thought the motivation for crime came from. As well, it was evident that years of abuse and neglect often manifested in substance abuse as a form of escapism or coping; unfortunately, this became a cycle that led participants further downward.

For each of the men interviewed, though, there came a point when living a criminal lifestyle became too costly to continue. The costs commonly described as becoming salient were that they had nothing to show for all of those years of criminality, little education, few marketable skills and, perhaps most importantly, that many had missed out on spending valuable time with family (see also Cusson & Pinsonneault, 1986; Shover, 1983). Consistent with Paternoster & Bushway's (2009; Paternoster et al., 2015) ITD, thinking about continuing down such a failed path resulted in a feared self, that is, a bleak vision of an anticipated 'Me' of the future. On the other hand, they also envisioned a desired self, a 'Me' of the future that led a normal life with some combination of a steady job, a partner, sound relationships with their children and sobriety (Giordano et al., 2002; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009).

The realization of the disjuncture between the feared and desired selves led participants to actively seek out means of transforming their lives. In many previous studies, relationships with family, friends and employment have been highlighted as some

of the means by which antisocial associates and attitudes are naturally 'knifed off' (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Warr, 1998) or by which identity and emotional transformations begin to take place (Farrall & Calverley, 2006; Giordano et al., 2002; Giordano et al., 2007; Maruna, 2001). Much prior research, however, either explicitly or through lack of elaboration, assumes that these relationships already existed or that they come about by happenstance. Certainly, in the current study, participants' relationships with their children, a major driving force behind their desistance, were pre-existing. Beyond this, though, the majority of relationships with friends and romantic partners who supported going straight were entered into purposefully. Echoing the theoretical suppositions of Paternoster & Bushway (2009) and findings from Giordano et al. (2003), participants in this study consciously cut themselves off from antisocial relationships and made efforts to engage in prosocial ones. By doing so, they surrounded themselves with like-minded and supportive individuals who could help to guide them through the process of going straight.

Part of this process, too, seemed to be that participants were either able to justify their actions (e.g., out of necessity, feelings or normality), focus on redeeming qualities in their past lives that were, unfortunately, put towards criminality, or to attribute their crimes to an alien force (see also Liem & Richardson, 2014; Maruna, 2001; Stone, 2016). In doing so, these men were able to craft a coherent narrative whereby the repurposing of qualities, breaking free of addictions and so forth made it sensible for them to have turned things around. Importantly, on the one hand, participants' stories reflected that a large degree of blame was placed on these forces beyond their control, yet many also accepted responsibility for their actions at the same time. These two seem at odds with one another, but it appears that acknowledging their own role in the past was an impetus for taking control of their present and future (see Mauna, 2001 for a similar dynamic). Expressing guilt over these past actions, many participants were actively engaged in or expressed a desire to be engaged in making amends to society in some way. Generative pursuits concerned with "establishing and guiding the next generation" (Erikson, 1963, p. 267) were participants' primary means of doing so. Speaking to at-risk youth, volunteering in the community and doing prison in-reach work provided these men with both a sense of agency and of reciprocal support (Bakan, 1996; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992) that they valued highly and which solidified their identities of being reformed.

One of the major reasons for undertaking this study was that, as Kazemian (2015) noted, there is relatively little knowledge on the role of prison in the desistance process. From his review of the literature at the time, Farrall (1995) argued desistance most often occurs away from the formal criminal justice system. For example, in Giordano et al.'s (2002) study, only 13% of women and 27% of men in their sample focused heavily on prison or treatment as hooks for change. From my own reading of desistance literature, no studies have specifically dealt with *why* desisters hold prison and treatment in such low regard in terms of their potential for catalyzing change. The current study explores a partial understanding of why this might be the case. Broadly put, participants were wary of formal CSC-run prison and re-entry programs for two interrelated reasons. First, they often felt pressured into participation because parole board decisions are swayed based on program completion. Given the sense of fatalism that prevailed for much of these participants' lives, it is not especially surprising that they might be resistant to further controls being placed on them by a domineering system. Second, even when these men did agree to participate, the lack of buy-in from other inmates (perhaps due to also feeling pressured into participation) created an atmosphere antithetical to openness and positive treatment outcomes.

On the other hand, many participants did seek out treatment options that were outside the purview of CSC. At a certain point, they realized that they needed some type of structured guidance in going straight. Inside the institution, mutual-aid groups such as AA, NA and the AVP provided "free therapy" (Rick) and a sense of community. Upon their release from incarceration, several participants also voluntarily sought out one-on-one therapy to address some of the underlying psychological and emotional issues that they believed were driving their offending. In the next section, I provide suggestions regarding ways forward for offender rehabilitation and re-entry based on findings from this study and other prior research.

## 6.1. Approaching Rehabilitation from a Desistance Paradigm

Chapter 2 laid out some of the major criticisms of risk-based treatment paradigms, most prominently the RNR model. To briefly recap, McMurrin & Ward (2004) summarize these best:

The major weaknesses include its tendency to focus on risk reduction rather than positive ways of living, the lack of attention paid to personal identity and human needs and the perception of offenders as bundles of risk factors rather than integrated, complex beings who are seeking to give value and meaning to their lives. (p. 298)

In laying out the 'Central Eight' criminogenic needs (see Andrews & Bonta, 2010) addressed in correctional treatment, proponents of RNR present a seemingly straightforward way to reduce recidivism. Yet, the trouble with these identified needs is that they are drawn from meta-analyses of the correlates of offending, not desistance. As Porporino (2010) points out, this is problematic because

offenders might begin offending, in part at least, because of their impulsivity, failure to attend to consequences, preference for anti-social associates, unstructured lifestyles and emerging pro-criminal sentiments ... and so on. But it doesn't follow that a reversal in these anti-social personality traits, behaviours and attitudes is what is key in moving offenders into desistance, or even in maintaining it. (p. 69)

Thus, focusing on reducing risk factors such as impulsivity, antisocial associates and the like leaves aside true consideration of how the process of change actually works (McNeill, 2006; Ward & Stewart, 2003b; Ward & Maruna, 2007).

At risk of being redundant, in the current study going straight involved participants re-evaluating their lives based on the accumulating pains of punishment, envisioning a future self free from crime and taking active steps to acquire the social supports and skills that they believed would help bring that desired self of the future to fruition. With some minor exceptions (see Chapter 5), this process was generally in line with much of the prior research and theory that has highlighted cognitive, identity and emotional changes evident throughout participants' desistance from crime (e.g., Farrall & Calverley, 2006; Giordano et al., 2002; Giordano et al., 2003; Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009;

Paternoster et al., 2015). Importantly, too, the participants in this study had largely rejected CSC programs and instead sought out help from informal, volunteer-driven programs in and outside the prison, as well as one-on-one therapy, to support these changes.

Moving forward, the question for those both formally and informally involved in correctional efforts is how we can “devise means of ‘forcing the plant’, as it were, so that benign maturation will occur earlier than it seems to at present” (Glueck & Glueck, 1937, p. 205). Perhaps “forcing” is not the best term, as feeling pressured into participation was one of the main criticisms lodged against formal CSC programming by participants in this study. Indeed, based on her decades of work with offenders, Harris (2005) similarly observes that many prisoners hold such negative attitudes towards correctional treatment and rehabilitation: “the distaste for such programs is linked to a sense that these interventions involve things being ‘done to’ or ‘prescribed for’ passive recipients who are characterized as deficient, ineffectual, misguided, untrustworthy, possibly dangerous, and almost certain to” (p. 318). That said, the underlying meaning of the Gluecks’ (1937) question is still valid. More recently, desistance researchers have thought of this question more in terms of ‘how can we *help* offenders to desist?’ as opposed ‘what can we *do to* offenders to prevent them from recidivating?’ (e.g., Harris, 2005; Maruna & LeBel, 2012; McNeill, 2006; Porporino, 2010).

One way to help offenders desist may be to develop correctional programming that places a high value on responsivity. As discussed through this thesis, practices that focus primarily on criminogenic needs and ignore the agentic and identity change processes involved in going straight, run the risk of alienating offenders because they do not address the things that actually matter to them (Ward & Maruna, 2007). From the perspective of Ward’s GLM, being truly responsive in treatment means identifying the various primary goods (e.g., knowledge, autonomy, relatedness, spirituality; see Laws & Ward, 2011, pp. 187-187 for a description) that an individual values and equipping them with the necessary internal competencies and external conditions to achieve these goods. These competencies and conditions inform the secondary goods (i.e., the means chosen) used to attain primary goods. For example, a person who values the primary good of mastery may attain this by way of the secondary good of making a bowl on a wood lathe. To

achieve this, they need to have knowledge about proper tool usage and wood selection, patience and persistence, and the financial resources to fund their hobby.

Many offenders, though, may lack competencies and conditions that allow them to fulfill primary goods in a prosocial way. For example, McMurrin and Ward (2004) explain that an offender may seek the primary good of intimacy by engaging in a relationship “characterized by violence, controlling behaviour and emotional distance” (p. 300). Such an offender likely lacks the cognitive and emotional skills to communicate themselves well and to empathize with their partner. A related set of problems is that offenders may focus their attention solely on the acquisition of a single primary good, or seek secondary goods in and of themselves. Both situations are likely to result in an incoherent and fractured identity that is frustrating rather than being indicative of purpose and meaning (Emmons, 1999; Ward & Stewart, 2003b). In descriptions of their past lives as offenders, participants’ narratives were indicative of striving for a very narrow range of primary goods. Faced with neglect and abuse as children, the majority of these men sought the goods of relatedness through associating with antisocial peers. Many of these relationships were surface-level at best. For example, Aaron mentioned that when he got out of prison and wanted to quit offending he called the “one person I knew actually gave a shit about me,” indicating that he could not expect the same support from his other ‘friends’. In a similar vein, many also sought the primary good of inner peace by trying to quell their emotional pain through substance abuse. While this may have worked in the short-term, they all eventually realized that they had not achieved true peace, but merely temporarily masked their pain. Finally, it was evident that happiness, in a hedonic sense, was sought through sex, money and the momentary excitement of offending. However, as Ward (2002) notes, these types of hedonic pleasures in and of themselves are unlikely to be psychologically fulfilling in the long-term without some connection to other primary goods. While the weight of importance each individual places on the various goods varies between individuals, Laws & Ward (2011) suggest that a fulfilling life will likely involve all 10 on some level.

On the other hand, the later-life narratives of participants in this study, covering their lives since actively deciding to go straight, were indicative of a much broader range of primary goods being sought after and attained through adaptive and personally satisfying secondary goods. To illustrate, take the case of Matt. Since accepting God into

his life, Matt had devoted himself to bringing people together, helping both offenders and victims of crime, and giving back to his community in general. Through both his charitable and paid work, Matt kept himself in good physical condition; remained up-to-date on government policy and research related to crime and justice; and felt connected to something greater than himself. Two things are worthy of note here. First, the range of primary goods Matt is achieving in his life are diverse, including physical health, knowledge, excellence in work, autonomy and agency, inner peace, spirituality, relatedness and happiness. It was clear from speaking with Matt about his life post-offending that he was extremely proud of and grateful for the life he now leads, which is likely why Laws & Ward (2011) suggest that a good life plan must include working towards a broad range of interrelated primary goods. Second, securing this range of primary goods through socially acceptable secondary goods (i.e., his work with offenders and victims through in-reach and community work) was a large part of that personal fulfilment. Like other participants, Matt previously worked towards the primary goods of happiness and relatedness through crime and his association with other criminals. However, ultimately the internalization of the maladaptive identity of a criminal created further problems for him and left him feeling insecure about himself and his relationships (see Deci & Ryan, 2000 for a discussion of maladaptation and psychological needs).

For Matt and many others in this study, the ability to secure a broad range of primary goods did not occur overnight, but required actively seeking out informal treatments such as AA, NA, the AVP, accepting religion into their lives, meeting a supportive partner and so forth (see Chapter 4). In trying to “force the plant” (Glueck & Glueck, 1937) of helping offenders to desist, Ward and his colleagues laid out a framework for developing treatment plans designed to motivate offenders to change (see especially e.g., Ward & Stewart, 2003b; Ward & Maruna, 2007). Broadly put, this process involves interviewing and reviewing the client’s case history to determine which primary goods relate to an individual’s offending, and identifying the criminogenic needs (i.e., the lack of internal and external conditions) that resulted in their use of maladaptive secondary goods. As Ward & Stewart (2003b) note,

Focusing on the reasons or goals that ground the actions of offenders makes their behavior intelligible and can also provide a more effective means of motivating them to enter treatment. The problem does not reside

in the primary human goods that underlie offending but in the way in which individuals seek those goods. (p. 358)

Treatment providers should also identify the individual's strengths, positive experiences and the context to which they will return post-release. Through these steps, therapists and offenders can collaboratively develop a plan for living a 'good life':

Taking into account the kind of life that would be fulfilling and meaningful to the individual (i.e. primary goods, secondary goods, and their relationship to ways of living and possible environments), the clinician notes the capabilities or competencies he or she requires to have a reasonable chance of putting the plan into action. (Ward & Maruna, 2007, p. 136)

The goal of treatment, then, is to orient offenders to the types of primary goods that will be personally fulfilling and suggesting treatment routes that will equip them with the skills and conditions necessary to meet these needs in a prosocial way. McMurrin & Ward (2004) argue that in helping offenders work towards a good life and an adaptive identity, they will naturally avoid criminogenic needs that once drew them towards offending, which is generally consistent with the unassisted efforts displayed by members of the sample in the current study.

One of the central tenets of the GLM is to provide offenders with the external conditions (i.e., education, social supports, opportunities; Ward & Stewart, 2003a) that necessarily provide hooks for change (Giordano et al., 2002). Given the findings of the current study (see also Farrall, 2004; Harris, 2005; McMurrin & Ward, 2004) formal corrections should not be the only medium by which offenders are exposed to these supports. Reflecting on the work of Farrall (2002), McNeill (2006) notes that "the problem with such [formal correctional] interventions is that while they can build human capital. . . they cannot generate the social capital that resides in the relationships through which we achieve participation and inclusion in society" (p. 50). Given this, I contend that, in addition to GLM-based treatment plans, we need to support participation in informal programs/means of change and community involvement that can have therapeutic benefit as well.

In the current study, four participants spoke very highly of the AVP program that they became involved in while incarcerated. Through a series of discussions, activities and games that take place over a three-day workshop, the goals of the AVP is to build self-confidence and self-worth; foster a sense of community and trust between participants; overcome communication barriers that lead to intolerance and thoughtlessness; and to accept one's past and take agency of the present and future (Reitan, 1992; Walrath, 2001). One of the chief reasons these men entered into this program was that participation was completely voluntary and outside of CSC's sphere of influence (see also Petrich, 2014; Petrich & Morrison, 2015). Beyond this, though, the AVP not only builds key skills and competencies, it exposes participants to a community of care that supports their change process. As Bill noted, engaging in these workshops with outside community members lets prisoners know that they at least some part of society cares for them and recognizes their efforts to transform themselves (see also Maruna et al., 2004; Maruna & LeBel, 2012).

In a similar vein, Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA), a reintegration program that primarily used with sex offenders, engages clients in weekly circles with members of the community who are willing to support and assist in the change process. From their analysis of narrative accounts provided by clients of COSA, Höing, Bogaerts & Vogelvang (2013) observed that the program builds human capital in the way of improved problem insight, problem-solving and social skills, and coping and self-regulation skills, as well as social capital in the way of social integration, participation in society and decreased emotional loneliness. Through the building of both types of capital, Höing et al. (2013) contend that participants are more likely to develop an adaptive, goal-oriented and prosocial identity that will provide motivation to change (see also Fox, 2015).

In that regard, mutual aid groups such as AA, NA and AVP may have an important role to play in the development of a redemption narrative. I have argued elsewhere (Petrich, 2016) that participating in these types of groups exposes individuals on the cusp of a new narrative to others who have already done so, and that listening to others' stories may provide the social and discursive elements necessary to reinterpret and edit their own stories (see also McAdams & McLean, 2013). Reflecting on this process in the context of AA, Cain (1991) writes:

The AA story is a learned genre, a cultural device, which acts to mediate self-understanding for newcomers acquiring the AA alcoholic identity. As the newcomer learns the structure of the AA story, and learns the model of alcoholism encoded in the story, he learns to place the events and experiences of his own life into this form. He learns to tell his own life as an AA personal story, and through this, to understand his life as an AA life and himself as an AA person. He comes to understand why, and how, he is an alcoholic. (p. 244)

Learning to craft a new story of the self, therefore, can enable individuals to make sense of and find benefit in past negative experiences, and lead to overall psychological wellbeing (Davis et al., 1998; Kent & Davis, 2010; Pals, 2006). Further, for many of the participants in this study, engaging in mutual aid groups characterized by openness, inclusion and reciprocity seemed to result in a desire for generativity, which only further solidified their sense of being 'redeemed' (see also Maruna, 2004; Petrich & Morrison, 2015).

## **6.2. Limitations and Future Research**

Despite the valuable insights garnered from this research, it was not without its pitfalls. One of the main limitations of this study was a lack of focus on cultural and ethnic influences on desistance and narrative identity. It should be clear from this thesis and the myriad other desistance studies that going straight is largely dependent on (a) the social and structural contexts one returns to, and (b) individual offenders envisioning a future self that can successfully navigate these contexts. As McAdams (1994; McAdams & Pals, 2006) noted, both personal concerns and narrative scripts are largely derived from our interpersonal and cultural interactions, as well as the historical context of our society. This insight is particularly poignant when considering the realities of the incarceration and post-release experiences of Aboriginal persons in Canada. According to the Office of the Correctional Investigator (2013), Aboriginal peoples make up approximately 4% of the Canadian population, but nearly 25% of the population incarcerated in federal institutions, which represents a 56% increase over the previous decade. As recognized by the courts in *R. v. Gladue* (1999), and later in *R. v. Ipeelee* (2012), Aboriginal peoples in Canada face myriad social, structural and economic barriers which have contributed to this overrepresentation, most notably the lingering effects of residential schools and the

associated loss of cultural and spiritual identity. Furthermore, Nuffield (1998) has observed that

since Aboriginal offenders often do not participate in, complete, or benefit as much as non-Aboriginal offenders from rehabilitation programs designed for non-Aboriginal offenders, this creates a gap in the provision of services which can help offenders stay out of custody, or help them be released from custody as early as possible. (p. 2)

As Martel, Brassard and Jaccoud (2011) point out, Aboriginal offenders need access to programs and services that speak to and reconnect them with their cultural heritage. Only a handful of studies (e.g., Bracken, Deane & Morrissette, 2009; Deane, Bracken & Morrissette, 2007) have taken on the issue of desistance experiences specific to Aboriginals and, therefore, further work here is necessary to aid in reducing these peoples' overrepresentation in the criminal justice system.

A second set of limitations relates to the nature of the sample itself. Given the difficulties of recruiting former prisoners, I relied on introductions to participants through other researchers and individuals involved in reintegration services. Thus, many of the individuals interviewed for this study may not be the 'typical' desister, but were those who stood out in the minds of others. While this may be detrimental to how representative or generalizable the results are, as Corbin & Strauss (1990; see also Lincoln & Guba, 1985) argue, these usual canons of validity that apply to quantitative research are not appropriate for qualitative research. The reason for undertaking this study was to understand how individuals who have successfully desisted actually did so; accordingly, it is appropriate to choose at least some outstanding exemplars. Further, prior to CSC's intervention midway through data collection, participants I recruited from local halfway houses spoke about similar processes involved in their desistance to the 'shining examples'. However, one problem with the exemplars recruited through third parties was that the majority were in their fifties and sixties. Some of these men had been out of prison for a considerable amount of time and had no first-hand knowledge of more contemporary rehabilitation programs offered by CSC. Future research regarding desistance experiences and their connection to CSC-run programs may benefit from putting a restriction on time since release.

Finally, from my perspective, one of the most crucial findings of this research was that successful desisters often actively sought out informal programs (e.g., AA, NA, AVP) that they believed would enable them to develop the human and social capital necessary to go straight. While an important finding, we need more investigation of these types of informal programs. A handful of prior studies (e.g., Duwe & Johnson, 2016; Fox, 2015; Höing et al., 2013; Petrich & Morrison, 2015; Ronel et al., 2013; Walker, 2009) found that developing relationships with supportive communities of care have positive effects on adaptive narrative identities, emotional wellbeing, recidivism and the general social ecology of prisons. Ultimately, though, more theoretical elaboration and empirical investigation of these informal treatment atmospheres is needed; specifically, whether they can be complimentary to the principles of the GLM highlighted through this thesis, increase motivation to participate in other types of treatment and result in decreased offending over the long term.

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## Appendix A.

### Recruitment Letter

**Project Title:** Pathways to and from criminality in the lives of prolific male offenders

**Application Number:** 2015s0557

#### WHO IS CONDUCTING THE STUDY?

**Principal Researcher:**

Damon Petrich

School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University

██████████@sfu.ca

**Supervisor:**

Dr. Brenda Morrison

School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University

██████████@sfu.ca

#### WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

You are invited to participate in a research study about your experiences with the criminal justice system in Canada. This study is interested in your own view on your life story, your time in prison and coming back into the community after being released. A lot of programs and policies aimed at prisoners and probationers/parolees are based on the opinions of others; we want to hear your perspectives on these issues since you are the one actually facing them.

#### WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR PARTICIPATING?

In order to take part in this study you must be (a) between 18 and 65 years of age, (2) have a history of involvement with the criminal justice system (that is, been incarcerated at least once), and (3) are not on federal parole under the purview of the Correctional Service of Canada.

#### YOUR PARTICIPATION IS COMPLETELY VOLUNTARY

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. You may choose to think about whether you would like to participate in this study. My contact information is on the final page of this Recruitment Letter if you wish to contact me at a later time and/or date. If you decide to participate, you may still choose to withdraw from this study at any time with no consequences.

#### HOW IS THE STUDY DONE?

Your involvement in this study will include one interview lasting between one and two hours. The interview questions will relate to your early life, your time in prison and your experiences since leaving. You are free not to answer any question that is asked. You may withdraw from this study at any time with no consequences.

With your consent, this interview will be audio-recorded. You may control the recording device, and turn it off if you want to discuss something without it being recorded. After your interview, the audio file will be typed out and the audio will be deleted within one week to protect your confidentiality.

### ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO PARTICIPATING?

The potential risk of participating in this research is that it deals with events that have the power to bring up some powerful emotions. As such, following the interview I will be giving you the name and phone of a 24-hour crisis support service that you can contact if you are feeling stressed. I will also provide you with a list of organizations offering counseling services with both free services and options for low-income individuals.

### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING?

#### *Benefits to you:*

You may or may not benefit from participating in this study. One way that you may benefit is by voicing your opinions/concerns about prison or the correctional system in general.

#### *Benefits to society:*

In the future, others may also benefit from what is learned in this study. Your perspective might help to influence changes to prison programs and relationships between corrections workers and people that have been through the system.

### WILL YOU BE PAID FOR TAKING PART?

I cannot pay you for your time, but please know that your participation in this research would be valuable because of the unique perspective that you have about the problems you have faced in prison and after leaving prison. Your participation in this research would greatly contribute to our understanding of this process.

### HOW WILL I MAINTAIN YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY?

The person who provided you with this initial Recruitment Letter will have no other involvement in the study, meaning that these third-parties will have no knowledge of whether you responded to the letter, if you were interviewed for the study, what is discussed in the interviews, and will not be provided with transcripts of the interviews. I, Damon Petrich, am also not employed by the Correctional Service of Canada, law enforcement or any other governmental branch and will not be providing them with the transcripts of our interviews.

I will take steps to maintain your confidentiality during the research process and in the final report. You will be referred to by a fake name/pseudonym in the data transcription process, in all drafts, and in the final report. I, Damon M. Petrich, and my research supervisor, Dr. Brenda Morrison, will be the only ones who will have access to the audio-recordings and any other interview information such as field notes. Tapes of the interview will be destroyed immediately following transcription. Transcripts will be password-protected, kept under lock and key, and all transcripts and field notes will be destroyed two years after the study is done.

While the interviews do not specifically ask about unreported criminal activity, if you happen to reveal something of that nature, I will uphold your confidentiality beyond the extent provided by law. Unless this criminal activity is subject to mandatory reporting (child abuse or imminent harm to others, for example), this means that I, Damon Petrich, am prepared to accept the legal consequences of protecting your confidentiality.

#### WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF YOU DECIDE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time with no consequences. You may also withdraw your response to any question with no consequences. If you withdraw from this study, your responses to the interview questions will not be transcribed and all data collected about you during your enrolment in this study will be destroyed.

#### WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

The results of this study will be presented as part of the requirements for completion of the Principal Investigator, Damon Petrich's, Master of Arts thesis at Simon Fraser University. The results may also be used in the future for publication purposes in the form of peer-reviewed journal articles or book chapters.

#### WHO CAN YOU CONTACT IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN TAKING PART IN THE STUDY?

If you are interested in taking part in the study you can contact the Principal Researcher, Damon Petrich, at [REDACTED]@sfu.ca, or his Supervisor, Dr. Brenda Morrison, at [REDACTED]sfu.ca

## Appendix B.

### Informed Consent Form

**Project Title:** Pathways to and from criminality in the lives of persistent male offenders

**Principal Researcher:** Damon M. Petrich, School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University

**Supervisor:** Dr. Brenda Morrison, School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University

**Application Number:** 2015s0557

You are invited to participate in a research study about your experiences with the criminal justice system in Canada. This study is interested in your own view on your life story, your time in prison and coming back into the community after being released.

This research is conducted under the auspices of Simon Fraser University. The results of this study will be presented as part of the requirements for completion of the Principal Researcher, Damon Petrich's, Master of Arts thesis at Simon Fraser University. The results may also be used in the future for publication purposes in the form of peer-reviewed journal articles or book chapters.

In order to take part in this study you must be (a) between 18 and 65 years of age (2) have a history of involvement with the criminal justice system (that is, have been incarcerated at least once), and (3) are not on federal parole under the purview of the Correctional Service of Canada.

While I cannot pay you for your time, your participation in this research is valuable because of the unique perspective that you have about the problems you have faced in prison and after leaving prison. Your participation in this research will greatly contribute to our understanding of this process.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary and will include one interview lasting between one and two hours. With your consent, this interview will be audio-recorded. You may control the recording device, and turn it off if you want to discuss something without it being recorded. After your interview, the audio file will be typed out and the audio will be deleted to protect your confidentiality.

If you reveal information about unreported involvement in criminal activity, I will uphold your confidentiality beyond the extent provided by law. Unless this criminal activity is subject to mandatory reporting (child abuse or imminent harm to others, for example), this means that I, Damon Petrich, am prepared to accept the legal consequences of protecting your confidentiality.

You may or may not benefit from participating in this study. One way that you may benefit is by voicing your opinions/concerns about prison or the correctional system in general. Others may also benefit from what is learned in this study. Your perspective

might help to influence changes to prison programs and relationships between corrections workers and people that have been through the system.

The potential risk of participating in this research is that it deals with events that have the power to bring up some powerful emotions. As such, following the interview I will be giving you the name and phone of a 24-hour crisis support service that you can contact if you are feeling stressed. I will also provide you with a list of organizations offering counseling services with both free services and options for low-income individuals.

You have the right at any time during the interview to ask that the recorder be turned off, not answer a question, or withdraw your consent to participate in the study if any of the questions make you uncomfortable. If, at any time, you wish to withdraw from the study, all data related to your participation will be destroyed and removed from final reports and publications.

I will take steps to maintain your confidentiality during the research process and in the final report. The person who provided you with this initial Recruitment Letter will have no other involvement in the study, meaning that these third-parties will have no knowledge of whether you responded to the letter, if you were interviewed for the study, what is discussed in the interviews, and will not be provided with transcripts of the interviews. I, Damon Petrich, am also not employed by the Correctional Service of Canada, law enforcement or any other governmental branch and will not be providing them with the transcripts of our interviews.

You will be referred to by a fake name/pseudonym in the data transcription process, in all drafts, and in the final report. I, Damon M. Petrich, and my research supervisor, Dr. Brenda Morrison, will be the only ones who will have access to the audio-recordings and any other interview information such as field notes. Tapes of the interview will be destroyed immediately following transcription. Transcripts will be password-protected, kept under lock and key in Dr. Morrison's office (Simon Fraser University, Saywell Hall, Room 10217), and all transcripts and field notes will be destroyed two years after the study is done.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Principal Researcher, Damon Petrich, at [dpetrich@sfu.ca](mailto:dpetrich@sfu.ca), or his supervisor, Dr. Brenda Morrison at (778) [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]@sfu.ca. Concerns or complaints should be addressed to Dr. Jeff Toward, Director of the Office of Research Ethics, (778) [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]@sfu.ca.

Do you have any questions or concerns about participating in this study?

Do you consent to this interview being audio-recorded?

Do you consent to participate in this study?

Do you consent to potentially being re-contacted in case I need to clarify anything you talk about today?

## Appendix C.

### Interview Protocol

**Project Title:** Pathways to and from criminality in the lives of persistent male offenders

**Principal Investigator:** Damon M. Petrich, School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University

**Application Number:** 2015s0557

Note: This is a semi-structured interview protocol. Side questions and conversations not covered by the questions below are likely to emerge and will be explored by the interviewer and participant if relevant to the overall aims of the research.

#### **Section 1: Introduction**

Outline research: Criminal justice organisations are interested in why people stop offending. Lots of 'other' people (experts, community, etc.) think lots of things about why people stop offending - we want to find out what you think - you are the expert.

- Clarify 'taping' permission & obtain consent

#### **Demographics**

- Age
- Years spent in prison
- Age at first arrest
- Latest release date

#### **Section 2: The Life History Narrative**

This way of doing research involves you thinking your life as a story - you are the storyteller - you are the expert. You DO NOT have to tell me EVERYTHING that happened in your life. You must select what you think/ feel is important with regard to your life and your offending behaviour. To include: where, what, who involved, what you were thinking and feeling, impact and what this experience says about who you are or who you were....

1. Please give a brief overview of your life story, from your perspective. Focus on people and events that you believe made you who you are.

#### **Critical Events:**

2. Is there a time in your life you considered your highest point?
3. Is there a time in your life you considered your lowest point?
4. Can you tell me of a serious turning point in your life?

5. Can you describe an important childhood scene that stands out in your mind as significant?
6. Can you describe an important adolescent scene that stands out in your mind as significant?
7. Can you describe an important adult scene that stands out in your mind as significant?
8. Can you describe your biggest life challenge to date?

### **Influences on the life story: positive and negative**

9. Looking back over what we've talked about, can you please identify the single person, group or organisation that has had the greatest POSITIVE influence on your life story?
10. Looking back over what we've talked about, can you please identify the single person, group or organisation that has had the greatest NEGATIVE influence on your life story?

### **Future Script**

11. What is going to come next in your life story? Dreams, hopes, plans?
12. Do you have a project in life? The project might involve your family or your work life, or it might be a hobby, avocation, or pastime. Tell me what the project is, how you got involved in the project or will get involved in the project, how the project might develop, and why you think this project is important for you and/or for other people.

### **Section 3: Services and interventions supporting desistance**

13. What, if any, 'services/interventions' have you accessed?
  - a. Which do you feel have supported you to stop offending the most effectively?
14. What other factors have supported your reintegration best? What makes life easier for you at this point? (e.g., family, friends, work, etc.)
15. What sort of challenges have you faced after leaving the institution?
16. Describe your relationships with Correctional Service of Canada, parole officers, etc. at this point.
17. What factors in your life do you think keep you away from crime best?
18. What factors in your life do you think have drawn you back toward crime in the past?