4

READING FROM A CONDEMNATION SCRIPT

The obstacles that interviewees say prevent them from making good are not delusions or figments of their imagination. Making an honest living is not easy for a poorly educated, poorly connected, working-class ex-convict with a massive criminal record, weak family ties, and no savings. This is especially true when one lives in a city where almost half of the male population is either unemployed or has stopped looking for work altogether. The potential appeal of crime in such situations is obvious, when interviewees say they can "go like that" [snaps fingers] and have "all the money you want" by entering the illegal drug trade (male, age 26):

> The reality is I'll never be able to get a straight, decent job unless I was working for myself or something. So, it looks like I'm back to crime, doesn't it? I mean, I'd love to go to work for £200 a week plastering walls, but I just can't see it. I'm now a single man. I've met people from all over the world, who have offered me [illegal] jobs all over the world . . . so, it looks like that's what I'm going to do. Isn't it? (male, age 28)

As logical as this reasoning might sound, though, persistent criminal behavior still requires some explanation. As easy as the money can be in the world of drugs and crime, this pursuit almost inevitably leads to imprisonment and renewed cycles of poverty and stigma. Although a first-

time delinquent may overestimate his or her chances of escaping this fate, surely every inmate sitting in prison has started to guess that crime does not pay.

To understand how repeat offending makes sense in the face of such deterrence, one must understand the mind-set or self-perspective of the recidivist actor. A vast literature explores this terrain "inside the mind" of deviants, spanning both sociology (e.g., Katz, 1988; Lofland, 1969; Shover, 1996; Sykes & Matza, 1957) and psychology (e.g., Andrews & Bonta, 1998; Blackburn, 1998; Dodge, 1993; Hollin, 1989; Ross & Ross, 1995; Singer, 1997; Toch, 1969, 1993). The behavioral manifestations of interest to these researchers differ. For instance, Dodge discussed conduct disorder in children, Singer studied alcoholism, and Toch focused on adult violence. Nonetheless, remarkable similarities can be found in the phenomenology of all these deviant behavior patterns. Bush (1995), in fact, suggested that almost all deviants share an "antisocial logic" or a "small set of cognitive habits that define their orientation toward life" (p. 144).

The basic structure of this logical self-narrative can be outlined by examining the life stories provided by participants in the Liverpool Desistance Study (LDS). Although this is a study of how ex-offenders can stay away from crime, the LDS includes the narratives of 20 active offenders to serve as a reference point or a contrasting sample for the "desisting" group. The assumption guiding this research is that the two groups (desisting and persisting offenders) represent similar individuals in different stages of the process of change (e.g., Prochaska & DiClemente, 1992) and not two starkly different "types" of people (e.g., adolescent-limited vs. life-course persistent offenders). In other words, from everything we know about crime and the life course, all of the active sample members will almost surely desist in the near future (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1986).

DOOMED TO DEVIANCE

The long-term, persistent offenders in this sample generally said that they are sick of offending, sick of prison, and sick of their position in life. Several talked at length about wanting to go legit or at least doing something different with their lives (see also Burnett, 1992). 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.

In trying to find a sample for this research project, I was prepared for difficulty in finding ex-offenders committed to a straight life. I imagined that finding ex-offenders committed to a criminal lifestyle, on the other hand, would be much easier. This did not turn out to be the case. Like Matza's delinquents, most of the adult offenders I contacted lacked any sort

of enthusiastic commitment to crime. Even among those included in the persisting sample, hand-picked for their willingness to admit to active criminal involvement, most only begrudgingly accept the labels society has applied to them: "I'm a thief, but if there was some other way, I'd do that. [pause] I guess I'm just a thief—no more, no less" (male, age 28).

I characterize the narrative of persistent offenders as a *condemnation script*. The condemned person in the story is the narrator (although he or she reserves plenty of condemnation and blame for society as well). Active offenders in this sample largely saw their life scripts as having been written for them a long time ago. In a description of "ontologies of the self," Hankiss (1981) called this a "self-absolutory" narrative strategy, in which a negative present follows linearly from a negative past.

When asked to describe "some of the important turning points in your life," for instance, persisting interviewees often described only events that took place in childhood. One 25-year-old answered that the time he was sexually attacked as a small boy was his life's turning point. As we had discussed this event earlier in the interview, I did not ask for further details, but rather asked, "Any other turning points, important episodes since then?" He responded, "Just that really, everything else was normal." Another 36-year-old respondent said that her father was her turning point. I asked what she meant by this, and she explained, "Just being treated the way I was by him and that."

The turning points described by active offenders tended to take on the quality of life sentences for these narrators:

> Participant: I was always on the border of being a good guy and drifting into the other side. I mean, I can fit in with anybody—with either group—I can adapt. I could have gone either way. But the judge, he decided for me. . . . One day I was on the way to work, and I had a fight. The judge sent me to remand for it. Since then, I've applied for other jobs and just—nothing. I eventually found a job working in a warehouse and stuff, but like life had mostly just straightened itself out after that, you know? Just prison, prison, prison, prison from then on.
>
> SM: What happened on that first conviction? What was it for?
>
> Participant: I'd been taking some drugs—coke, snorting, you know—and I couldn't get to sleep, right. I'm sitting there, watching "Santa Barbara" and shit at 9 a.m. and still can't sleep. And, I got to get to work. On the way, I just clashed with a geezer [claps his hands] and a fight sort of started. That was the deciding factor in my life. Now

I wish I'd just taken that day off work, called in sick or whatever. (male, age 27)

Participants in the persisting or active offender group largely see no real hope for change in their lives and have generally accepted the fate that has been handed to them.

> [My ex-wife] said, like, "If you got off heroin now, I'd come back," you know, but I'm happy the way I am. I'm just happy to plod along, and I know I've got a habit. I'm at the stage now where I'm resigned to the fact that I'm an addict and I'm going to be an addict to the day I die, and nothing's going to change that. (male, age 33)

> It was just—we were completely like opposites. Me old fella [father], like, he—like I'm complacent like—but me old fella like, he used to be an alcoholic, and he tried to stop drinking and he stopped. He used to smoke, and he decided to stop and he stopped. You know what I mean, if he decided he was going stop then he stopped. If he said he was going to do something, he'd do it and then that would be the end of it. Whereas me like, I'll say something, and I'll half mean it and you know, I mightn't do it. . . . The fact that I look like me old fella, you know, I just couldn't be me old fella, you know what I mean. We are just completely different people. (male, age 32)

To refer to the active offenders in this sample as "persistent" misses this ubiquitous feeling of helplessness among active offenders. Attached to the word *persistence* in a thesaurus, one finds synonyms like *tenacity, perseverance, resolve, determination, pluck, grit* and, most ironically, *purpose*. Decidedly none of the above, the persistent offender's orientation toward life is far more like what de Charms (1968) described as the "Pawn" self. Whereas "Origins"—or people with high self-efficacy—feel that they are masters of their own fates, Pawns feel that life outcomes are largely dependent on circumstance and chance events. As such, Pawns are unlikely to search for meaning in their lives and lack a "language of agency" or self-initiative (Larson, 2000). In the Pawn's version of causality, "shit happens."

> SM: What do you see in your life, say 5 or 10 years down the road?
>
> Participant: I'm scared to think that far ahead actually. Right now, I'm just living one day at a time actually. You can't afford to look any further I suppose, 'cause you just don't know what's around the next corner. You know what I mean? (male, age 38)

Some cognitive-based theories suggest that this weak sense of personal control may be linked to depression, substance abuse, and possibly criminal behavior (e.g., Bush, 1995). We were able to empirically examine this hypothesis using the two samples of narratives in the LDS. Turning-point

episodes offered by interviewees in both groups were extracted and were content analyzed by two independent raters using McAdams's (1992) coding scheme for measuring agentic themes (self-mastery, status–victory, achievement–responsibility, and empowerment) in life narratives. In a test of proportions, the narratives of active offenders were found to be five times more likely ($\chi^2 = 10.3$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$) than the desisting offender stories to be completely lacking a "language of agency" (Larson, 2000) in their descriptions of life turning points. This coding scheme and the details of the content analysis can be found in the appendix under "Agency Content Analysis."

ESCAPING THE BURDEN OF CHOICE

This lack of self-efficacy may encourage offending in several ways. First, a person who subscribes to a Pawn story of self might seek out situations that can reinforce and even enhance one's sense of self-victimization (Caspi & Moffitt, 1995; Rotenberg, 1978, p. 95). As one desisting interviewee said in retrospect, "I offended to be caught; I didn't stop" (male, age 28). According to Shover (1996), imprisonment in particular can "crystallize and strengthen a conception of oneself as a person who has been treated unfairly by authorities" (p. 181). This may be precisely what the persistent offender consciously or unconsciously wants.

> SM: So what did you do when you got out [of prison]?
>
> Participant: I went home, and when I got home, as soon as I got home, me brother picked me up and took me home, and me brother was sat in the living room on his own, and I walked in to him and I said, "Take me back." Believe it or not like, I did. He said, "What?" and I said "Go ahead, take me back." I said, "It's not for me, this life," and that's the truth like. I said, "Take me back," and he said, "No." I said, "Take me back like, I'm not ready for this life." (male, age 26)

The cycle of "just prison, prison, prison" helps to maintain a coherent sense of oneself as a victim of society, which for the active offenders in this sample may be the only life script they know (see Epstein & Erskine, 1983).

At the same time, as indicated in their scores on the personality trait questionnaires, the individuals in this sample tend to be repelled by authority, regulation, and outside control. Therefore, they may feel the indignity of being controlled by circumstance more deeply and painfully than others, and therefore be motivated to try to regain some control by offending. Indeed, this idea is central to Matza's (1964) theory of delinquency among adolescent males. Matza argued that being "pushed around" puts a

young man in a "fatalistic mood," whereby he starts to "see himself as an effect" rather than a cause (p. 88; cf. Bush, 1995). This sense of irresponsibility frees him from moral constraints. In such situations, delinquent behavior can be viewed as a way of "restoring the mood of humanism" or allowing the individual to feel in control of a situation (see also Hollin, 1989).

Singer (1997) described a similar process in his discussion of individuals experiencing chronic alcoholism:

> Convinced that failure, relapse and death are his inevitable fate, the chronically addicted man chooses to say, "I might as well do the damage to myself before life does it to me." At such moments the individual turns his capacity for self-mastery against himself. His only sense of control is the harm he can do to his body and to those people who still love him. . . . There are two avenues to a sense of agency that any individual can travel—one is the independence gained by success, the other the freedom of total loss. (p. 39)

The "freedom of total loss" can be understood as a way of avoiding the burden of responsibility that accompanies free choice. Rather than self-destruction, this can be considered a form of self-protection for those with a vulnerable or shame-prone sense of self (Baumeister, 2000; Khantzian, Halliday, & McAuliffe, 1990). Intentionally failing may be less stressful on a person's ego than trying to succeed and failing anyway. Sabotaging one's life chances with alcohol and other drugs, therefore, may be "the best available excuse for not living up to expectations" (Baumeister, 1991, p. 154).

The following story, told by a 25-year-old male (who incidentally had stolen a television set in the hour prior to our interview) illustrates this possibility in sharp detail:

> Participant: I got nicked [arrested], goes in, does me turkey [heroin withdrawal] in jail, and it was fucking, very rough. I got sent to [prison], down near London from Liverpool—no visits, no letters, no nothing. . . . Gets out. And, as soon as I got out the first thing on me mind was smack [heroin]. I had, like, I took some money off a couple of the lads, getting out, I had like £300 [approximately U.S. $500] in me pocket, I had another £200 waiting for me on the way home. . . . I bought a bottle of whiskey, 4 tins of lager, and just got bevvied [liquored] up on the train going home. As soon as I got home, it was just smack, rocks [crack cocaine], smack, rocks.
>
> SM: Had you done rocks before?
>
> Participant: Yeah, been doing them on and off, not as often, but this day when I went home I had £500 to spend, and I'm spending it, I'm going to have a good day of it, but I thought I'll have one day of it and then pack it in. So anyway, I gets through the money, I'm just injecting it, and I was injecting this bag into me arm, and [my friend] said "Your face has just turned blue," and I've gone, boomph [claps hands] on the deck and died. Three times I died on the way to hospital. Got brought 'round and you don't remember nothing about it. I just, one minute I was there at [my friend]'s, pumping gear [heroin] into me arm, and then the next minute I woke up in a hospital. Just, "What the fuck's going on? What's happened here?" . . . I remember the doctor coming in and saying "Did you try to kill yourself?" I said "No, I never, I was just having a hit, and I woke up here." And that was it. I got treated like a piece of shit then. He said, "Smackheads, they deserve what they get." I just got straight back into it then, and I was going out, I was robbing, shoplifting, scheming, borrowing, begging, and I wasn't getting anywhere fast. I knew what I was doing, getting back into the old routine, and I didn't want to, because I knew exactly what would happen, you know. I'd end up dead somewhere, but . . . (male, age 27)

In sports, these might be called "head games." The basketball player who internalizes a reputation as a poor free-throw shooter, for instance, not only has to manage the relatively simple shot from the foul line, she also has to wrestle with that "little voice in her head" telling her that she is going to miss. All of the participants in the sample probably heard these little voices telling them they would "screw up," telling them they do not deserve any better.

Interestingly, as in the excerpt above, this "voice" of condemnation for narrators in this sample is generally not interpreted as an internal, pleasure-seeking "id"—some internal trait leading them to commit crimes. Rather, using a victim stance narrative, the interviewees attributed the voice to the doctor who says "Smackheads don't deserve to live" or the parent who said "You're a waste of space" (male, age 26). The voice becomes the voice of a society that has largely given up on the person. After all, if the persistent offenders in this sample think they are doomed to a life of crime and punishment, they are most certainly not alone in this belief.

After a series of highly publicized reports in the 1970s that claimed to show that "nothing works" in efforts to rehabilitate offenders (e.g., Martinson, 1974), a good deal has been written about how demoralized rehabilitation professionals have become. For instance, the probation service in the United Kingdom (once thought to be in the business of helping offenders change their lives) is said to have become "uncomfortable, threat-

ened, unsure of its role, and not at all confident of its social or political credibility" (Garland, 1997b, p. 3). Yet, if these professionals have become demoralized, imagine what messages their recidivist clients must be receiving! When offenders say that they "can't" change, they are reflecting the views of many of those around them.

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Importantly, even when active offenders in the LDS are optimistic about their futures, they still see little personal control over this outcome:

> SM: How about long term, 5 or 10 years down the road? Any vision?
>
> Participant: I haven't got a vision to be truthful, long term. Maybe I'll win the lottery, you know. (male, age 29)

Following Emmons (1986), all LDS participants were asked to name 5 to 10 of their "personal strivings"—things they are trying to accomplish in their day-to-day lives, like "being a good husband," "doing my best at work," or "raising my kids right." One of the first active offenders I interviewed, immediately responded with "winning the lottery" as one of his daily strivings. I explained that these should be "day-to-day" goals, not ultimate dreams, but still recorded his answer. I was surprised when three other interviewees from the active offender group gave the same response.

Although all four probably misunderstood the question, this response is still telling. The myth of winning it big or making the "big score" is an internally consistent element of a passive self-narrative. If there is no connection between intentional actions and ultimate outcomes, and life is a series of chance events ("shit happens"), then why work hard or play by the rules? Success, like failure, is as randomly allocated as the daily lottery. The fact that a lottery windfall is gained through luck and not "earned" through effort, therefore, does not diminish its appeal as a life goal.

In fact, for offenders, the mythical "big score" often becomes "imbued with almost magical prospects for reversing or ending the state of discomfort" (Shover, 1996, p. 100). If only I could strike it rich, interviewees implied, everything will be all right—the hurt or indignity of a life of disrepute will vanish. Ironically, research suggests that when people do win the lottery they can become habituated to this good luck, consequently reducing the level of pleasure they experience in ordinary experiences (Brickman, Coates, & Janoff-Bulman, 1978).

During the fieldwork for this project, a probation officer joked, "You want to know what will make people give up crime? Winning the lottery." Oddly enough, several months later, I interviewed an active offender who had recently won the lottery: "Believe it or not, I won the lottery. Yea,

[I matched] five balls. Second week out [of prison] and I got five balls" (male, age 31). This unfortunately did not have the predicted rehabilitative effect: "Don't get me wrong, I've still been doing bits [of crime], doin' bits of cars and that."

Importantly, the quest for the "big score" is not about selfishness or accumulative greed in the familiar sense. Quite to the contrary, active offenders described considerable generosity in their spending patterns. Tipping extravagantly, buying gifts for others, and consistently throwing money around are all part of the experiential lifestyle that characterizes offending (Katz, 1988; Matza, 1964).

> I used to go to the meat market and rob a van full of meat, drive it out, drive it into the flats [public housing projects]. I'd take what I wanted, and then I'd say, "There y'are," and everyone would come down and help themselves, you know? I've done that all me life, yeah? I've basically done that all me life, you know. (male, age 38)

The point of winning the big score is not to horde it, but to spend it, and the path to happiness is to be found in this hyperconsumption:

> Participant: I wanted money for a solid base. I liked to party and liked a decent motor [car]. As I said before, I equated 50 grand with excitement. The money will go, of course. I'd sort my friends out, then you get stupid with it, really stupid spending, which goes with the job. That seems to be a sort of tedious, sort of boring prerequisite—being the big spender, spending more in a week than most people spend in a lifetime, and on trivia, you know.
>
> SM: Did you ever meet somebody in your line of work [drug smuggling] who would save it up and was more conservative with money?
>
> Participant: No, otherwise they'd get a job as a bank teller, because it's safe, if they want to save money. We lost bundles. It's bad business. (male, age 47)

Excessive alcohol or drug usage, often involving week-long binges, may represent the pinnacle experience in this quest for consumption according to sample members.

> One of my close friends owns a security firm. You know, it seems like everyone has done something with their lives, and it's only me that's not done nothing. I've just like, you know—it's like, I've partied! At the end of the day, I can say honestly, you know, [laughs] I can show what I've got for my money at the end of the day. (male, age 30)

In many ways, the persisting narrative, then, seems to embody Cushman's (1990) notion of the "empty self." Cushman argued that contemporary Western individuals seek "the experience of being continually filled

up by consuming goods, calories, experiences, politicians, romantic partners, and empathic therapists in an attempt to combat the growing alienation and fragmentation of its era" (p. 600). The active offender seeks to stave off this emptiness primarily with experiential thrills (drug highs, popularity, excitement).

> I used to enjoy it, the offending. I would enjoy doing what I did, just burgling, joy riding, shoplifting. . . . I enjoyed the rush. . . . But I used to buy friends as well. I've always liked attention. I've always liked to have a lot of people around me, and again, if I had the money I would take me friends out for a drink. (male, age 28)

> I was starting to enjoy the sort of fame in school, like the big car thief. Everyone wanted to know me and find out what I was doing and that. We weren't even selling [the car parts] then. It was just the sheer excitement. The speed of the car. (male, age 24)

Being momentary, of course, such thrills are incapable of satiating the empty self's need, and so the quest for fulfillment carries on to the next night's adventures (see Brickman et al.'s, 1978, lottery winners). Indeed, considerable research suggests that extrinsically oriented goals, such as achieving financial success or social recognition, are frequently associated with low measures of personal well-being and self-actualization (Emmons, 1999; Kasser & Ryan, 1993). Repeat offending is only understandable if one understands the impossibility of this quest for happiness.

> I love driving and all that like, you know, I love, you know, putting cars to the limits, like, putting meself to the limit in a car like, you know, like, it's good, like. You know what? You know what I've just thought about there, right? You know, like, when I used to get in stolen cars, like, sometimes I'd just go out on me own in it and there's these country lanes, like. And, you get the odd couple going at ten miles per hour. I was doing fucking 70 down it. And, I think, like, you know, I think, like, the adrenaline and all that like—I think, you know, like, I was saying, "I couldn't feel," you understand what I mean? Honest to God, I've just thought about this now: Like, [I was] doing that just to *feel something* inside, like, you know what I mean? Fuck me, like, you know, I just thought of that now. You know what I mean, 'cause I get a kick out of it and all that, you know what I mean? I love throwing cars around and that, like, it's great. D'you reckon . . . you know what I mean, like, trying to, you know, make yourself feel something, like, going that fast, like, and you go 'round a bend and you, like, go sideways 'round it and next thing there's just this big fucking tree in front of you and that, and you just go, "Aaargh!" You know what I mean? Does that make sense, like? To me it does, like. Trying to sort of, like going 'round a corner and seeing a brick wall there, you're bound to shit yourself, like, but at least you're feeling something like, which is scared, isn't it? It's something, like. Like when I used to get chased by the police, I used to feel so—honest to God—you feel so exhilarated. "Phew," but you're high as a kite on adrenaline. I got chased right, fucking from—I didn't know I was getting chased, though. I was doing 129 miles per hour, right, and when I come to the bottom of the M62 motorway, right, all of a sudden, the police surrounded me everywhere. And, this copper said, "We've been fucking chasing you for over half an hour, and we couldn't fucking catch you," and I said, "I didn't know." I didn't even know, you know what I mean? I was just flying, you know what I mean? Me and me mates were in it, like, in a 3i [sports car], and I didn't even know I was getting chased. You need to like, to like, you need sometimes just to remind yourself that you're alive, don't you, like? (male, age 26)

Again, there is no mystery regarding where this particular quest for happiness "comes from." As Matza and Sykes (1961) pointed out, "The delinquent's attachment to conspicuous consumption hardly makes him a stranger to dominant society" (p. 717). Perhaps increasingly over the past two decades (see Schor, 1998), the virtues of hyperconsumption are celebrated by the mass media, popular culture, and particularly in advertising of all sorts. Although these values compete with the popular virtues of hard work and contributing to society, the pleasures of hyperconsumption get a lot more air time (Cushman, 1990; Kasser & Ryan, 1993). Do offenders need to be reintegrated into mainstream society, then? They may be too well integrated as it is.

OFFENDING WISDOM

Persistent offenders in this sample view themselves as victims of circumstance. They claim to have a clear picture of the "good life" but do not feel they have the ability to get there using their own volition. The only refuge they can imagine is found in a bottle or behind the wheel of a stolen sports car. In the words of the participant above, "going around a corner and seeing a brick wall there, you're bound to shit yourself, like, but at least you're feeling something. It's something" (male, age 26). It is not a happy narrative.

The irony is that they just might be "right." Research on individuals suffering from depression suggests that they may actually be more realistic about their prospects for success than nondepressed people (Alloy & Abramson, 1979; Bandura, 1989). Seligman (1991) wrote,

> On average, optimistic people will distort reality and pessimists, as Ambrose Bierce defined them, will "see the world aright." The pessimist seems to be at the mercy of reality, whereas the optimist has a massive defense against reality that maintains good cheer in the face of a relentlessly indifferent universe. (p. 111)

Persistent offenders, like people who are clinically depressed, might be "sadder but wiser" than their contemporaries who struggle to desist. The condemnation script the persistent offender constructs for him- or herself may or may not be an "accurate" assessment of reality, but it certainly conforms with societal wisdom about deviance, criminality, and the measure of a person's personal success.

5

MAKING GOOD: THE RHETORIC OF REDEMPTION

Unlike active offenders, the long-time, persistent offender who tries to desist from crime has a lot to explain. The participants in the Liverpool Desistance Study (LDS) each spent around a decade selling drugs, stealing cars, and sitting in prison. Most critically, they have made repeated breaks with the life of crime and drugs (often announcing their "reform" to authorities and significant others), only to return to offending behavior. No one (including the speaker himself or herself) is going to automatically believe such a person, when they announce, "I am a new person" or "I have changed my ways."

If such an enormous life transformation is to be believed, the person needs a coherent narrative to explain and justify this turnaround. According to Lofland (1969),

> One of the most broadly and deeply held beliefs in recent Western societies is that an actor must have some consistent and special history that explains the current social object that he [she] is seen as being. . . . The present evil of current characters must be related to past evil that can be discovered in biography. (p. 150)

Similarly, the present "good" of the reformed ex-offender must also be explained somehow through biographical events. Otherwise, audiences

(i.e., significant others, employers, the public) will simply not "buy" a person's claims to being reformed.

Perhaps most importantly, ex-offenders need to have a believable story of why they are going straight to convince *themselves* that this is a real change. It is easy to say one is giving up drugs and crime. Yet, when setbacks occur—and ex-convicts are likely to face many such disappointments—wanting to desist is not enough. The individual needs a logical, believable, and respectable story about who they are that "makes it impossible to engage in criminal conduct without arousing guilt reactions and feelings of shame that are incompatible with the self-conception" (Cressey, 1963, p. 158). The desisting person's self-story, therefore, not only has to allow for desistance but also has to make desistance a logical necessity.

One might imagine that if the condemnation script allows for the continuance of deviant behavior, then the desisting person's self-narrative would simply be the opposite of the active offender's script. This assumption is made all the time in correctional practice (see Fox, 1999a). If offenders make excuses for their behavior, they need to stop making excuses. If offenders see themselves as victims, then they need to stop seeing themselves as victims. The self-perspective of the desisting persons in this sample, however, did not fit this model of simple negation.

One of the overlooked difficulties of going straight (or of any comparable identity change) is what Lofland (1969) called the "horrors of identity nakedness" (p. 288). Being completely stripped of one's identity, Lofland said, is "a fate worse than death" (p. 282). Faced with the disorientation of a radical change in behavior, desisting ex-offenders may seek to maintain a consistent and coherent sense of who they are. According to Sutherland and Cressey (1978):

> Once a man has gone through the impersonal procedures necessary to processing and labeling him as a criminal and a prisoner, about all he has left in the world is his "self." No matter what that self may be, he takes elaborate steps to protect it, to guard it, to maintain it. If it should be taken away from him, even in the name of rehabilitation or treatment, he will have lost everything. (p. 558)

This is consistent with what is known about self-identity in general. Self-schemas tend to remain fairly stable over time, because individuals carefully screen and select from their experiences in an effort to maintain a structural equilibrium of the self (Caspi & Moffitt, 1995, p. 485). Although self-narratives do change, this change tends to involve incremental, internally consistent shifts rather than a wholesale overthrow of the previous self-story. Epstein and Erskine (1983) compared personal identity change to the shifting of paradigms in science. Although such a change can appear revolutionary in retrospect, it is often experienced as a more gradual evolution based on the slow accumulation of disconfirming information.

The life stories of desisting narrators in this sample maintain this equilibrium by connecting negative past experiences to the present in such a way that the present good seems an almost inevitable outcome. "Because of all that I have been through, I am now this new way." If this can be accomplished, desistance can be reshaped as a process of "maintaining one's sense of self or one's personal identity" (Waldorf et al., 1991, p. 222) rather than the "schizophrenic" process of rejecting one's old self and becoming a "new person" (Rotenberg, 1978). This secure self-identity also helps protect the person from becoming overwhelmed with shame regarding his or her past self.

A parallel can be found to the prototypical Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) narrative. O'Reilly (1997) wrote,

> Telling the story—it may be said that, in a sense, there is only one story in AA—enables the speaker to reconstrue a chaotic, absurd, or violent past as a meaningful, indeed a necessary, prelude to the structured, purposeful, and comparatively serene present. (p. 24)

Although each story is of course unique, the self-narratives of the desisting sample feature a number of key plot devices with striking regularity. This indicates that a particular identity narrative may be the most personally and culturally persuasive, meaningful, and enabling for the person who is trying to desist. This section addresses how this recovery story (or *redemption script*) "works," by outlining the elements of this particular narrative that make it especially coherent and convincing by the standards of "narrative logic" (Bruner, 1987).

The redemption script begins by establishing the goodness and conventionality of the narrator—a victim of society who gets involved with crime and drugs to achieve some sort of power over otherwise bleak circumstances. This deviance eventually becomes its own trap, however, as the narrator becomes ensnared in the vicious cycle of crime and imprisonment. Yet, with the help of some outside force, someone who "believed in" the ex-offender, the narrator is able to accomplish what he or she was "always meant to do." Newly empowered, he or she now also seeks to "give something back" to society as a display of gratitude.

This process might be characterized as "making good." Rather than "knifing off" one's troubled past (e.g., Elder, 1998), this redemption script allows the person to rewrite a shameful past into a necessary prelude to a productive and worthy life. Although the personal agency implied in the "knifing off" concept remains, "making good" involves more self-reconstruction than amputation. McAdams (1994a) divided personality into three, separate domains: Traits (the "having" aspects of the self), strivings (the "doing" aspects), and identity narratives (the "making" aspects). Desistance, perhaps like criminality, seems to exist "in the making" (my apologies to Sampson & Laub, 1993).

Thematically, the narratives that desisting interviewees make out of their lives differ from those of active offenders in three fundamental ways:

1. an establishment of the core beliefs that characterize the person's "true self"
2. an optimistic perception (some might say useful "illusion") of personal control over one's destiny
3. the desire to be productive and give something back to society, particularly the next generation.

Because similar themes can be found among samples of desisting ex-offenders as diverse as those in Burnett (1992), Hughes (1998), Leibrich (1993), and Shover (1996), these themes may form some larger construct such as *maturity* (Glueck & Glueck, 1940) or the "Reformed Self." At any rate, adapting some version of this macronarrative seems to help the desisting ex-offender find a meaning in a life filled with failure and shame.

THE "REAL ME"

Essential to every desisting narrative is the establishment of a "true self" or "real me." Turner (1976) described the "real self" as a person's subjective understanding of his or her true nature. In contemporary, Western society, Turner suggested, the individual increasingly looks for clues to the nature of this real self in what are experienced as deep, unsocialized, inner feelings and impulses and not in institutionalized roles or professional identities. Thus, one might play the part of the responsible parent, the caring nurse, or the no-nonsense drug dealer "on the outside," but one's self-perceived "real self" might be completely different.

> The judge was saying I'm no good as a mother. They don't know me as a person. They just judge me by what I've done. Other than that, they don't know me as a person. I've stood in front of the judge and said, "You are not my judge. God is my judge." (female, age 42)

In a life narrative, this core or inner self is established in recurring themes and significant episodes in the person's past, however brief or unimportant they might have seemed at the time. Filmmakers frequently use this narrative technique. Think of any generic group of "bad guys" (they are almost always "guys") in the movies. The leader will show no sign of common humanity. A handful of others will be stock character thugs: ugly, stupid, and generally disposable (their demise will precede the climactic disposal of the leader, with a fraction of the fanfare). Yet, often, there will be one bad guy who will show the occasional glimpse of redeeming personal integrity. This may be conveyed in a moment of hesitation or a lingering look back at a victim, but it will be enough to foreshadow an ending

whereby this particular bad guy aids our heroes in some way, ensuring victory for the good side. Such an ending is only believable because of the use of foreshadowing scenes. If one of the other thugs were to make such a conversion at the film's end, viewers would be confused and the narrative might be lost.

Narrators in this sample carefully established their essential nature through personally significant foreshadowing episodes. Even when they were "at their worst," the desisting narrators emphasized that "deep down" they were good people. In a process with parallels to Braithwaite's (1989) restoration process, the ex-offenders look in their past to find some redeeming value and emphasize their "essential core of normalcy" (cf. Lofland, 1969, p. 214).

> I used to play truant, and there used to be a show on in the afternoon in England in the '70s, called "Crown Court," and it was like, reconstructions of court cases. And, I used to play truant to watch that because I used to want to be a lawyer. Um, because of the justice thing, you know, the world wasn't fair. And, I do believe that if I hadn't have gone the way I did [into armed robbery], um, 'cause I am quite intelligent and articulate, I would have done it. I would have actually been a lawyer now. It was me burning ambition it really was, and I'd stand about like this all day [pretends to be a barrister], with me wig on and all that. You know, righting wrongs. (male, age 30)

Even in descriptions of playing truant, protagonists emerge as moral heroes, concerned with greater truths.

Instead of discovering a "new me," the desisting ex-offender reaches back into early experiences to find and reestablish an "old me" in order to desist (see Rotenberg, 1987). In some ways, this narrative reconstruction functions in the same way as Goffman's (1961) process of "reverting to an unspoiled identity" (see Biernacki, 1986). After all, not all of the roles played by participants in this sample have been deviant ones. All of the narrators have played the role of the thief or the junkie, but they have also occasionally played the loving parent, working-class hero, loyal friend, and so forth. By falling back on these other identities, they are able to deemphasize the centrality of crime in the life history and suggest that they were just a normal people "all along." Notice the repetition in these quotes:

> I now feel as though I can achieve what I've *always wanted* to achieve, you know, which is gain some qualifications and get a job that I can, um, help other people in. (male, age 36)

> What I always saw in other people was one thing I *always wanted*, and that was integrity. . . . It's either in you or it isn't and I used to think —I knew I had integrity, but as soon as I used to pick up a drink, it just went wayward. (male, age 32)

This rebiographing also parallels what Lofland (1969) called the

"well-nigh universal practice" of digging through newly discovered deviants' pasts for evidence that they were always different.

> Acts in [the deviant person's] past that were once viewed in a certain way are reinterpreted. Other acts, which had gone unnoticed or had seemed irrelevant, are brought forth and considered central, for they help others to understand that the Actor was that way all along. (p. 150)

Most likely, this consistency is retrospectively imposed on one's narrative. For instance, the same narrator who described beating up suspected homosexual men in public men's rooms as a teenager later said,

> Yeah, [getting a] job was good because like, you know it was giving me a chance to earn me money honestly, which is something I've never done before you know. Plus it was helping charity, which is something like *I've always wanted to do*. I've always liked helping people who are worse off than meself. (male, age 24)

There is no objective sense in which this claim to a lifelong charitable desire can be verified or refuted. It becomes believable, however, when there are clues or hints of this core self in the person's self-narrative. For instance, few of the participants claimed that their true self was careful with money, diligent, tender-hearted, steady, reliable, or responsible. Such a story would be completely at odds with their known histories and would require considerable evidence or explanation.

The most common strategy, therefore, is to mine even deviant episodes in one's past for positive qualities. For instance, many narrators establish their "true self" as a heroic underdog who only did what needed to be done to help family and friends.

> We used to live by a coal pit thing. . . . We had a coal fire, no one had coal fires, but we did. . . . And, I always remember, I was about, I don't know, 8 or 9 years of age, and we had no coal, so the most sensible thing to do was to steal some from the pit. But, we had to go through all these woods and forests, and it was so spooky. And, I always remember I had my other brother with me, who was crying and moaning, and I dragged him along. And, we had to go down what must have been a 40- or 50-foot embankment, get the coal in a bag, carry it all the way back, but that was the way it had to be. When I did it, I never ever told anyone, I think certain things that I did when I was young, and I was always wise enough to know it was wrong, and I felt ashamed, but some things you did because you just felt you had to. (male, age 32)

Another Hollywood trick: In any group of bad guys, if one of them is unusually intelligent, witty, or attractive, it is a safe bet that this character will be the one to change by the film's conclusion. The ugly, stupid, and brutish are rarely thought to be worth redeeming in Hollywood scripts

or in rehabilitative efforts. Similarly, the desisting participants in this sample seem to have also decided that they are "better than some common criminal."

> I wasn't happy selling [drugs], you know. You're making money and whatever, it was just something that, what it was, it was the people that I'd come into contact with, selling it. I just didn't like—it took me into a world, a seedy world that I didn't like. So, um, that had a little sort of, also had a, um, I don't know what the word is, a contributing factor. . . . I didn't like the shady world that it brings with it. You know, and when I say that, I mean the low-life scum bags, low intelligence, you know. I had nothing in common. (male, age 20)

When describing their offending histories, almost all the desisting narrators frequently emphasized that they have "a good brain," "a good heart," or some other positive attributes. Even those who did admit to being "no bright spark" frequently emphasized their street smarts and understanding of how life works.

> What I used to do—this is why I've escaped jail so far, I really used to use me brain—so what I used to do is get trains and coaches out to places. I'd spend the first of the morning checking around everywhere, routes of escape, which way I could go, stuff like that. Then, I'd usually do it in the afternoon, around four, quarter past four. That's the time we used to steal the computers, too. Because, it's like a low-energy time for people. They usually aren't very alert. They usually have other things on their mind, getting dinner ready or whatever. People don't tend to take so much notice of things about quarter past four. But what I did as well, I got a mate's girl to cut off all me hair, and I super-glued the hair to the inside of me baseball cap, and wear the baseball cap, so they'd be looking for somebody with long hair. I used to take a change of clothes with me in a carrier bag. Never wear a mask. It's trouble. It's really obvious [we laugh]. But, you know, I'd bend the baseball cap down and sometimes I'd wear glasses as well. I must have done about six or seven of them [armed robberies] at various places . . . and I never got caught 'cause I used me brain, see. (male, age 30)

Interviewees use the intelligence and bravery they displayed as offenders as evidence in convincing themselves that they will be equally successful at going straight.

> Yea I always classed myself as a good thief now I want to be a good photographer. (male, age 36)

> I lived in the fast lane then, [and] I still live life in the fast lane in respect of work. I'm a highly, highly motivated sort of person. (male, age 32)

All the energy we used to have for thieving—we used to get up and rob all over the country, that's what we used to do get up hire a car we'd be all over the place just busy all the time, making money—and all that energy has just gone into all legit things, you know. (male, age 33)

THE "I," THE "ME," AND THE "IT"

While the redemption script emphasizes the socially valued aspects of deviant involvement, the other aspects of one's criminal past (selfishness, macho posturing, violence, cruelty, slothfulness) are put into a different category by participants. These are not part of the "real self," rather these are products of the environment.

> It was just that, um, I realized that the entire thing had all been an act, my entire life, all me criminal offenses, all me drug taking, it was all a sham. . . . It was just like what it was, was right at the core of me, I am who I am now, who I've always been inside. I've always been intelligent, right, inside. I've always been intelligent, honest, hard working, truthful, erm, nice, you know, loving. I've always like. But it was always wrapped up in so much shit it couldn't get out. Um and it's only now that . . . I've realized that. That that wasn't who I was, I did it all to try and, to try and find out who I was. . . . That's what people I knew were doing, people I looked up to and . . . you know I was just adapting. I used to adapt to me peers, which most people do, but some people choose the right peers. (male, age 30)

The core self of the desisting ex-offender is the diamond, whereas the environment she or he lives in is described as the rough.

> Then me mum found out what I was doing [heroin use and burglary]. She come to the flat and got me, um, brought me home. She knew I had a bad problem. I was a different person, psychologically. I just—*it weren't me*. (male, age 25)

> Participant: I was working [at a youth apprentice scheme]. Me and me mates were also getting [legitimate] work on the side, like, through this scheme. That was the only time that I hadn't been in trouble or been robbin'. And then it finished, the scheme, it just ended. Phhhwttt. I just started to take drugs then, and it all started to go wrong.
>
> SM: You had never taken drugs prior to that?
>
> Participant: Didn't even smoke or nothing. It was just where you lived. As soon as you come out of your house it was there. Like everyone was on it. Every single one. Near enough every single lad was on it. Smack, all kinds, rock [crack], coke—normal cocaine.
>
> SM: But you weren't tempted by all this when you were working?
>
> Participant: No, didn't bother with it. *It wasn't me*. (male, age 29)

The offending came from out there, not inside. It "wasn't me," interviewees said. Frequently, when describing their past lives in crime, desisting narrators seemed to attribute their behaviors to something Petrunik and Shearing (1988) called "the It." In George Herbert Mead's framework, the self consists of an "I" (the self-as-subject, the I who acts, does, and chooses) and a "Me" (the self-as-object, the Me who is known, observed, and blamed). Petrunik and Shearing added to this conceptualization by calling attention to human behavior that agents believe to emanate not from the "I" but rather from an alien source of action, or an "It." This autonomous "not-I" force is internal (i.e., part of the self) yet is responsible for behavior considered unintentional, unpredictable, and uncontrollable.

Therefore, even though the person appears to *do* some behaviors intentionally, the behavior is experienced as something that happens *to* them (see also Bateson, 1971). Petrunik and Shearing (1988) used the example of stuttering. Stuttering is something that certain individuals feel "happens to them," whereas speech pathologists say that "stutterers *do* their stuttering" (p. 440). Individuals who stutter may acknowledge that they "have a stutter" but feel that the behavior is beyond their control. Stuttering is experienced as the product of a "mysterious, intrusive force," or the It.

Using quite similar language, participants in this sample repeatedly described heroin addiction or alcoholism as an alien force, a monkey on one's back. Frequently, this addiction itself was endowed with the ability to "do" things:

> The drink was killing me by the age of 21. (male, age 32)

> Heroin made me sneaky. . . . But it just become part of me life kind of thing, I had to have it. (male, age 25)

One interviewee described a period of 5 years over which he had remained abstinent from drugs, but said that one day, "You know, it just happened to lapse" (male, age 31). Rather than "I got back into drugs," or even "I had a relapse," the "It" just happened. Many sought explicitly or implicitly to separate themselves or at least their "real selves" (the I) from the addiction, suggesting that the behavior that others attribute to the Me (crime, for instance), can be caused by either the I or by the It.

This pattern was not limited to interviewees who used addictive drugs, however. The overuse of the passive voice and descriptions of being carried away by situations and circumstances were common to almost all

the narratives. In a somewhat extreme example, one interviewee described how he was rearrested within a week of his release from prison:

> Mad isn't it. What it was, was, it was breach of probation but it was relatin' to cars. What happened was, you see, I've got this—I haven't got the fetish anymore, believe it or not, but I had this fetish. I could just be walking 'round town, and something would just say to me, "Go in that car and take it." And, zoom, I'd be gone. I've had like people trying to smash the windows to try and get me out of their cars. (male, age 31)

More typically, narrators used more subtle, linguistic devices to avoid directly acknowledging responsibility for extensive patterns of negative patterns:

> It just went on and on. It went on like that for about 2 or 3 years. (male, age 33)

> It started off with little things and then it got bigger you know. (male, age 40)

> You're stuck in a vicious circle. It's money, drugs, money, drugs—and it just goes round and round and round. It's like a roundabout. (male, age 27)

Even when describing the process of desistance, criminal behavior can still be passively described as an "it" that just goes away:

> It just like fizzled out. It's just been years. It just stopped. (male, age 29)

> It just stopped for some reason. I don't know why. (male, age 31)

Another linguistic strategy used by participants was to deindividuate or refer to themselves as just "one of many" (Matza, 1964, p. 90). Especially in describing their childhoods, narrators often replaced the singular "I" with the plural "we" to diffuse the blame and hence soften pangs of guilt (Festinger, Pepitone, & Newcomb, 1952):

> Me and my gang, we were like the local hard cases, and we turned into a gang of tit heads, idiots. Like real scruffy, "Give us a ciggie," [he pretends to panhandle] and that type of thing. . . . With stealing, it wasn't so much a fashion, but I would have looked odd if I didn't. As I say, the company I was in all through school, we all done exactly the same thing. All my mates were in the same gang. They're all in jail now or out and on heroin. There's no exception really—maybe one or two—but basically we are all the same. (male, age 29)

If "we" are all the same, and there is no exception to this rule, then little blame can fairly befall the "me."

> We started hanging about on street corners, we all had our heads shaved and started wearing Doc Marten's boots, stuff like that, going 'round beating people up, you know, that used to hang round public toilets—you know the type that used to hang round public toilets and that. . . . Like, we had a thing against homosexuals back then, you know. Just kids growing up. Then we started stealing more cars then —not for any reason except just to drive 'round in them and then dump them. You know, the feeling of power, having your own car. (male, age 24)

Substituting an "I" for the "we" in the preceding passages might change the meaning from almost sociological descriptions of working-class, British youths "just growing up" to admissions of essential psychopathy.

Finally, like the previous narrator, participants frequently substituted the second-person pronoun "you" for the "I," in an attempt to draw the listener into the story and emphasize the universality of the behavior.

> It sounds mad, but when you're on drugs, you don't think about . . . (male, age 29)

> At 19, you just think it goes hand-in-hand with being young. (male, age 32)

The compulsive, ubiquitous use of "you know" and "you know what I mean" is also a way of constantly maintaining a connection between the speaker and the audience. Phrases like "I was young, you know" and "You know yourself that if you can't find a job . . ." beg the question of the legitimacy for one's behavior. All of these largely unconscious rhetorical devices are probably best understood as being part of an impression management strategy (Goffman, 1959). By separating the actions of the "It" from the essential nature of both the "I" and the "Me," ex-offenders are also able to protect themselves from the internalization of blame and shame.

REDEEMING ONE'S "SELF"

Making good, in this framework, is not seen as a matter of being resocialized or cured, but rather becomes a process of freeing one's "real me" from these external constraints or "finding the diamond in the rough." This process of self-discovery was frequently described in terms of empowerment from some outside source.

> Before I came here [to a job training program for ex-offenders], I was just looking at this brick wall. But when I came here, that brick wall moved out of the way, and it's given me a clearer view, you know, it's given me a runway. And I'm halfway up that runway. And when I get to the end of that runway: take-off. (male, age 31)

Several desisting interviewees used some variation of the following theme,

"If it weren't for X (organization, new philosophy or religion, some special individual, God, etc.), I would still be involved with crime" in their explanation of desisting.

> When I got out [of prison], you know, it's as if someone in a higher place is looking down and saying, "Right you are starting now. All the cogs are fitting together, and you are going away from that and you are going to become this sort of thing." You want to become what you want to become, set your own ambitions, don't you? (male, age 33)

In fact, the theme of empowerment was one of the most distinguishing characteristics between the two LDS samples in a test of proportions ($\chi^2 = 12.46$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). At five times the proportion of persisting narratives, desisting narratives described scenes in which "The subject is enlarged, enhanced, empowered, ennobled, built up, or made better through his or her association with something larger and more powerful than the self" (McAdams, 1992; see appendix for a description of this coding).

Importantly, while the catalyst for the change is said to be an outside force, desistance almost always seems to come from "within." You "become what you want to become." Interviewees did not describe being passively rehabilitated or reformed by the outside force, rather they describe gaining personal power. The outside force removes the "brick wall" but it is up to the individual to "take off."

This initiation into personal initiative is frequently described in terms of a "looking-glass recovery" process. At first, the individual had no belief in himself or herself, but someone else (often a partner or a social organization) "believed in" the person and made the ex-offender realize they did in fact have personal value.

> Well, before I'd gone to college, [my girlfriend] had said that she knew that I had potential, and nobody else had ever told me that, that I could do something with me life. (male, age 28)

Following this external "certification" (Meisenhelder, 1982), however, the individual now internalizes his own self-worth and realizes his own ability to choose a destiny.

Describing Malcolm X's transformation from prisoner to civil rights leader, one ex-offender said, "Malcolm found himself, in himself" (male, 30s, *field notes*). On a less grand scale, most desisting participants said they found some buried talent or personal trait, however mundane, that they could now exploit in their new lives.

> I've *always* liked playing with wood, making things out of wood. I've *always* been good with me hands. . . . So I thought "woodwork." . . . That is just the choice I made. It's supposed to take you a year doing the NVQ [degree], and I've just finished in four and a half months! The teacher said like, he said he doesn't believe that I haven't done [professional training] before. (male, age 33)

Another interviewee described his decision to take up truck driving as a similar process of finding a buried talent.

> I don't know, like. I know fucking I'm not any bright spark [genius], you know what I mean? . . . But I love, I don't know, I'm not being big-headed or boasting, you know what I mean, but I can drive. You know what I mean, and I *know* I can. Going to jail, they give you these tests to see if you're mentally—or whether you're better with your hands or your mind. For coordination, right, out of 100 points, right, I scored 110. (male, age 26)

TRAGIC OPTIMISM: MAKING "GOOD FROM THE BAD"

As in the above examples, redemption narratives rarely involve just getting by. Reformed ex-offenders seem to always operate at "110 percent."

> [Now I'm doing] a part-time diploma over 4 years or 3 years, and . . . I'm top of the class, all of me assignments are all A's. So yeah, I'm doing really well on it. This is the end of me first University year, in 3 weeks time, so I've got another 2½ to go. (male, age 30)

While sometimes measured in grades or skill, this sense of achievement is most often reflected in a person's contribution to his or her community, family, or group. The fathers I talked to were not just fathers, but super-fathers. The volunteers were super-volunteers. The counselors were super-counselors. In the redemption narrative, making good is part of a higher mission, fulfilling a role that had been inherent in the person's true self.

To test whether desisting participants tended to be more consistently optimistic in their outlooks, the LDS narratives were analyzed for occurrences of "redemption sequences" or "contamination sequences" (see McAdams et al., 1997). In a *contamination sequence*, a decidedly good event "turns sour." In a *redemption sequence*, the opposite occurs, "something good" emerges out of otherwise negative circumstances. (Of course, descriptions of giving up crime itself were not included in this coding.) In this analysis, two independent raters found that 70% of the desisting group narratives included redemption sequences in the sampled passages compared with 25% of active offender narratives ($\chi^2 = 12.39$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$).

In perhaps the most important manifestation of this positive outlook, former offenders tend to recast their lives as being "planned" or orchestrated by a higher power for a certain purpose.

> It's as if [being involved with crime, going to prison] was all meant to happen now you know. (male, age 33)

I have the philosophy that things happen when they are meant to happen. Like this [going straight] now. (male, age 30)

I'm glad I had to go through what I had to go through. See, this is recovery for me. I'm glad I had to go what I had to go through to be where I'm at, because this is where I am supposed to be. See, I believe in predestination. Whatever's happened to you is supposed to happen to you. (female, 30s, *field notes*)

Narrators seek to find some reason or purpose for the long stretches of their lives for which they have "nothing to show." This rationalization usually takes the form of "If it weren't for X (me going to jail, my life of crime, etc.), I never would have realized Y (that there are more important things in life than money, that I was good at helping others, etc.)." The good has emerged out of the bad.

In many ways, this resembles what Frankl (1984) called "tragic optimism," or the belief that suffering can be redemptive. In this case, however, the belief is that one's *mistakes* can make one a stronger person. In fact, for many, the only thing they do have "to show for themselves" after 10 years of involvement in criminal behavior is the wisdom they gained from spending this much time on and beyond "the edge." This experience, for whatever it is worth, is turned into a strength in the redemption script.

I can honestly say, I've ducked and dived, but I've never been crooked. . . . All that shit and all that rubbish and all those things I've done have been the biggest asset to where I am now. It's like, you do find yourself being a bit of a role model sometimes. (male, age 32)

Not only has the speaker effectively separated his past mistakes from his true self (he was never "crooked" deep down), he also has become a better person because of all that he has been through.

Sometimes the benefits of having experienced crime and drug use are literal. One interviewee who found work counseling young offenders said that going to prison was a "good career move" for him. More typically, interviewees said, the experience of having "been there and back" has provided them with a sense of "street cred" (credibility among young people) or else an insight into life or how the world works. Ex-offenders say they have learned from their past lives, and this knowledge has made them wiser people.

This is vividly expressed in the following excerpt from an interview with a female ex-convict from New York (Maruna et al., 1999):

I believe that all recovering addicts are the Chosen Ones. That's my point of view. I feel we are all chosen by God, because we're loved. . . . Like, I feel addicts are lucky when they learn recovery. Because the people who are not addicts, they're not—they still have their problems. People who are in recovery and go through programs, they

learn how to live life on life's terms. . . . So I feel we're special because we're learning how to deal with the world. And, the people that aren't addicts, they don't know how to deal with the world because they were never taught. So, I just feel like we're the special ones. (female, 30s)

While rarely this explicit, the underlying suggestion in many desisting narratives is that the person who experiences crime and then goes straight is in some ways morally superior to the person who has never experienced drug use or criminal behavior. The ex-offender, after all, has tasted the euphoria of easy money, drugs, and criminal domination and has still managed to renounce these pleasures and pursue a more productive lifestyle. Rotenberg (1987) described this as the theme of "ascent through descent" and argued that such a belief is firmly rooted in Midrashic hermeneutics. Talmudic sayings such as "Repentance is so great that premeditated sins are accounted for as though they were merits" and "In a place where repenters stand, the perfect righteous may not stand" celebrate the reformed deviant as the bearer of wisdom and hope (Rotenberg, 1987, p. 87; cf. Augustine's *Confessions*).

FINDING ONE'S PURPOSE

According to Lofland (1969), "Transformed deviants tend to become not merely moral but hypermoral. . . . They take on a relatively fervent moral purpose" (p. 283). The desisting participants in this sample indeed often claimed to have found a higher purpose and found fulfillment in "fighting the good fight" (male, age 30), defined differently by each narrator. For this Liverpool sample, this "moral purpose" often took the form of mutual-help movements or class-based identity politics. In a U.S. sample, ex-offenders may be more likely to turn to race- or faith-based social movements (e.g., Maruna, 1997). Regardless of the specific framework, ex-offenders who desist seem to find some larger cause that brings them a sense of purpose.

In many ways, desisting participants seem to have reached the revelation that "I am what survives me," described by Erik Erikson (1968, p. 141) as the essence of a construct he called *generativity*. Generativity has been defined as

The concern for and commitment to promoting the next generation, manifested through parenting, teaching, mentoring, and generating products and outcomes that aim to benefit youth and foster the development and well-being of individuals and social systems that will outlive the self. (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1998, p. xx)

In a content analysis using Stewart et al.'s (1988) coding system, desisting narratives in the LDS scored significantly higher than persisting

narratives on this theme. On a measure of overall generativity content, the median score in the desisting group was 6.71 ($M = 6.9$), compared with a median of 1.79 ($M = 1.79$) in the persisting group narratives ($p < .01$). The details of this content analysis can be found in the appendix.

Changing the Currency

Each of us seeks to stave off meaninglessness and void by finding some life pursuit worthy of our time. As was outlined in chapter 4, for the active offenders in this sample this fulfillment is largely sought in the "big score" and other experiential thrills. Desisting interviewees, on the other hand, expressed a desire for more lasting accomplishments or "something to show" for themselves. They described newfound pleasures in creative and productive pursuits, and often expressed a special attachment or duty to some particular community, group, or cause.

> I just—I get more of a thrill out of being on my little computer at home at ten o'clock at night, writing a song, than going out earning all kinds of money. It's like, because like I say, I wanted to be recognized for my creativity, it's true. I really, at the end of the day, want nothing more than someone else to say they like my work. That's more important. Whenever I've put money first, that's been the root of my evil. (male, age 32)

One interviewee, a former drug smuggler who took up painting in a prison education course, described this eloquently as a "change of currency":

> The only thing that is going to improve a geezer [guy] is changing your currency of life, from pounds [money] to something slightly more heady: yoga or art or music or whatever. The people I know from nick [prison] that took up art, they get an equivalent buzz. When I finish a painting, I get the same buzz as I got when I landed 80 kilos on a beach in Spain. So, I don't make much money, I'm quite poor, but I altered the currency. Life's currencies can be less, you know, hard cash, basically less physical. What do you spend your money on? Having a nice time. For what? So you can enjoy life. But if I can enjoy life by painting pictures, talking to impoverished artists and getting arse-holed [drunk] every now and again, going to exhibitions, it suits me fine. (male, age 47)

This difference in motivation goes beyond realizing that crime is "wrong." In fact, few desisting ex-offenders described reaching this conclusion (see also Burnett, 1992; Irwin, 1970). The difference can be found in

personal definitions of success and assessments of "what matters in life" (Leibrich, 1993).

> It's what you want out of life, isn't it? Like, I always thought I was going to be rich. I always robbed thinking I'll hit the jackpot one day, but I never did. (male, age 33)

Several desisting ex-offenders said that they have never been as financially poor as they are now that they have gone legit.

> Whereas before I wouldn't dream, wouldn't think, wouldn't bat an eyelid, do you know what I mean, to spend 200, 300, 400, even 500 pounds a day. Now I have to manage on 100 pounds [US $150] a week. Whereas I was spending up to 500 pounds a day. It's a big leap from 500 pounds a day to 100 pounds a week. I'm trying to manage it, barely, but I'm managing it. (female, age 23)

Desisting interviewees said that experiential and consumptive pleasures are no longer seen as ends in themselves that can justify any means:

> The luxuries most people think of in life are fast cars and all that, like. That's bullshit. They're not, like. Luxuries in life are fucking running water in your taps, like. Some people haven't got that. Food in your cupboard, leccy [electricity], gas, and a TV to watch, maybe. You wouldn't worry if you haven't got a TV. You've still got luxuries, you know what I mean? . . . But because, you know, nowadays there's so much of it and all that in this country, like people have forgot, you know, just like how fucking fortunate they are, like, you know what I mean? You know, [I wish] someone had've said that to me [when I was young] like, 'cause I always wanted fast cars and loads of money and that like. (male, age 26)

Several participants mentioned "learning the value of money" since going legit.

> SM: What do you think has been the high point, the best times of your life so far?
>
> Participant: Well, getting to go to Australia [on a work assignment].
>
> SM: Why that?
>
> Participant: It's just cause I've achieved it. I could have went out and robbed the money for that and went to Sydney anytime I wanted, like, but it wouldn't be the same, you know. (male, age 36)

Another participant explained:

> Participant: I'm not proud of being poor, because I am poor, but I earned what I own, and that makes me proud. (male, age 30)

A few desisting ex-offenders, in fact, blamed their offending behavior on the evils of money itself:

> Me mind's changed a bit about money, the more money I have, the more I take drugs. The less money I've got, and I'm not taking it. The money's the evil thing. (male, age 33)

Unfortunately, as a desisting interviewee explains, "It doesn't work like that" (male, age 32). In quite similar stories, two interviewees said that at one point they gave away all of their money (thousands of pounds in ill-gotten savings) in an attempt to go straight, only to find this left them in worse shape than before.

> Participant: I was just sick of it all. So, I had this crazy notion that if I made meself poor, I wouldn't be able to afford heroin or cocaine. So if I remove the money, I won't be able to score. . . . Looking back on it, it was pure idiocy. It went a lot downhill after that.
>
> SM: What happened next?
>
> Participant: I went to live with me friends. . . . Tried to do me turkey [come off heroin]. Couldn't hack it. So, I had to go out stealing. Just the shame of it, I had to go out stealing car radios, car stereos, getting 60 quid [pounds] from them. (male, age 30)

According to interviewees, for a person to desist, scaling down monetary ambitions is only half the battle. One also needs to find a new purpose in life. Generative motivations can apparently fill this void.

Degenerative Lives, Generative Stories

The prototypical example of generativity and ex-deviants might be the case of Bill Sands (1964), an ex-convict who says the only way that he could find "inner peace" and a "sense of accomplishment" was to abandon a successful entrepreneurial career and dedicate himself to helping other ex-convicts change their lives. Like Sands, several sample members assumed the generative role of the "wounded healer" or "professional ex-." Brown (1991) defined "professional exes" as individuals who "have exited their deviant careers by replacing them with occupations in professional counseling" (p. 219). This seems to be an increasingly popular path for former deviants who desist from crime and drugs. As one reintegration worker told me, "I don't know how much time you've spent around recovering addicts, but every addict who gives up drugs wants to become a drug counselor."

Although only 3 of the participants in this study had found full-time, paid work as counselors or social workers at the time of the interview, 11

others were doing volunteer work to this regard or hoped to become full-time counselors or youth workers. Two others were employed full time in different careers but were active as volunteers with young offenders. Because of the use of snowball sampling, such volunteers have likely been oversampled in the LDS. Still, the desire among reformed deviants to help others in this process is a well-documented phenomenon. Brown (1991, p. 219) reported that an estimated 72% of the professional counselors working in the over 10,000 substance abuse treatment centers in the United States are former substance abusers. In addition to such professional work, thousands of long-sober individuals freely volunteer their time to helping others in mutual-help groups like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).

In the LDS, I purposely avoided oversampling members of any particular organization, such as AA or Phoenix House, as these groups can promote consistencies in the language of reform used by their members (Denzin, 1987). Nonetheless, the impulse toward volunteerism and mentoring could be found in almost every narrative:

> Hopefully I'll be a probation officer soon—or rather work in the probation service, not as a probation officer. I want to *give people my life*—you know, experiences—what I been through. You know, tell them what experiences they can have if they do what I done, basically. (male, age 31)

This urge to "give people my life" appears repeatedly in the interviews with desisting people, who use almost identical language in explaining this desire:

> Like, the way I see it, if I could stop even one person taking drugs again, it would be enough. I don't want to be a drug counselor or nothing like that, but if you can learn off what I'm telling you and *stop one person going through the life that I've gone through*, that's an achievement, isn't it? A big achievement, 'cause I wouldn't like anyone to go through what I've gone through and what I've put me family through as well, you know what I mean? (male, age 33)

> I now feel as though I can achieve what I've always wanted to achieve, you know, which is gain some qualifications and get a job that I can, um, help other people in, you know. Train and get some full-time employment where I can contribute, you know, and maybe help save —*even if I only saved one out of a hundred*, you know, um. I know there's people out there, they'll trust me, once they gain my trust and I can tell them things about me. There's things that I haven't told you yet—things I'm just remembering now. Like, I've had fights while under the influence of alcohol, lots of bad things. You know, just try and make the connections, just try and get through to them. (male, age 36)

Participant: I just woke up one morning and said, "I've got to put this to use now." You know, I can actually tell youngsters where I'm coming from and basically what jail's about. And that's what I want to do. That's me aim. It's gonna take me a couple years to get settled in, 'cause I'm actually starting some work now for probation. It's gonna take me six or seven months before I actually start. I'm gonna be buzzin' with that, you know what I mean?

SM: Why do you think that's something you want to do?

Participant: Well, basically, I'm sick of jail, you know, and I know what jail's about. And I know a lot of these youngsters wouldn't want to go to jail. They need guidance. Do you get me? So, I feel as if I can give the guidance. Maybe *if I had ten lads in a room and I could stop one of them going to jail*, I'd have done a job, and that's basically what I want to try and do. If I get one to listen to me, and think, "Well fuckin' hell, look where he's been all his life." I'm talking like ten years in jail, basically half of my life gone. . . . You total all my sentences up, it's over eleven and a half years and I could have done a life sentence. I just want to get through to them. (male, age 30)

A lifetime that is deemed a "waste" or a shame can be "put to use" by saving one—"even just one"—other life from repeating the same mistakes. This cautionary story is intended in particular as a gift for the next generation.

> I was saying to [my brother's] kids the other day. I'd sat both of them down the other day, and I said, "Listen, me and your dad have wasted our lives. I don't want yous to do what we've done. For 15 or 16 years, me and your dad wasted our lives, and now we want you to take a leaf out of our book." (male, age 33)

Ironically, although the speaker says that his life has been wasted, by living to tell the tale, he has in fact found a social purpose or meaning for this part of his life: It has produced a "book" that he can pass on to the next generation.

Indeed the desire among inmates and ex-offenders to convert their life stories into actual book form seems to be quite common. "For whatever reason, a great many former offenders believe their life history would make an entertaining and perhaps useful contribution to understanding crime and those who commit it" (Shover, 1996, p. 190). This phenomenon may be rooted in the same underlying motivation that is behind the "professional ex-" phenomenon—the desire to make a lasting contribution or leave a positive legacy ("something to show") with one's life.

The professional ex-, according to Lofland (1969), essentially has two

"selves": the deviant person that he or she was and the normal person that he or she is now. "The deviant person that he was is kept very much alive through the practice of relating, even ad nauseam, the character of the deviant person he used to be" (p. 232).

> Hopefully, I'll be something to other people. To a few people down by ours, I already am. I know people coming in here [to a voluntary re-integration program] now, and they've found out about it because they've seen me. I led through example. I get a lot of people now, everyone else's ma's whose on drugs, have got me harassed all the time, saying "Can you help our boy, Joe, or whatever?" "What if you just come round for a couple of nights and spend time?" (male, age 36)

The construction or reconstruction of one's life story into a moral tale might therefore, itself, be an important element of sustaining significant behavioral reform.

RECOVERING WISDOM

The moral heroism of the redemption script "serves to make acceptable, explicable and even meritorious the guilt-laden, 'wasted' portions of an Actor's life" (Lofland, 1969, p. 287). This reconstruction also allows the ex-offender to "unabashedly and proudly" announce his or her past, instead of having to run from it (Irwin, 1980, p. 94). Essentially, the desisting ex-offender has found a meaning in his or her otherwise shame-filled past.

The transition from being a model of degeneracy and vice to being a generative role model for the next generation may seem like an extreme shift. Indeed, some may be troubled that long-term ex-offenders could feel so positive about their lives. Yet, this sense of optimism and self-efficacy might be useful for sustaining desistance. For all of its problems, being a criminal provides individuals with at least momentary escapes into excitement, power, and notoriety. If going straight means accepting docility, self-hatred, and stigma, there is little reason to desist from such escapes.

Making good in the face of all the obstacles and risk factors detailed in chapter 3 is hard work. It is far easier to allow oneself to slip back into familiar behavior patterns than face such challenges without one's usual comforting defenses. (As one active offender liked to say, "Better the devil you know.") According to Bandura (1989),

> There is a growing body of evidence that human attainments and positive well-being require an optimistic sense of personal efficacy. This is because ordinary social realities are strewn with difficulties. They are full of impediments, failures, adversities, setbacks, frustrations and inequities. People must have a robust sense of personal efficacy to sustain the perseverant effort needed to succeed. (p. 1176)

As such, it is the desisting sample members who seem to be distorters of reality (see Seligman, 1991). Yet, rather than criminogenic cognitive distortions, in Bandura's (1989) words, "They exhibit self-enhancing biases that distort appraisals in the positive direction" (p. 1177).

The major components of the redemption script are also largely consistent with what is known about how individuals rationalize different types of life traumas. When individuals suffering from illnesses or other life traumas find some "silver lining" or convince themselves that some benefits have emerged out of their adversity, they tend to adjust better to their situation (e.g. Taylor, 1983; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995). People who construct these "positive illusions" also seem to suffer less psychological distress and are less prone to depression (Taylor, 1989).

The difficulty, in the case of ex-offenders, of course, is that transforming a deviant life story into "an inordinately worthwhile personal identity" (Lofland, 1969, p. 283) carries an implicit (and sometimes explicit) attitude toward mainstream morality and justice.

> I want to go into some kind of counseling work, because I know I'd be good at it, because I've been there. A lot of the problem with probation is they're just, they're pen pushers, you know, they just sit in the college for a few years, read a book about psychology and they think they know it all, and they don't. They just haven't got a clue. (male, age 24)

> [An ex-con] can empathize with you, because he's been there. He knows what it's like to need it [heroin], to be standing there in the rain and the cold for hours waiting for your dealer. He knows what it is like to feel that, you know, humiliated and worthless and just have no respect for yourself at all, like. If someone hasn't been there . . . why should I listen to them [talk about rehabilitation]? Why should anybody? (male, age 31)

The confession that conventional authorities had it "right all along," while seemingly implicit in the act of choosing to desist, does not come easily to the lips of many reformed ex-offenders.

One interviewee explained that he has not become a volunteer with probation because he now supports "The System." Quite to the contrary, he is entering the probation service because he was "so bloody fed up with The System, that I wanted to get in here and try to change some things" (male, age 31). This reformist approach is common to many of the desisting narratives:

> SM: Why (would you want a career in) social work?
>
> Participant: I always said that I'd like to work with kids my age, and just the amount of things I've seen done to children by social workers, who are out of hand. . . . There are social workers who are qualified, but are idiots. You can't tell me about social work! (male, age 28)

> I'd love to actually go and work within the system, the prison system. Find out what is really happening in the system, find the faults, and write a report. (female, age 26)

Another participant explained:

> The main reason I do this job [working with other ex-cons] isn't because it's easy for me because I've been there and I speak the language. I do this because I still believe in justice. A lot of the people I work with have been shunned by society. They're seen as scum. A lot of people would just as soon kill them. They really would. But I see the diamond [in the rough]. (male, age 30)

In the desisting self-story, the "System" may need more reform than the recovering individual himself or herself. While the ex-offenders in this sample are playing by the rules of mainstream society, they often emphasized their dissatisfaction with the culture that "led" them to offending in the first place (see also Irwin, 1970, p. 156). In fact, rather than overcoming a "criminal value system," the interviewees saw themselves as recovering from *society's* value system in some sense.

> Well, at least I've got food in the cupboard you know. You've got to be grateful for the little things in life. People who have everything don't appreciate what they've got. They take things and people for granted. They treat people like shit. They've got money and they think they're better than you. (female, age 42)

This critique is reflected in the well-known monologue of a desisting ex-offender in the film *Trainspotting*:

> Choose Life. Choose a job. Choose a career. Choose a family. Choose a fucking big television. Choose washing machines, cars, compact disc players, and electrical tin openers. Choose good health, low cholesterol, and dental insurance. Choose fixed interest mortgage repayments. Choose a starter home. Choose your friends. Choose leisurewear and matching luggage. Choose a three-piece suite on hire purchase in a range of fucking fabrics. Choose DIY and wondering who the fuck you are on a Sunday morning. Choose sitting on that couch watching mind-numbing, spirit-crushing game shows, stuffing junk food into your mouth. Choose rotting away at the end of it all, pishing your last in a miserable home, nothing more than an embarrassment to the selfish, fucked up brats you spawned to replace yourself. Choose your future. Choose Life.

While the speaker, Renton, does eventually go straight by the end of the film, "choosing life" as it were, the antiestablishment message is quite clear:

Before you judge my past choices as deviant, take a long look at your own life, mate.

This long monologue, quite remarkably, became something of a pop culture mantra among teenagers and university students throughout the United Kingdom. In 1996–1997, the ubiquitous "Choose Life" monologue could be found on T-shirts, coffee mugs, and posters, and a pop song even set the speech to dance music. Although few of these legions of *Trainspotting* fans are themselves former heroin addicts or burglars like the character of Renton in the film, discomfort regarding the transition away from deviance might be somewhat universal among young people. Like the ex-offenders in this sample, many youths may seek to balance this tension by trying to transform the mainstream even while they are joining it. Idealistic passion, overconfidence, and even a touch of self-righteousness may be traits shared by both successful ex-offenders and successful young people as members of both groups seek to make a place for themselves in the world of conventional adults.

III

APPLIED MYTHOLOGY

Leslie Wilkins once described the field of corrections as "applied mythology" (cited in Fogel, 1975). By this, he meant that very little of what is done in the name of offender treatment is based on grounded evidence about how people change. Likewise, Ross and Fabiano (1983) suggested that "Corrections appears to be functioning in a 'conceptual vacuum'" (p. 2). Indeed, even the most highly regarded rehabilitation researchers admit that the field "is not viewed as a professional area of practice, replete with a growing body of core psychological knowledge and opinion with which practitioners and managers should be familiar before 'innovative' programs are introduced" (Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990, p. 45).

In the absence of such a conceptual framework for rehabilitation practice, faddish all-purpose "cures" have flourished in what has been called an epidemic of "panacea-philia" (Gendreau, 1996). In fact, the dominant philosophy in the corrections field has been described as "anything goes," with many interventions drawing from an "ill-digested mixture of behaviorism and neo-Freudian psychologies" (Cohen, 1985, p. 154). As Cohen pointed out, "It is easy to find a single agency which lists as its 'methods': role playing, transactional analysis, problem solving, task setting, reality therapy, behavior modification, operant reinforcement, video game skills, remedial education and camping trips" (p. 154).

In an effort to rectify this situation, academic researchers have struggled to develop a science of corrections. The best of this genre, frequently dubbed "what works" research, seeks to identify "empirically based best practices" with the help of standardized evaluation techniques, controlled quasi-experiments, and meta-analysis. This "what works" literature has played an essential role in challenging the notion that "nothing works" in corrections (Martinson, 1974).

Although this evaluation-based research is very useful in answering the question, "Does this type of program work (on average, overall)?," it tells us little about *how* rehabilitation works, *why* it works with some clients, or why it fails with others (Chen, 1990; Palmer, 1994; Pawson & Tilley, 1997). The answers to such questions have been generally locked away in the "black box" of program evaluation research, treated as unknowable—or else unimportant in the face of challenges like Martinson's "nothing works."[22]

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[22]Prior to being put on the defensive following the "nothing works" attack, rehabilitation research frequently asked these more micro-level questions about how the process of reform

Yet, the individual client does not experience some undifferentiated "program," like behavioral therapy or Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Every individual experiences and interprets unique social interactions within a program setting (D. A. Lewis, 1990). The long tradition of change process research in psychotherapy (e.g., Rice & Greenberg, 1984; Toukmanian & Rennie, 1992) has taught us that every intervention or program actually consists of thousands of different micromechanisms of change (e.g., confrontation, learning to trust, and self-reevaluation). Whereas macrolevel research asks, "Does rehabilitation work?" or "Does group therapy with offenders work?" this microlevel research starts a few thousand steps back and asks, for instance, "How do different individuals tend to respond to direct confrontations of their behavior?" By gradually accumulating knowledge about these micromechanisms of change (hence opening the black box), researchers may be able to develop a more theory-driven agenda on effective programming (Pawson & Tilley, 1997). Unfortunately, this sort of science of rehabilitation is a long way off.

THE ROOTS OF CORRECTIONS

A few implications for correctional practice might be inferred from the Liverpool Desistance Study (LDS). The highly subjective data collected for the LDS are not well suited for arguing for or against the effectiveness of particular programs or interventions. However, they may provide some insight into the process of maintaining behavioral change.

Cressey (1963), for instance, argued that if criminal behavior is dependent on the neutralizations or verbalizations that make deviance possible, then "Attempts to change that conduct should concentrate on processes for avoiding some verbalizations and acquiring others . . . the words utilized in acquiring what is called a 'self conception' must be changed" (p. 152). This is an idea worth repeating: If the cognitive neutralization techniques play an important role in allowing for deviant behavior, then rehabilitation probably involves a reworking of these self-narratives.

Certainly, the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of self-stories are at the very core of traditional correctional interventions. Thune (1977) and O'Reilly (1997) suggested that the power of storytelling may account for the success of twelve-step programs like Alcoholics Anonymous, which can be found in prisons and correctional settings across the United States (and indeed are the only form of "therapeutic support" offered in many prisons). The edited volume *Alcoholics Anonymous* (1939), the primary text (or "Big Book") that has introduced millions of people to

worked (e.g., Grant & Grant, 1959; Palmer, 1965; Sealy & Banks, 1971; Warren, 1971). In the post-Martinson (1974) era, however, such work clearly made less sense. Why study how rehabilitation works, if we have not even agreed that anything works to begin with?

the twelve-step philosophy, is itself a collection of 29 life stories of the original members of the organization. AA founder Bill Wilson has said, "The 400 pages of Alcoholics Anonymous contain no theory; they narrate experience. . . . Being laymen, we have naught but a story to tell" (O'Reilly, 1997, p. 129).

Recovery stories continue to be told at twelve-step fellowships around the world. "Rarely is any point made in AA meetings or publications without at least a few fragments of some individual's life history being presented to support it" (Thune, 1977, p. 79). AA members implicitly model their own life stories on the stories in the Big Book and those told by more experienced members of the fellowship (O'Reilly, 1997). Far from mere mimicry, this reworking of one's self-story according to the AA model is itself the recovery process used in twelve-step programs (Thune, 1977, p. 80). Regarding Narcotics Anonymous (NA), for instance, Ronel (1998) wrote,

> NA's accumulated biography, expressed as members' sharings, functions as raw material for the process of re-biography. It gives communal meaning, direction and structure to an individual life story. Individuals can therefore fashion their life stories to conform with those of the sub-culture, and live according to them. (p. 194)

Rebiographing is also essential to the practice of reintegrative shaming in the restorative justice model (e.g., Clear & Karp, 1999). Victim-offender mediation and other forms of conferencing involve a mutual retelling of the events leading up to and including the immediate offense. All sides describe their interpretation of the event and how it made them feel. Mediation practitioners refer to this as "telling their stories" (Zehr, 1990, p. 161). This storytelling is intended to humanize victims, offenders, and the family members of both. It is also an ideal method for deconstructing offender neutralizations. The denial of injury or denial of victim, in particular, becomes immediately implausible in such a circumstance.

Similar examples of storytelling and self-story analysis can be found in the group therapy (E. M. Scott, 1998) and in cognitive self-change interventions (Bush, 1995) conducted in innovative correctional environments. As such, narrative reconstruction might even be seen as a "root metaphor" (Sarbin, 1986) for correctional practice itself. Essentially, when the black box of correctional programming is pried open, one may find that it contains a complex web of discourse—organizational narratives, reformer narratives, personal narratives, and the interaction therein (Cooren, 2000). According to O'Reilly (1997), "Narrative is not a cure, but it is a method, a path toward redemption. Redemption lies in . . . a better understanding—an improved epistemology" (p. 65).

If this is the case, phenomenological research may have a contribution to make to the science of corrections as a supplement to controlled

evaluation experiments (Lovejoy et al., 1995; McCorkle, Harrison, & Inciardi, 1998). According to Brickman and his colleagues (Brickman et al., 1982), "If either helping or coping is to be understood, the two processes must be studied together rather than separately" (p. 370). If one knows what personal myths seem most appealing to desisting persons, one can better direct the narrative reconstruction implicit in the rehabilitative efforts. This is certainly not what Wilkins meant by "applied mythology," but the phrase is an apt description of this vision of correctional research.

SUPPORTING MAINTENANCE

Frequently, discussions about correctional policy get caught up in the pendulous debate between deterrence and treatment. The question is what is the best way to change a wrong-doer's behavior, the "carrot" or the "stick"? Perhaps fortunately, the LDS data have little to say about this controversy, so I will not be entering this dialogue. After all, it is not clear what "caused" the LDS interviewees to decide to make good—the turning point could have been a form of deterrence or else some helpful intervention (or both). I cannot say for sure because they were already desisting "when I found them."

On the other hand, although little in the LDS can answer the question of how to "turn the bad into the good," the findings can provide some suggestions about how people who have *already decided to stop offending* can maintain this desistance. This is no small thing. If personal change is a long-term, cyclical process of trial and error (Hser, Anglin, Grella, Longshore, & Prendergast, 1997; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1992), treatment interventions should probably focus less on changing committed offenders and more on providing support for those who make initial efforts to change (see Marlatt & Gordon, 1985).

In an irony noted by several interviewees, although considerable resources are spent encouraging individuals to stop offending, once the ex-offender does make this break, he or she is generally abandoned by social support networks. This might be precisely the period when the ex-offender needs the most support.

> Participant: It's funny, when you are on drugs there are a million places you can go and have people help you, but when you are clean and not into crime and all that, then suddenly there isn't anyone that will help you. . . . When you're into crime and drugs and stuff, you've got drugs help lines. You've got drugs counselors, drug units. You've got the probation that'll help you. There's NACRO [National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders], sort of thing, that'll help you along the way. There was like, the [probation] hostel staff. . . . But, once you turn the corner, there's nothing really. There's no sort of organizations that can help you out. . . . There's nothing like counseling or anything like that, or people that can help you manage your money, stuff like that.
>
> SM: What sort of help would you like to see?
>
> Participant: Well, you know, counselors, people to give you the encouragement to stay on the straight and narrow. (male, age 24)

Another interviewee explained why she relapsed soon after leaving a 30-day detoxification program for people with heroin addictions.

> Within like two months [after starting the program], they'd forgotten about us. We were just left . . . and when you leave, you haven't finished [the change process], and we were just left. I know they had—they didn't have that much time because new residents were coming in, and they had to help them. But . . . we shouldn't have been left on the hardest part [of the recovery process]. The easy part's getting off [drugs], it's staying off that's the hard part, and we were just left to fend for ourselves. (female, age 26)

For this reason, a group of former drug users, all of whom completed a Liverpool detoxification program, formed a weekly support group to give and receive this necessary follow-through assistance. Augmenting such efforts at relapse prevention may be as important a goal of correctional practice as convincing those who do not want to desist to contemplate it.

In the following chapters, I explore in greater depth the three key themes that characterized the desisting narratives in this study (generative motivations, the core self, and a sense of agency). In doing so, I make tentative suggestions how each of these self-understandings might be encouraged in correctional practice. I claim no experimental evidence for the effectiveness of such practices, only offer them as possibilities on the basis of the narrative testimonies. Finally, as narratives are cultural artifacts, I take the opportunity at the end of each of the following chapters to speculate about where these story lines are "coming from" and what purposes they might serve. This speculation is based in theory (e.g., my own meta-narrative for interpreting the world). This perspective need not be shared to appreciate the findings from the research, nor, I hope, has it colored my own interpretation of the data any more than it does the perspective of any other researcher.

6

WORK, GENERATIVITY, AND REFORM

The link between work and the rehabilitation of offenders has been assumed for at least the past century. According to Simon (1993), "Wherever you look in the development of modernist penality you will find labor. Exhort the offenders with religious tracts, but make them work. . . . Educate them as citizens, but make them work. Treat their pathological features, but make them work" (p. 39). As such, the finding that desisting sample members in the Liverpool Desistance Study (LDS) derived meaning from a variety of productive pursuits should be comforting to those in the offender reintegration business. The specific nature of the productive motivations and their role in the sample members' identity narratives, however, need to be emphasized and understood.

In particular, the desisting self-narrative frequently involves reworking a delinquent history into a source of wisdom to be drawn from while acting as a drug counselor, youth worker, community volunteer, or mutual-help group participant. Although this generative phenomenon is well documented among persons in recovery (Brown, 1991; Green, Thompson, & Fullilove, 1998; Hughes, 1998), such efforts are often questioned or considered insincere. For instance, in a favorable review of reformed ex-offender Bob Turney's (1997) book, Sir Stephen Tumin is quoted as saying, "I have always been rather against the idea of prisoners after discharge becoming professional former prisoners. They should, it seems to me, learn the lessons of imprisonment and move on to fresh lives with new occu-

pations and new interests" (back cover). Similarly, during the LDS fieldwork, a critic of the "professional ex-" phenomenon said, "Sometimes, these cons misunderstand and sort of want to become one of the therapists themselves, instead of going out and finding real jobs." In some cases, ex-offenders are even prohibited from pursuing work that would put them in contact with young people or other offenders.

> When I was on me diploma in social work [course], I was paid by my local authority [city government] as an outreach worker for the youth justice team, working with young offenders. And when they saw that I was on the course and could become qualified [as a social worker], they withdrew the placement and said that I couldn't be employed by them because I was an ex-offender. (male, age 28)

Part of this resistance may be based on class-based, territorial interests. As Leary (1962) wrote, "Allowing criminals to take over responsibility and authority and prestige as experts on 'crime and rehabilitation' brings [them] into competition with the professional middle class" (p. 66). However, some of this resistance can be attributed to the lack of a theoretical understanding for why ex-offenders seem to be drawn toward generative roles and activities. In this chapter, I try to analyze the reformative aspects of generative pursuits and, on the basis of interview testimony, I speculate as to the origins of these motivations.

HOW GENERATIVE SCRIPTS "WORK"

Generativity is a product of both inner drives and social demands (McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998). As humans age, the adults face societal expectations—encoded in normative, age-graded standards and buttressed by economic and structural opportunities and constraints—to take responsibility for the next generation (Neugarten & Hagestad, 1976). Former offenders, however, may face unique personal and cultural demands for developing generative goals and plans.

Interviews with active offenders suggested that criminal behavior might be used as a way of filling a void or emptiness in a person's life. Additionally, external stigma and an internalized sense of shame also led to feelings of being "doomed to deviance." Generative pursuits seem to address all of these needs in the lives of desisting interviewees:

- *Fulfillment:* Generative roles can provide an alternative source of meaning and achievement in one's life.
- *Exoneration:* By helping others, one relieves his or her own sense of guilt and shame.
- *Legitimacy:* The penitent ex-offender who tries to persuade others not to offend is a well-known and established role in society.
- *Therapy:* Helping others actually helps the ex-offender maintain his or her own reform efforts.

Each aspect of generativity's appeal is developed in this chapter.

Generativity as Fulfillment

One of the struggles described by interviewees in this sample was the creeping sense that one's existence was meaningless or useless.

> We always had a lot of money and a lot of gear [drugs] and that. It wasn't really a problem to us, 'cause we always had it. But it was a problem like. I just wasn't happy with me life at any stage. About 18 months ago, I just had enough like, so I took 100 tablets just to kill meself. (male, age 36)

> I had nothing to do so I just lapsed back into it [burglary] but I still had it in me mind that I wanted to leave it alone like. It had come to a time where I'd had enough of it you know. I'd had enough of prison and all the lifestyle that goes with it you know, and just the uselessness of everything. You know, just feeling useless. I would still go out robbing and making money and spending it on something else, but it was still not fulfilling to me and still felt like I was wasting meself. (male, age 33)

Waldorf et al. (1991) compared this experience to Kierkegaard's (1843/1941) concept of despair. In the state of despair, a life of meaningless hedonism leads an individual to a choice between either death or conversion to a religious life. Although organized religion played a primary role in only a few of the LDS narratives, the interviewees often showed a similar sense of newfound purpose in some larger community. Like the recovering drug abusers in Baskin and Sommers's (1998) research, many "were like religious converts in terms of the fervor with which they attempted to establish and maintain support networks that validated their new sense of self" (p. 136; see also Lofland, 1969).

Perhaps most importantly, other-centered pursuits provide socially excluded offenders with a feeling of connection to or "embeddedness" in the world around them (Singer, 1997). By providing a supportive community and a network of people with shared experiences, these organizations can transform a seemingly individual process like desistance or recovery into a social movement of sorts (Hamm, 1997; Sands, 1964). This connection to something larger than the self (even in the name of *self*-help) appears to be a vital part of the desistance process (see Baskin & Sommers, 1998, p. 137).

Additionally, although they may be likely to fail in many legitimate careers, ex-offenders often discover that they are quite good at counseling other ex-offenders. They find that this is a field in which they can achieve and even excel. Like the ex-convict in O. Henry's (1953) "A Retrieved Reformation," who uses his safe-cracking skills to free a trapped child, wounded healers are able to use their wealth of criminal experience for prosocial ends.

SM: How have you found working with kids in your new job?

Participant: It's been brilliant. The times I've been out and the kids have started battling, and the social worker just flaps, "Uh, oh." I was picked specially to work with [a particularly difficult young person]. I have earrings, long hair. I don't give a shit. That's the bottom line. I told him, "It's my job. I will allow you to tell me to fuck off once, but it's your loss. I'm here to help you." And I was in for nearly an hour and he asked me to come back, and I built up a very, very strong relationship with him—so much so that we got him out of the Secure Unit [of the prison]. . . . I had a lot of response. (male, age 29)

Indeed, numerous observers have outlined the theoretical and practical reasons why former deviants should be recruited to work as rehabilitation practitioners (e.g., Cressey, 1965; Lofland, 1969).

> With such backgrounds, [wounded healers] are living examples of the transformation that is possible. . . . When the [going] gets tough, it is possible to say, "He did it, so can I." A would-be identity model derives legitimacy from his [or her] having traversed the same route. To expect deviants to have affective bonds for—to take as identity models—others who have not had that career is to expect an atypical, unusual and treacherous identification. Perhaps only deviants are expected to be so unusually responsive to persons different from themselves. (Lofland, 1969, p. 268)

Ex-offenders are, after all, experts on the subject of deviance and desistance, and each has the wisdom (or what one interviewee described as "insight") that comes with having "been there and back." One interviewee, who had expressed considerable criticism for social workers (who had, among other things, taken her children away from her at one point), surprised me by announcing at the end of the interview that she wanted to become a social worker herself:

> I want to show people the positive side of social work. When they [social workers] come around, they don't do that. . . . I want to show people that I've been there, I've been through this stuff, so I can relate to what they're going through. (female, age 26)

Interviewees also described the fulfillment they derive from being able

to contribute to a social control establishment that had long been seen as their adversary. One wounded healer, a volunteer reintegration worker, said that he realized just how far he had come when a client asked him to write a letter of support to a parole officer on the client's behalf. "Writing to a parole officer as if he were a peer, rather than my superior, like" (male, age 30).

Most of the other occupations available to ex-offenders ("thankless, stinking work in dog food factories," according to one) do not provide this same sense of achievement.

> I used to work for a local supermarket, stacking the shelves and things. No problem with the [criminal] record, I didn't declare [the convictions]. But I just gave it all up. I just got bored. It was dead boring. Ended up on the dole. Didn't have enough money to live off, and again the easy option was to start offending again. (male, age 28)

The dispositional traits of LDS sample members (low conscientiousness, high need for excitement) make them rather poor fits for low-status, repetitive work. Like the active offenders interviewed in this study, if faced with a choice between such work or criminal involvement, they are likely to choose the latter (and, of course, they did for many years). One active offender explained,

> I can't explain it. . . . It's just that when you see people with nice things, you say "That's where I want to be." Then you see this lot working hard, real struggle, going to work everyday, and still with nothing to show for it. Then you see this other group [criminals] out having a good time, never bored, and they got the nice things that the posh people have. (male, age 27)

Fortunately, desisting sample members were able to find leadership roles in community groups, in voluntary organizations, or in their families that could provide them with a source of personal satisfaction. Going straight, therefore, does not seem to be about defiant rebels turning into diligent working stiffs. Instead, defiant rebels are able to find social roles or occupations that can provide them with the same sense of empowerment and potency they were seeking (unsuccessfully) through criminal behavior.

Generativity as Restitution

All of the interviewees in this sample had to manage the shame and guilt that accompany involvement in criminal behavior. Generative activities seem to help a person come to terms with past mistakes and "move on."

> I feel tremendously guilty for what I've done, and that really is a big thing, because I'm waiting to go now and train as a Victim Support

Worker. I'm going to go and work with the victims of crime. D'you know what I mean? I'm human. (male, age 28)

Another participant explained:

> But I owe [my children] a lot, you see. Like I told you, she had me son when I was in jail. So, I haven't even paid him back for that. I've been in [prison] twice since. I haven't actually paid them back to say I'm sorry. I want to do it in a nice way. I want to leave them something. I want to give them something back. But that's hard to do, 'cause I got nothing to give them. (male, age 40)

Braithwaite and Mugford (1994) wrote, "The gesture of restoration to both community and victim, 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). One of the interviewees described his experiences doing woodwork projects at a reintegration program in much the same terms:

> I mean, since I've been here, I've made three big playhouses, like eight-foot wide by ten-foot with an upstairs and all. Gettin' a buzz. I mean, I took so much out of the community, but the first one we made, we donated that to the children's home. So we took that much out of the community, [but] now we're putting something back in. It's not much compared to what we took out, but we put something back. I mean, it helped the kids, it helped the parents. Me kids are always asking me when am I going to build something for them. Every house I've built, my kids have seen it. That's a buzz, that. (male, age 31)

Some interviewees described wanting to help less fortunate others as a reciprocal gesture, because they themselves had received so much help from volunteers, counselors, or reintegration workers. "I try to give people respect. What people gave to me, I try to give back" (male, age 33). Other times, the atonement is directed at family members or significant others who have stuck by the person.

> SM: So you gave up the smack [heroin]. How about stealing cars and that?
>
> Participant: I don't bother with cars and all that now, like. I've had a legit car, like, you know to drive me mum around. Like, that's what I do now, like. That's why I've got me shit together now, like. Me ma, like, she's had four strokes, you know, and as I said before, me ma is me world, you know what I mean, seriously like. I do believe that, like. So I, like, I look after me ma and all that, like, you know. I try to do good things for her—for meself, you know what I mean, but for her too, you know. I've done bad things to them in the past and that, like, you know. I wasn't the ideal fucking son and all that, was I? You know what I mean, so I do try now, though. (male, age 26)

Another participant explained:

> I mean, my kids are starting to call me "Dad" now, whereas years ago, they used to just say, "Who's he?"—'cause I used to just come in, get something to eat, then go out. Now they're calling me Dad. I feel like a dad. I'm backin' them, I'm dressing them, taking them to school. That's things I've never done. They're two brilliant kids. I'm just sick I missed out on the early part of their life. I'm making up for it now. (male, age 31)

Significantly, though, the debt that desisting offenders describe is often an abstract, rather than a specific, one. The "score" that some interviewees feel they need to settle is generally with society, the community, or God. It is not a direct debt to the individuals whom they have harmed along the way. As one desisting participant, now a drug counselor and social activist, said,

> If I were to approach every person I ever ripped off and tell them I was sorry or whatever, one of them is going to go and call the police, and I'll get thrown in the nick. . . . I think I can do the universe a bit more good out here. (male, age 30)

Perhaps the greatest debt most of the sample described was a debt to themselves. They felt that they wasted their own lives and their own potential by behaving stupidly, sitting in prison cells, and messing around. Perhaps this is why saving "just one" other life is seen as enough to provide a sense of redemption.

Generativity as Legitimacy

Lofland (1969, p. 210) wrote, "Long years of truly exemplary conformity or even hyperconformity and stellar service to society may be required" before an actor publicly identified as deviant can achieve the status of a "pivotal normal." This is probably well known by participants in this sample, who uniformly tried to underscore the magnitude of their newly found morality with statements such as the following: "I don't even litter anymore" (male, age 30) or "I don't smoke. I don't even drink" (male, age 26) or "I won't even pay the wrong fare on a bus" (male, age 25).

In addition to this aggressive piety, the pursuit of full-time generative roles can expedite the process of obtaining public acceptance. When a person becomes a probation officer or an antidrugs campaigner, they need not constantly remind and convince others that they have changed. Their acceptance of conventional values is embedded in their new role in society (Cressey, 1965). However, nothing inherent in becoming a factory worker

or day laborer openly advertises that a person has given up crime. Indeed, many active offenders in the sample described doing such jobs occasionally.

Finally, the "penitent rebel" has for centuries played a highly useful, symbolic role in the upholding of societal values (Faller, 1987). In the Victorian era, Ignatieff (1983) argued, the "drama of repentance" symbolized "the triumph of good over evil in all men and women. If there was a social message in the ideal of reform it was that the institutional salvation of the deviant acted out the salvation of all men and women, rich and poor alike" (p. 92).

Such repentance rituals continue to play an important role in societies like contemporary Japan (Haley, 1996), yet the cultural apparatuses that institutionalize the repentant role (e.g., the sacrament of penance) have "withered or disappeared in the West," according to Braithwaite (1989, p. 162).

Although this seems to be true on an institutional scale, sporadic examples of the penitent role remain in Western culture. The moralistic confessionals of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), for instance, may be the primary reason for the widespread public acceptance of such self-help organizations:

> This success appears to be accounted for largely by AA's use of the repentant role available in American society, constructing a "comeback" for "repentant" alcoholics based on their apparently intense adherence to middle-class ideals coupled with their repudiation of the "hedonistic underworld" to which they "traveled" as alcoholics. (Trice & Roman, 1970, p. 538)

Although we may not hold out much hope for deviants, members of mainstream society are still generally comforted when deviants say they want to be like us (see Faller, 1987). It is on some level reassuring to know that we are not missing out on some great party by not using heroin or joining gangs.

Generativity as Therapy

Perhaps the most important appeal of pursuing generative goals is the rehabilitative aspects of such activities. It is a well-known irony that help-givers are often helped more than help-receivers in a helping relationship (Brickman et al., 1982). Cressey (1955) referred to this as "retroflexive reformation": "A group in which criminal A joins with some noncriminals to change criminal B is probably most effective in changing criminal A, not B; in order to change criminal B, criminal A must necessarily share the values of the anticriminal members" (p. 119). Counseling similar others can also provide a constant reminder of the purpose of reform.

> Working here [at a reintegration program], I meet people every day who are still stealing, still using drugs, and I look at them, and it is a

> real reminder of how far I've come. . . . So, I use these reminders to keep me honest, keep me from being depressed. (male, age 30)

Indeed, the therapeutic value of helping others is well known by rehabilitation organizations. The explicit service orientation of AA, codified in the Twelfth Step and the Fifth Tradition, serves to "engender . . . an involvement in the human community and foster an aspiration to participate usefully" in life on life's terms (O'Reilly, 1997, p. 23). AA members who have been sober for many years may remain with the organization, not just because they need to receive ongoing support but because the act of supporting others can itself be empowering and therapeutic (Brickman et al., 1982). In fact, AA's cofounder Bill Wilson said that he felt that his own sobriety was dependent on his assisting other alcoholics. According to O'Reilly (1997), "next to avoiding intoxicants," the therapeutic power of helping is "the major premise upon which [AA] is built" (p. 128). According to Mimi Silbert, coordinator of Delancey Street Project, an ex-offender reintegration program in San Francisco, "People will change simply by 'doing' for somebody else" (Whittmore, 1992, p. 5).

EXPERIENCING ONE'S SELF AS A CAUSE

As useful as they are, generative aspirations do not appear magically in the hearts and minds of ex-offenders. In fact, the interviewees' stories indicate that a person might be initiated into generative behavior in much the same way that one is thought to be initiated into deviant behavior. For instance, in Becker's (1963) classic model of "becoming a marijuana user," a person first has to learn the proper techniques for using the drug, then has to learn to recognize and enjoy the sensations that the drug brings through a process of modeling more experienced users. Desisting ex-offenders describe a similar process through which they learn that they are capable of creative, productive work, and *then* learn how to find pleasure in these pursuits. As Tocqueville (1835/1956) argued, "By dint of working for one's fellow-citizens, the habit and the taste for serving them is at length acquired" (p. 197).

Learning to Be Straight

To make good, a person may need "not only motive but also method" (Leibrich, 1993, p. 51). An ex-offender may need to experience some level of personal success in the straight world before they realize that they do not need to offend to regain a sense of personal agency. As one desisting ex-con explained, he had known he wanted to go legit for a long time, but he "just couldn't picture it" (male, age 29). Rotenberg (1978) wrote,

"It seems unlikely that one would label himself a 'soldier' just by reading about army life. . . . In order for self-relabeling to occur, one has to be organismically involved in the new role carrying that label" (p. 90).

Although most of us learned the pleasures of learning and creative thought as children, most of the participants in this research said their memories of school are almost entirely negative. Even achieving the most basic accomplishments in the classroom can therefore be a revelation to the ex-offender.

> Like, from when I first started [a computer training course] like I must have had me ma harassed, going home with little things that I'd done on the computer. Looking back now, a 10-year-old kid could do them, but it was *that I'd never done anything before*. I'm starting to do things, and I'm getting good reports. It just makes you feel good in yourself. I think it builds your confidence more than anything. I've got no shortage of confidence now like. (male, age 36)

The interviewee's mother, interviewed separately, said,

> I mean, I didn't know [he] could do all this. He's even doing written work. He was never any good at school. He never ever went to school. He was hopeless at school. He just wasn't any good at all. Whereas his brother was quite good at school, but [he], no, he just wasn't any good. He didn't take any notice to anybody. But, then, he started doing all this [through a reintegration program for ex-offenders], and I thought, "This is brilliant." And, he puts himself out you know. The only thing he does now, he has a few bevvies [drinks] and that's not harming anybody but himself you know what I mean? I am so delighted. (tape-recorded interview)

As with one's first exposure to deviance, there is "nothing even approximating a guarantee of conversion" involved in this initiation phase (Matza, 1969, p. 117). Exposure to productive roles is probably necessary, but not sufficient, for the conversion experience. This taste of productivity, like one's first taste of deviance, brings the person to the "invitational edge" requiring a "leap" (or, optimistically, a push). The ex-offender who has been initiated into productive activity can still decide she or he is not interested. Yet, the decision now is made from inside. Relapsing back into crime is no longer a matter of simply going back to "the devil you know," because the ex-offender has been introduced to more than one option. The person has tasted productivity and tasted hyperconsumption and now can choose between the two on slightly more equal terms.

Learning to Enjoy Generativity

The next step in becoming a marijuana user, according to Becker (1963), is learning to enjoy the effects one has just learned to experience.

Like getting high, sensitivity is a "socially acquired taste" not different in kind from "tastes for oysters or dry martinis" (p. 53). The initial experiences of such behavior may at first be perceived as unpleasant or at least ambiguous. After all, there is nothing obviously or inherently pleasurable in learning a trade, painting, raising children, or building a house. One has to learn to redefine these difficult activities as rewarding and pleasurable.

Four participants, all describing different productive pursuits, used the cliché, "It's like I'm addicted to this now, instead of being addicted to drugs." Enjoying productivity is such a novel experience, apparently, that desisting ex-offenders need to ground the experience in a construct that they are more familiar with—being "addicted" to some behavior.

> You know, the way you've got into a routine of sitting in the house, watching the telly, you seem to get into the routine of coming to work as well, it's good. It feels good like. It's better. You feel like you're doing something. You're made up [pleased] to say to someone, "Yeah, I'm going to work." It feels good like. (male, age 28)

> Every penny I get now—where every penny used to go on drugs—now it goes on buying new tools and equipment like. It's as if I'm addicted to joinery. I must have an addictive personality. If there's something I get into, I get into it, you know, full hog. It's never in half measures. I'll go to the hilt whatever I do and that's what I've done. . . . I just haven't stopped doing jobs for all the family and that. It's just nice to be able to go back to them and say, you know, "Here's your brother—this is me now, no fucking zombie. And, I've got me uses, you know, and I'll help yous anyway I can now." Not that I've ever done wrong by me family, but just being on the drugs has hurt them a lot. (male, age 33)

As with Becker's (1963) marijuana smokers, this redefinition may occur in interaction with more experienced "users" (straights) who have "been there" and can relate to the frustrations inherent in productive pursuits and help them reinterpret these feelings of initial discomfort as rewarding.

INSTITUTIONALIZING GENERATIVE INITIATION

"Work" covers a broad range of activities, spanning from stigmatized "dirty work" (Shover, 1996) to leadership careers in the managerial class. Almost always, when policy makers talk about ex-offenders needing to "work," they are implicitly referring to the former—the jobs that the rest of society does not want to do. The cartoonist Barbara Brandon captured this unspoken intent in a comic strip that was deemed too controversial for a special "Black Issue" of the *New Yorker* magazine. In the cartoon's first panel, a White woman enjoins an African American woman to "Get

off your butt and get a job." In the next panel, we see the African American woman sitting behind a large desk in an office. The White woman now says, "Hey, wait a minute, I wanted *that* job!"

Work can be found punishing and work can be found rewarding. If it is found rewarding, then it seems likely to help support desistance. If it is found punishing, then it may provide an individual with an excuse ("victim stance") to return to criminal behavior. And, of course, all work is not created equal—some jobs are far more likely to be experienced as punishing. As in the cartoon, the unspoken purpose behind such labor may in fact be the "disciplining" of the poor (Foucault, 1988c; Simon, 1993). Hard work will be "good for them" (with an emphasis, always, on the "them"). As Irwin (1970) wrote, the "model ex-convict" should be "penitent, puritanical, respectful of authority and industrious, but *not* ambitious" (p. 175).

For many, the psychological lesson of coerced, hard labor may be that work is punishment and something to be avoided.

> They say, "We're taking you to this ugly old detention center for five days." I'm like, "No," you know, "I've done 28 days [in jail]. You've just given me 28 days [as a sentence], I'm free to go." Apparently, there's a rule in English law that says that no sentence can be reduced by remission to less than five days. They call it, "Having to do five days for the Queen." So apparently if you're on remand for six months and you go to jail and you get [sentenced to] one month of jail, you still have to do five days for the Queen. Which I was pretty irritated about, because I'm sure the Queen wouldn't do five days for me. So I had to go to this detention center. The first thing that happened to me when I got there was I got me nose broke by a screw, that's why it's over to the right [shows me]. Punches me full in the face, when I had my arms handcuffed behind me back for not saying, "Sir." Um, it was 6 in the morning to 6 in the evening scrubbing floors, hands and knees. . . . So, . . . after that, I just went back down to London and just carried on [with crime] . . . just see what kind of scams I can work. (male, age 30)

No cult or social movement would use these tactics to recruit new members, and indeed few ex-cons leave the chain gang or labor camp as passionate adherents of the values of hard work. Shover (1996) wrote,

> Not all types of employment are equally likely to moderate offenders' criminal involvement, but there is little surprise about the kinds that do. They return a decent income, enable the individual to exercise intelligence and creativity, and allow for some autonomy in structuring the day's activities. (p. 127)

Requiring offenders to pick up garbage along the highway probably will not create many environmentalists. Yet, giving convicted offenders the option to volunteer at homeless shelters, build houses with Habitat for

Humanity, or counsel juvenile offenders (as alternatives to sitting in a cell) just might help "turn on" a few individuals to something besides criminal consumption (see Van Voorhis, 1985). This hypothesis has been bolstered by research indicating the effectiveness of community service and volunteer work as a socializing force (McIvor, 1992; Nirel, Landau, Sebba, & Sagiv, 1997; Uggen & Janikula, 1999). If this aspect of the "punishment" process is found enjoyable and rewarding by the offender (like it was for participants in this research), then so much the better for society.

One important rehabilitative innovation designed to provide opportunities for learning the rewards of generative behavior in the U.S. was the "New Careers" movement. Under New Careers programs, inmates and ex-convicts could earn the privilege of working as counselors, teachers, and rehabilitators for other inmates or offenders under community supervision. The key principle of the movement was the idea of reciprocity or complementarity—in a program in which one person helps another, both parties benefit (Cressey, 1955, 1963, 1965). While most New Careers programs disappeared along with other Great Society-era programs in the 1980's, the therapeutic power of reciprocity is recognized by many contemporary self-help and reintegration programs. Indeed, the seventh step of the ex-offender self-help group called "The Seventh Step" involves the mission to help "lift up" other ex-offenders.

Frequently, ex-offenders experience their first tastes of success in reintegration programs run by charities and nonprofit groups. Often kept fairly low profile, these organizations can achieve an almost religious adherence among their clients:

> Believe me. Never in my life have I ever asked for help, but I asked NACRO [the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders] for help and they saved my life. They saved me, and they won't accept that. They say I helped myself, but I couldn't do it without them. They saved me and I feel an obligation to them for that. (male, 40s, *field notes*)

The ex-offenders who self-select into these organizations want to change but have little idea of any other sort of life besides the life of drugs and crime. These reintegration programs are frequently the only avenue such individuals have to gain exposure to and experience in productive activities.

> You can't just give [ex-users], "Just say No," you have to offer something to say "Yes" to, some real alternative. . . . You have to make it so [ex-offenders] don't have time for drugs—make it so drugs would get in the way of what they really want to do. . . . One of our clients once said, "Drugs used to be the answer for me, now they are the problem." . . . To get to that stage, they need to find something of value in themselves. (Keith Midgley, Alternatives to Drugs Programme, Liverpool, *field notes*)

Unfortunately, under the current funding policies in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, support programs for ex-offenders (often innovative, grassroots organizations) tend to disappear as quickly as they appear, sometimes leaving clients disappointed and embittered. Every reintegration group I worked with, including an organization that has been in existence for over three decades, was surviving year to year, competing for 9- and 12-month contracts to do a job (ex-offender reintegration) that requires a far more long-term vision. Without a more permanent investment and commitment to community-based reintegration, it is nearly impossible to develop program integrity and provide the continuity that people undergoing a life change need.

Research is also lacking on the topic of reintegration. Compared with the amount of research on punitive, deterrent policies like boot camps or shock incarceration, surprisingly little empirical research has focused on social programs that provide criminal offenders with material assistance, employment opportunities, or other general assistance. In a fascinating aside, Uggen and Piliavin (1998) have subtly implied that the reason for this academic oversight might be a political one—federal funders of research may fear that the results will be too positive.

> If these [opportunity-based] programs are shown to increase the probability of desistance from crime among offenders, policy makers face a potential dilemma. Should they support full implementation of these programs they may face accusations that they reward the unworthy for their criminal behavior; conversely, should they oppose implementation, they may be criticized for withholding proven crime control measures. (pp. 1421–1422)

7

MEA CULPA: SHAME, BLAME, AND THE CORE SELF

Central to the redemption script used by desisting interviewees is the notion of a "core self" or "real me" that is explicitly distinct from the party responsible for committing the bulk of crimes in the narrator's past. This sense of self-protection seems to contradict one of the fundamental tenets of rehabilitation practice—the need to "own up" to one's past. Indeed, many rehabilitation philosophies might view such a belief as evidence of denial, criminal thinking, or a cognitive error (see Samenow, 1984). In my favorite phrase, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) members refer to the use of such excuses and justifications as "stinking thinking."

Perhaps second only to work, "owning up" to the immorality of one's past behaviors is consistently held up as a key first step toward reform (Garland, 1997a). Indeed, a considerable amount of contemporary therapeutic work with offenders is intended to break through an offender's hardened shell of rationalizations and coerce the person to accept responsibility for past actions (for two divergent perspectives on this theme, see Galaway & Hudson, 1996; Walters, 1998). In particular, the shaming of offenders has reemerged as a leading paradigm in correctional practice and theory. Occasionally these calls for shaming reflect the "reintegrative" approach proposed by Braithwaite (1989), but more commonly, the desire is for the "good, old-fashioned" practice of stigmatizing wrong-doers (Abraria, 1994). "Shame has become in the 1990s what self-esteem was in the 1980s: a

blurry psychological phenomenon that is ill understood, but that nevertheless has become a catch word for sweeping social diagnoses and prescriptions" (Massaro, 1997, p. 646).

Shame-based "technologies of the self" seek to "subjectify" or "responsibilize" offenders through the ritual of confession (Foucault, 1988c; Garland, 1997a). In this framework, the only acceptable confession is one in which the person accepts complete and unmediated blame for an event. As Fox (1999b) illustrated in her field work inside a correctional program, a "good core self" story would not be well received in such counseling. In one scenario described by Fox, for instance,

> The inmate . . . believed he was a good person [and] he did not perceive this to be an error. . . . Clinging to this belief that he was essentially a decent person was deemed erroneous and further evidence of how deeply ingrained his criminal thinking was. (p. 448)

In the case of sex offenders, those who refuse to accept responsibility for an offense during therapy can be terminated from treatment and punished with probation revocation or extended stays of imprisonment (Kaden, 1999). Self-incrimination, in these circumstances, is seen as a necessary part of the recovery process, and therefore in the best interests of the accused offender. Nelson (1996) compared this coercion of therapeutic confessions with the practice of the ecclesiastical courts, in which compulsory confessions were allegedly justified for an equally charitable reason —to save the accused's soul from eternal damnation. Indeed, although the push for cognitive therapy and therapeutic shaming is relatively new, there is nothing new about the emphasis on confession in rehabilitation. The two have been intimately linked throughout the history of corrections (Foucault, 1988c; Rose, 1996).

Unfortunately, little empirical evidence can either confirm or refute the claim that the internalization of shame is a necessary prerequisite for successful offender reform (Northey, 1999). On the one hand, Leibrich (1993) found that a sense of shame for one's criminal behavior was "the most commonly mentioned reason for going straight" (p. 67). On the other hand, Irwin (1970) found that even among reformed ex-offenders "there is no denial of, or regret for, the past. In fact, the past criminal life is looked back upon with pleasure and excitement" (p. 202). In this chapter, I further explain the way the Liverpool Desistance Study (LDS) sample members view their past lives and discuss the possible implications for therapeutic work with ex-offenders.

ACCOUNTING FOR CRIMINAL CAREERS

Every narrative in the LDS sample was coded for the use of excuses and justifications—as well as concessions of guilt, shame, and remorse—

using an adapted version of Schonbach's (1990) comprehensive coding framework (see the appendix for a description and representative examples from the LDS analysis). Coded episodes included not only discussions of criminal behavior but also any *failure event*. Defined by M. B. Scott and Lyman (1968), failure events include both deviant behavior (dropping out of school, running away from home, infidelity, etc.) and neglected obligations (quitting or losing a job, leaving one's children, etc.). Speakers use justifications, excuses, and other explanations for past shortcomings of all types, and it was hypothesized that patterns in the use of these rhetorical devices might extend to all aspects of the way a person sees his or her past behavior.

In our analysis, over 1,400 such failure episodes (an average of around 30 per interview) were coded for occurrences of one of the 29 subcategories of attribution types. We compared the frequencies of each category across sample-member narratives, controlling for the number in the other categories, and no differences were found between persisting and desisting narratives. Overall, when describing failure episodes, interviewees across the two samples were most likely to use neutral reporting (about one third of each participant's failure episodes) or else made excuses for the behavior (also one third). The most common excuses involved blaming one's behavior on the difficulties of one's situation or else blaming the effects of drugs or alcohol (see Maruna, 1998 for a detailed analysis).

Justifications were used less frequently, with the most commonly used being the denial of injury ("No one was really hurt by it"). Research suggests that justifications of violence and deviance are most commonly used among peers, whereas exculpatory excuses are most commonly used when presenting one's story to strangers or outsiders (Harvey et al., 1990). Toch (1993) gave the example of the hockey player, who might plead with officials that his actions were accidental but would never say to his peers, "You can imagine my chagrin when I misjudged the distance between Big Pierre and myself and knocked his teeth out with my stick" (p. 195). One's peers better understand justifications like "the bastard had it coming" or "I did it for us" than the outsider would. In fact, the most common excuse used by interviewees in this sample—"It is all down to the situation I was in"—implies that the listener is not in the same situation and so probably cannot empathize with the behavior out of its context.

Although explicit expressions of shame were relatively uncommon overall (see Irwin, 1970), all of the interviewees in the present sample frequently conceded the negativity of their behavior when describing failure episodes. Concessions or admissions of wrongdoing were used in almost a quarter of the account episodes across the two groups. Usually, these involved statements such as "That was really stupid of me" or "That was the worst mistake I ever made."

Accepting responsibility for one's behavior in the self-narratives of

this sample, then, is certainly not an all-or-nothing affair. Sample members in both groups seem to have a shifting or conflicted sense of responsibility for past actions. Like most people, they feel worthy of blame for certain behaviors but feel that many others are largely outside of their control. Participants in both groups seem to feel obliged to take responsibility for their past behavior. Yet, they also appear to want to align themselves with conventional moral values. As Sykes and Matza (1957) suggested, doing so often means developing some sort of neutralization for the offense.

The result is often a chaotic jumble of excuses and justifications mixed in with concessions and admissions of shame:

> Em, yea, I was selling drugs, so I got done for supplying. I've been done for possession, shoplifting, stolen check books, social security books, but I can still put me hand on me heart and say I never walked into anyone's house and took their money [*justification*]. So there's still some morals. I mean, I did go to me mum and take £25 out of her purse. I phoned her up two days later. She did know already, but it had to come from me. I wouldn't have phoned me dad up if I'd took it off him, 'cause he's got money [*justification*], but me mum was always there for me standing in the way and taking a hiding. So she was always there and it did cut me up robbing the money off her [*concession*], but I needed it [*excuse*]. . . . So I've done lots of bad things [*concession*]. (female, age 35)

These complicated accounts indicate the complexity of the individuals' sense of control or responsibility over their past lives:

> . . . because I do, I blow the money. I mean, I'll get me money and I'll sneak out the door with it at times and blow it. And, [my girlfriend]'s got nothing there to buy the kids clothes and that. I mean, don't get me wrong, me kids don't go without food. I've never—I'll suffer, I'll die for me kids, and that is straight. But there's times when I know we're up a bit on the money and I'll take that money, and it's—I feel bad doing it, but I have to do it. You don't understand all that, you know, I *have* to do it. I mean, I could say the drug makes me do it, but I'm not going to blame the drug. It's me that does it, but I do it for the drug. (male, age 28)

In other words, "I won't say the drug does it, yet I can't say that I do it either." Participants in both groups suffer from this conflicted locus of control, sometimes using a bewildering mixture of the passive voice, the third person, and the conditional verb tense. All along, an effort is made to obligingly "take responsibility."

> I had no money . . . even to do things that a normal lad my age with a job could do. . . . So I was turned to reoffend. Obviously, I'm not making excuses, but . . . (male, age 28)

"Obviously" none of the desisting narrators want to make excuses, "but . . ." they do.

Interviewees, often literally, did not like the way their stories sounded during the interview process. On several occasions, the interviewee would use some sort of excuse ("everybody was doing it" or "the drugs made me do it"), which I would repeat to them in sincere affirmation ("Sure, in that situation, you didn't really have much of a choice"). Surprisingly, the interviewee would very often become defensive when he or she heard such statements, and would say something like, "Well, I had a choice. You always have a choice." In some ways, this resembles the deviant's dilemma identified by Sagarin (1990):

> If they claim that [deviant impulses] arose spontaneously and are beyond their control, they then relinquish any semblance of free choice. . . . If they claim that the feelings are those that they wish to have and would have chosen had there been a free choice, they must take responsibility for and explain the rationale of making a choice contrary to the advantages offered by an alternative path. (p. 808)

The participants in this sample seem to want to have it both ways.

Judging from their narratives, participants in both groups seem to subscribe to conventional moral values (see also Kornhauser, 1978; Sykes & Matza, 1957). None of the interviewees expressed any acceptance or tolerance for lying, cheating, stealing, or hurting others—without reason. In general, interviewees viewed crime as an evil, if at times a necessary evil. When discussing crime in the abstract, interviewees sounded almost conservative in their views.

> Oh, I know. It is getting bad. The guns and the drugs are just out of control and it's just going to get worse. They can build all the prisons they like, but nobody is going to be able to do anything about [growing crime rates]. (male, age 37, formerly involved in armed robbery)

In the specific contexts of the interviewees' lives, some, but not all, criminal behaviors are made to sound permissible or excusable. Yet, conventional moral values are also generally conditional. Although research indicates that there is widespread disapproval of predatory crime across social groups (Glaser, 1978), for instance, even the most explicit moral prohibitions, like "Thou shalt not kill," are largely excused in cases of war or self-defense. During the interviews, participants tried to fit their past behaviors into this contingent value system and often told their life stories as "morality tales," casting themselves as the protagonist or moral hero (see Toch, 1993).

Samenow (1984) wrote, "[Offenders] will acknowledge that, from society's point of view, they are criminals. But not one really regards himself that way. Every [offender] believes that he is basically a decent human being" (p. 160). Survey research has generally confirmed this clinical observation, with only a small percentage of prison inmates identifying themselves primarily or even secondarily as "criminals" on a variety of surveys

(Burnett, 1992; Shover, 1996). Participants in the current research fit this pattern, emphasizing throughout the interviews that, despite some stupid mistakes, they are not really bad people.

Importantly, interviewees rarely attributed negative behaviors to underlying personality defects or character weaknesses. During the life story interviews, participants only described themselves in negative terms ("I am just stupid sometimes")—even in the past tense ("I was really stupid back then")—in about 2% of the descriptions of failure episodes. More typically, the concessions used by interviewees regarded bad behaviors, but not bad selves:

> I weren't thick [stupid] at school. Like, I got like an O-level and 5 GCSEs [qualifications] at school, so I don't know why I went off the rails like I did. Cause I was educated and that. (male, age 28)

"REAL" CRIMINALS

Concessions of guilt were often tempered with comparisons to other, worse offenders to reinforce the speaker's alignment with traditional values (see Blanton, in press).

> I have done some things in me life, but I haven't stooped to the levels a lot of people have. Everyone in our area says, "You know, even though you have been on drugs, you've never burgled houses, you've never robbed old people, you've never robbed people's handbags and things like that. Yous have still got respect." But a lot of people on drugs, you know yourself, they'll beat a granny and rob her purse. They will stoop to any levels. [My group] still had our morals about us. We were still committing crime and it's still costing people money, the taxpayer and what have ya, but we never hurt anyone. . . . Say, if we are not going to get money today, "Tough shit, it's hard shite." We're not going to go out and murder anyone just to get it, which is a good thing in a way. (male, age 33)

These spontaneous downward social comparisons (Taylor, 1989) often reflected what Rotenberg (1978) called the "myth of the psychopath" or the idea of the natural-born criminal. The interviewees simply insisted that they were not one of them. Desisting ex-offenders, for instance, frequently said that real criminals probably could not change their behavior and make good. After explaining my research to one interviewee, he said, "I bet you won't find too many others [who have reformed]. I mean, all the people I grew up with who were, like, into crime and that, they're either in jail or dead, like" (male, age 25). Another ex-convict explained that he would be a good probation officer, because he knows "a lot about how criminals think and behave":

> Criminals have a familiar pattern don't they? I mean they have the track suit [a working-class fashion statement in Liverpool], but also they have, you know, certain mannerisms, you know, a certain walk [he demonstrates]. Especially those in the drugs, you know. (male, age 36)

Desisting interviewees frequently differentiated themselves even from their "partners in crime," seeing their friends as the natural or "real" criminals while setting themselves apart as never quite fitting in:

> How I started? It was just me mates and all that, you know. Like, I wasn't like, I know I used to fight and all that like, but, you know. And like I'm not saying I was different in that sense, but I was in a sense, I was different. But like the way I was brought up, you know what I mean, like. And the lads who I started hanging around with were great lads, really was, but they'd been brought up around robbing and all that like, you know what I mean, so obviously they *naturally* progressed into that. I wasn't, you know what I mean. And like even they used to say that, you know what I mean. Like I just started getting into this and that like, you know, robbing car stereos, briefcases out of cars, stuff like that then. Then I started robbing cars like, that was me thing. I've never robbed a house, I've never robbed a house in me life like, no and anyone who does rob a house, I've got no regard for them whatsoever. I think they're the lowest on the earth to be honest with you. Alright, I know I did steal and all that, but I can honestly say I did steal off people who had it like, you know. And um, I done all big shops and big warehouses and all that like, you know. Ram raids, smash and grabs, whatever. I done ram raiding, smash and grabs and robberies, you know stuff like that. (male, age 26)

These interviewees have committed plenty of serious crime (in a "ram raid," one drives a usually stolen vehicle through a storefront window, runs in the store, steals whatever they can, then escapes in a second vehicle). But, they were never themselves *real* criminals like the "lowest of the earth."

Frequently, this point is expressed in explicit, typological terms. An active armed robber, who had never used drugs of any sort, explained that there are "two types" of robbers: the Old School (the "ultimate criminals" of which he included himself) and junkies, who fail to follow any of the established rules of the Old School: "Junkies are a whole different thing. They're nuts. The junkies will stick together just to get gear [drugs], but that's all. The Old School will stick together out of a common bond" (male, age 28). Interestingly, in a different interview, a heroin user explained that there are "two types" of heroin addicts as well. The first group (his type) consists of the generally good people who happen to be addicted to the drug. The second group, as always, consists of "the nuts."

> There's the likes of us that had a normal everyday home and, like, we were living just a normal life, weren't we? [He looks to his wife.] And still are now. We're still living a normal life, even though we are in me Dad's and have no property and everything. . . . The other type, the house robbers, they will do basically anything you know or take

anything. . . . They're the ones that get the smackheads the bad names. (male, age 38)

Again, this dichotomy is directly borrowed from conventional wisdom: All of us have committed occasional crimes and misdemeanors ("We were just kids" or "We all did it back then"), but there are a small number out there who are the "true" criminals. The essential irony of sample members accepting this belief, of course, is that conventional society would likely include most of them among the psychopaths. Yet, instead of outwardly accepting this stigma, the interviewees are actually able to use this cultural belief as a way of protecting themselves against shame. After all, according to society, real criminals are "less than human" (Goffman, 1963). Because all of the interviewees are certain that they are fully human, they use the idea of the "real criminal" to reassure themselves that they are not among the "real" bad guys. How can they be, after all, when they live in "normal everyday homes" and do not have that "certain walk?"

LOVING THE SINNER, BUT HATING THE SIN

Several observers have noted that, although appearing irrational to outsiders, deviance has its own internal logic (e.g., Canter, 1994; Shover, 1996). For instance, if a person views success as a matter of fate and luck, rather than hard work, pursuing the "big score" or lottery lifestyle makes intuitive sense. Similarly, if people believe that they have consistently been punished for no reason by authority figures, it makes sense that arrests and convictions have no great shaming effect on them. Indeed, in many ways, this logic can perpetuate itself. Perhaps in the most obvious example, if people believe that society is against them, they might logically decide to disregard that society's laws. The more crimes they commit, of course, the more society will turn against them in a self-fulfilling cycle.

Nonetheless, the storied identity of the persistent offender also seems to be based on a great number of glaring contradictions and discrepancies. The belief in the "good core self" among active offenders is probably chief among these. This belief, where it exists, might be seen as an ideal "opening" for rehabilitation. Desisting ex-offenders explained:

> I always thought myself to be a bit of a hippie at heart, and all this violence just didn't sit too well with that picture of myself. (male, age 30)

> I couldn't believe I was doing it, but I still did it, . . . I hated it. I used to think "I'm worth more than this." I really thought I was worth more than this. . . . I didn't want to do it but I did. Booze crippled me. It made me into someone that I never liked being, stripped me of everything I had, and it took me to the depths of—it took me down to doing check card fraud. And, I always said I never wanted to do that. Lots of the things I did [as a con man], I was chuffed [pleased] with, but check cards? And, I used to think, especially at Christmas time, I thought, someone's had their check card stolen, and I'm out spending it. I don't know, that's the one thing. (male, age 32)

When the essential inconsistency between feeling one is a good person and yet doing bad things is thrust to the foreground by "disorienting episodes" (Lofland, 1969), deviant identities may begin to deconstruct. According to Lofland (1969), "Human identities and human meanings are arbitrary constructs imposed on a reality that is essentially without meaning. As such, all systems of meaning, of human reality, are continuously subject to breakdown and rupture" (p. 290).

In the LDS interviewees, this deconstruction often seemed to occur organically in interactions with other deviants. In several instances, interviewees said that they looked around and asked, "If I am such a clever bloke, what am I doing in here with this bunch of losers?"

> I'd always wanted to be clean. Even being around drug addicts all the time, I've always thought meself to be above it. It weren't me, kind of thing. I've always thought that even though I was on it—I mean, I didn't look down on anyone but, I mean, I used to look down on meself kind of thing. I put meself down. I hated it. (male, age 25)

> That was when I just decided, um, I'd give it a shot at doing something else rather than crime, you know. The borstal, it didn't rehabilitate me, but it just seemed, it showed me how many negative and stupid people there are in the world. And, I just looked at meself and them and the way they, they carry on. I just knew. . . . I had a little bit more than them, in respect of intelligence you know . . . I just knew I wasn't as stupid as 90 percent of those fellas in jail, you know. (male, age 36)

The experience of arrest and conviction, it seems, provides an ideal opportunity for this sort of existential realization. As one interviewee explained, "That's the hard thing about prison—prison breeds out the truth" (male, age 47). Unfortunately, correctional experiences frequently have the effect of strengthening, rather than disorienting, deviant identities. The degradation ceremonies of conviction and imprisonment often serve to reinforce a person's antagonistic worldview and disconnection from mainstream society.

According to Lofland (1969), correctional counseling can take two approaches: "deviant-smithing" and "normal-smithing." In deviant-smithing, the offender is stigmatized and made to feel he or she has a disease or inner pathology. Although sometimes unintentional, deviant-smithing is common in correctional practice, according to LDS interviewees:

> I've been on probation all me life. I've been to all these organizations that are supposed to help you out and no one's ever done nothing. Usually, you go through the door and they are looking down at you as if, like straight away, you're a drug addict and you're a low life, sort of thing. (male, age 36)

In normal-smithing, the message is the opposite. "Communicate to him the message that, despite what Actor thinks of himself, despite what normal and deviant others think of him, there lurks within him—underneath, after all, essentially—a core of being that is normal" (Lofland, 1969, p. 213). This is parallel to Braithwaite's notion of reintegrative shaming. In this framework, although an accused offender will be expected to admit to his or her crime, he or she will also be provided with a "way out"—or, more accurately, a way back into the moral mainstream. According to Braithwaite and Mugford (1994),

> The self of the perpetrator is sustained as sacred rather than profane. This is accomplished by comprehending: (a) how essentially good people have a pluralistic self that accounts for their occasional lapse into profane acts; and (b) that the profane act of a perpetrator occurs in a social context for which many actors may bear some shared responsibility. (p. 146)

The LDS findings indicate that this image of the "good lad who has strayed into bad ways" (Braitwaite & Mugford, 1994, p. 141) is an adaptive identity that can facilitate reintegration.

Advocates of narrative therapy or rebiographing have suggested that ex-offenders be formally taught ways to reconstruct these "more liberating life narratives" for themselves (Henry & Milovanovic, 1996, p. 224). In what is being called the "archaeology of hope" (Monk, Winslade, Crocket, & Epston, 1996), narrative therapy encourages clients to reconstruct "new" life histories for themselves with the help and guidance of therapy (see especially Parry & Doan, 1994; White & Epston, 1990). For instance, beginning with the seemingly paradoxical statement "I hope to have a good past," Rotenberg (1987) asked, "Why must Western people 'hide' their old, failing, 'Mr. Hyde' self? Why shouldn't one be able to *correct one's past* [italics added] in order to bridge the cognitive gap that separates . . . one's failing past from one's . . . rebirth" (p. 49). He argued,

> If there is some truth in what Thomas (1928) wrote, that situations become real in their consequences if people define them as real, then people [can be taught] to descend into their past in order to reread it so that they may ascend. . . . Therapy must teach people to write the scripts of their future instead of reading it as an unchangeable blueprint of life plans. (p. 198)

As Thune (1977) wrote, this sort of rebiographing is "not so much a falsification of the past, any more than any other autobiographical creation

is a falsification, as simply the application of a new model for conceptualizing it" (p. 84). In this framework, individuals are not coerced into accepting "prepackaged realities" (Fox, 1999b), but rather are encouraged to develop their own stories in a more natural, gradual rearranging of their past lives.

> [T]he attainment of usable truths in psychoanalysis, as in AA, is not the shedding of some superannuated "identity" in preference for a newer, brighter one, but an act of purposeful conservation and cultivation, employing native materials: the formed precipitate of character, the patterns of irrevocable past actions, the transformations of guilt, shame and error, not repudiated, but reconstrued. (O'Reilly, 1997, p. 165)

Although the average correctional facility might not be ready for this sort of radical therapy (but see E. M. Scott, 1998), parallels to narrative therapy can be found in the prison-based Cognitive Self-Change Program in Vermont (Bush, 1995), in AA, and elsewhere. Of course, almost all forms of therapy focus on helping individuals change their self-stories. Newer interventions including narrative therapy and cognitive self-change are deeply rooted in more traditional therapeutic traditions such as psychoanalysis, existential analysis, rational–emotive therapy, Gestalt therapy, transactional analysis, and other humanistic approaches. Indeed, for the LDS sample, normal-smithing frequently took place during fairly traditional therapeutic programs, which most said they had been coerced to enter.

To be most effective, interventions geared toward this sort of historical deconstruction should use a discourse that is meaningful to the offender. If enforced therapy can be written off as "psychobabble" or middle-class nonsense, as it definitely was by some interviewees,[23] these interventions are unlikely to break through offender self-defenses. The best

[23]Reliance on therapy techniques designed for work-a-day overachievers or middle-class neurotics tends to reinforce the impression among a few ex-offenders that counseling is essentially "a load of bollocks" and unrelated to their own lives. For instance, in one of the group therapy sessions I observed, a guest facilitator was brought in to help teach the group to deal with their anger. I was aware, from regular involvement with the group, that everyone in the room besides the social worker and myself was a regular heroin user and had probably taken heroin that morning prior to the workshop. The facilitator never mentioned the physiological symptoms that accompany heroin withdrawal. Instead, the focus was on not letting stress build up in our lives without any release.

"The speaker recommended taking 'a timeout away from everything,' and asked, 'Do any of you do that? Have a little place where you can go to be by yourself and take the weight of the world off your backs, just get away from the stress all around you?' I looked around the room to see if anyone else in the room was hearing what I was hearing. One of the clients saved me the trouble of having to explain. 'Sure, but don't we have the gear [heroin], like?' he asked. Several participants had to laugh at the irony of someone telling a group of heroin addicts that they needed a way to chill out and 'escape.' Undaunted, the instructor asked us to practice a more socially acceptable 'timeout' or stress buster. 'This might seem a little silly,' we were forewarned, as she turned on a tape-recording of ocean sounds and soft music, and asked us all to close our eyes and take deep breaths. Realizing I was the only one meditating who was not currently enjoying an opiate high, I felt distinctly left out of the full stress-busting experience." (7/31/97, *field notes*)

"therapists," therefore, are often fellow recovering (or desisting) offenders or else the friends and family members of desisting offenders. "Therapeutic effects seem to be obtained through the sharing of problems among persons who have them, on a scale which makes professional therapy an extremely puny enterprise by comparison" (Toch, 1963, p. 119).

The well-known professional ex- Bill Sands uses a normal-smithing approach when counseling young offenders as part of his Seven Steps outreach work.

> I said, "Hello. My name is Bill Sands. A friend of yours told me you were here. When I was about your age I sat in a cell like this, only it wasn't in jail—it was in San Quentin prison. I was fighting mad at the whole world, just like you are. I hear you have been doing a lot of fighting. But I understand that along with all that brawn you have a pretty high I.Q. Why don't you try using it to get yourself straightened out—out of here." (Sands, 1964, p. 190)

Using a classic "hate the sin, love the sinner" strategy, Sands exposed the young person's neutralization (the world hates me), while coupling this with an attempt to find some redeeming value in the individual (a high IQ). Essentially, Sands offered the young person a story—a self-story that worked for Sands himself. The three-part plot structure of Sands's self-concept can also be found in many of the desisting narratives in this sample:

1. Like a lot of young people in troubled circumstances, I was full of anger, so my offending was justified.
2. But I am also too smart to let this passion be my downfall.
3. So, once I saw where I was heading, I applied my energy and smarts toward more positive and rewarding pursuits.

The young person in Sands's example is under no obligation to rework his self-narrative in this way but is allowed that opportunity. Doing so will let him preserve his positive self-concept (in the same way that his previous neutralization did), but it will also obligate him to desist (in a way that his old story did not).

Sands's outreach effort is also buttressed by the fact that he himself shares the self-story that he offers to the active offender. The wounded healer stands in direct contradiction to the deviant neutralization (repeated constantly in interviews with active offenders) that "anyone from my background, addicted to this stuff, with a criminal record, etc. would do exactly what I'm doing." The professional ex-, for one, does not. This contradictory information has to be either rejected ("He's not really straight") or else assimilated into the person's narrative. Faced with this disorientation, a likely concession or amendment to the person's self-story might be, "OK, not everyone in my situation commits crime, but it takes a lot of skill to succeed in the straight world, and I don't have any straight skills." Although still excusing criminal involvement, this new self-story provides an opening, a window of opportunity, that was not there in the previous narrative.

Rehabilitation maverick Father Peter Young, who founded the HIT (Housing, Industry and Treatment) Program in New York, similarly likes to say that his job is to "take away an offender's excuses." By this, he does not mean that he forbids the use of justifications or exculpatory language, however. Instead, if an offender claims he cannot desist because he or she has no skills, HIT trains the individual. If clients blame their addiction, HIT provides drug counseling. This goes on and on until eventually, the client either has to admit to simply being criminal or else desist.

EXCUSES AND US

What then, of "good, old fashioned shame" (Abraria, 1994, p. 1) in the midst of all this loving of sinners? Although Leibrich (1993, 1996) found shame to be a key reason for individuals to give when abandoning crime, there is an important difference between the desisting ex-offenders in Leibrich's sample and the LDS sample. Over half of the individuals in Leibrich's sample had two convictions or less, and only an eighth of her sample had ever been to prison. Shaming may indeed be an effective strategy for encouraging desistance for first-time offenders, or individuals beginning to experiment with crime or drugs. In these cases, as Leibrich (1993) suggested, the trauma of just going to court or having a conviction on one's record can be a significant deterrent (p. 70).

However, in cases in which offending becomes a lifestyle, as it did in the lives of the LDS sample, shame may create as many problems as it solves. In other words, being ashamed of an isolated act or two is one thing, but it is a quite different thing to be ashamed of one's entire past identity, of *who* one used to be (for stretches sometimes lasting as long as 10 years or more). According to research on attributions and mental health, internalizing self-blame can have both positive and negative consequences (Weiner, 1991; Weiner et al., 1987). If a person dwells on a stable or permanent attribute ("If only I weren't . . ."), then self-blame may be maladaptive. Yet, accepting blame for unstable past behavior ("If only I hadn't . . .") may be adaptive (Niedenthal, Tangney, & Gavanski, 1994). Social psychologists describe this as the difference between shame and guilt. Whereas, guilt concerns discrete misdemeanors or transgressions, Giddens (1991, p. 67) wrote, shame is "concerned with the overall tissue of self-identity" and the "exposure of hidden traits which compromise the narrative of self-identity." Whereas guilt involves regretting one's behavior, shame is about the "whole self" (H. B. Lewis, 1971).

Thus, instead of being seen as "evidence of extraordinary pathology"

(Fox, 1999b, p. 436), the use of neutralizations and excuses might be interpreted as an adaptive, ego defense mechanism that actually helps to restore the speaker's bonds to society. After all, Sykes and Matza (1957) originally argued that neutralizations are necessary because the person using them *subscribes* to conventional morality. Similarly, in the attribution literature, excuses and justifications are seen as "a type of aligning action indicating to the audience that the actor is aligned with the social order even though he or she has violated it" (Felson & Ribner, 1981, p. 138). By making an excuse or justification for one's behavior, a person is able to make a claim for his or her status as a normal person. Without such a story, "there exists no means to locate their identity in a shared narrative of common experience" (Singer, 1997, p. 284).

Therefore, instead of a hardening process (e.g., Hirschi, 1969), the acceptance of neutralizations might even be the first step in a *softening* process. The deviant who feels no compulsion to make excuses for illegal behavior—the offender who says, "Nobody made me do it; I did it for the money!" or "I just enjoy it" (see Akerstrom, 1985)—may be the least likely to reform. Offenders who use neutralizations, however, seem less comfortable with their behaviors and more in line with conventional morality.

Although these are means of avoiding responsibility, these accounts also help to protect self-esteem, increase one's sense of personal worth, and reduce anxiety (A. Beck, 1979; Harvey et al., 1990; Northey, 1999). Such self-protection may be necessary for offenders to desist (Rotenberg, 1987). Indeed, Meisenhelder (1982) wrote, "The plan to exit from crime is in large part founded on the sense of the self as noncriminal" (p. 140).

Most importantly, in Western society, if individuals admit that they willfully and purposefully stole a person's purse, they would also be admitting that they are the "type of person" who could commit this sort of crime. Therefore, they admit to being fundamentally different from the rest of society. Western culture provides very few acceptable ways of saying, "I did some bad things. What can I say? I was a prick. But I'm not a prick anymore." A story like that will not fly in a society that believes, crudely, "Once a prick, always a prick" (less crudely, see Rotenberg, 1978).

In fact, Felson and Ribner (1981) wrote, "There is evidence that when actors fail to provide accounts [i.e. excuses and justifications] for their deviant behavior they are likely to be sanctioned more severely by the audience" (p. 138; see also Schonbach, 1990).

> When [my mother] found out [about my drug use] it made things worse I suppose. Because, that was when all the lying and all that starts, because they're going to ask you, "Have you been taking drugs?" and you're going to say, "No." And, it's not because you're being a con [that] you're lying. It's because you don't want to hurt her feelings. The same if your mum asks you if you've been taking drugs and you're stoned off your fucking head, you'd say "No." You don't want them to

> think you're that kind of person. So that's where all the lying starts. (male, age 24)

The participants in this sample do not want to admit to significant others, or to themselves, that they are "the kind of person" who uses drugs or commits crime, possibly because such an admission in Western culture would be tantamount to admitting they are irredeemable.

Different cultures might expect and accept quite different narratives from wrongdoers (cf. Allen, 1981; Rotenberg, 1978). In Japan, for instance, noncontingent admissions of guilt, rather than explanations and excuses, are expected and rewarded by juries and other listeners (Haley, 1996). To illustrate this contrast in accepted accounting styles, Braithwaite (1989) provided the example of a Japanese woman who had made a mistake in declaring the amount of currency she was carrying when she entered the United States:

> After the woman left the airport, she wrote the Customs Service acknowledging her violation of the law, raising none of the excuses or explanations available to her, apologizing profusely, and seeking forgiveness. In a case that would not normally merit prosecution, the prosecution went forward *because* she had confessed and apologized; the U.S. Justice Department felt it was obliged to proceed in the face of a bald admission of guilt. (p. 165)

In Western society, we demand a "sad tale" of some sort from deviants to make them forgivable (Goffman, 1961). Apology and repentance, while institutionalized in cultures like Japan, play an increasingly insignificant role in Western societies, where the belief that deviants can change has allegedly been discredited (Braithwaite, 1989). The purpose of personal narratives is to make sense out of one's life (not to achieve some vague "truth"), and sense-making is a distinctly culture-bound process. As Goffman (1961) suggested, there are no true stories or false stories, only good stories (convincing, coherent, acceptable) and bad stories (unbelievable, illogical, unpopular). Therefore, if making an excuse (even if it is a "lie" of sorts) about one's past is required to explain one's present behavior, then this might be an important part of the desistance process. In other words, Western societies may prefer pleasant lies ("it wasn't my fault") to the painful truth that good people often do bad things.

8

THE RITUALS OF REDEMPTION

The third essential characteristic of the redemption script is the narrator's strong sense that he or she is in control of his or her destiny. Whereas active offenders in the Liverpool Desistance Study (LDS) seemed to have little vision of what the future might hold, desisting interviewees had a plan and were optimistic that they could make it work.

This strong belief in self-determination seems at first to contradict these interviewees' use of excuses like "it wasn't my fault" to account for past wrongdoing. Nonetheless, the peculiar combination of making excuses for past failures and yet taking responsibility for present and future accomplishments is a well-established characteristic of another group of interest to social psychologists—healthy adults (see Alloy & Abramson, 1979; Bandura, 1989). In *Learned Optimism*, Seligman (1991) wrote,

> For nondepressives, failure events tend to be external, temporary, and specific, but good events are personal, permanent, and pervasive. "If it's bad, you did it to me, it'll be over soon, and it's only this situation. But if it's good, I did it, it's going to last forever, and it's going to help me in many situations." (p. 110)

Brickman et al. (1982) provided an interesting framework for understanding and modeling this shift in locus of control. Unlike their predecessors in the attribution literature, Brickman et al. divided the concept of personal responsibility into two dimensions: blame and control. In other words, they distinguished between taking responsibility for the *origin* of a

problem and taking responsibility for the *solution* to that problem (see also Weiner et al., 1987). Instead of dividing personality types into "Pawns" and "Origins," therefore, this framework allows for the identification of four orientations that a person can have toward his or her behavior: a moral model, an enlightenment model, a medical model, or a compensatory model. In a *moral model*, people hold themselves responsible for their problems and for the solutions to those problems. In an *enlightenment model*, people hold themselves responsible for their problems but not for the solutions to those problems. In a *medical model*, people do not hold themselves responsible for their problems or for the solutions to those problems. Finally, in the *compensatory model*, people do not blame themselves for their problems but hold themselves responsible for the solution to their own problems.

THE COMEBACK OF THE "I"

The compensatory model seems to characterize the general pattern of the redemption script. Brickman et al. (1982, p. 372) quoted the Reverend Jesse Jackson's various slogans as being representative of this model of responsibility (e.g., "You are not responsible for being down, but you are responsible for getting up" and "Both tears and sweat are wet and salty, but they render a different result. Tears will get you sympathy, but sweat will get you change"). A compensatory model ex-offender might say, "I only got into crime and drugs because of my disadvantaged childhood, but now I am working hard to go straight." For instance, one desisting ex-offender began his life narrative with the following excuse (which we coded as "blaming family background"):

> When I was about 13 or 14, my mother and father were going through a bit of a rotten patch and me dad used to come in and belt me ma and all that. It emotionally affected me, you know what I mean? Then I like just turned to [drugs] just as a way of getting out, just getting out of a situation I found myself in, you know.

Much later in the interview, in describing how he decided to go straight, the same narrator said,

> I just said, look, I've been on [heroin] 10 years. I can't blame [others] for giving me my first go. There must be another reason why I'm still on it. I mean for years and years, I blamed what me mam and dad went through, and then it got to last year when I got out [of prison] and I thought, "This is stupid. It was like 18 years ago me mam and dad got divorced and I'm still blaming it on that today!" (male, age 36)

His story of the past has not apparently changed much. He still attributes

the onset of his drug use on his family troubles. Yet, although this past cannot be changed, he realizes that no one is controlling his present except him.

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. Notice how the following interviewee's sense of subjectivity and control makes a comeback at the end of the following narrative passage. I have used italics to highlight some of the key words that emphasize an external blame and passive explanation for past mistakes, but, later, the triumphant emergence of the "first-person singular" when the story gets good.

> Just shoplifting, robbing cars, we were just out robbing constantly, every day. No matter what we'd do, we'd go out and rob. . . . Even robbing some lady's handbag which I am disgusted with, but at the time, *when you're in that situation* and you're having them drugs, you don't think about nothing else but your money for your drugs. Um, I couldn't go on with it and I thought, "I don't want this." And as we were trying to stop one of the drugs, [my boyfriend] got nicked for a car offense and he went to jail again. And I couldn't handle it . . . I *ended up* going to jail again, *getting the kids taken off me*. . . . So then I was in jail, he was in jail. We fell out 'cause we wasn't with each other, so then his family no longer wanted to know me, after all these years. . . . I came home . . . and a week later he came home. I was in a hostel 'cause I didn't have a house, I didn't have nothing. I lost everything, everything. My mum and stepdad had the kids. . . . [My boyfriend] came looking for me, he wanted to get back with me and I said "If we get back together I don't want no more drugs, no nothing." He said "OK." . . . I still didn't have me kids, so it was just me and him for like about 6 months. I got pregnant again, then I got this other house. . . . And I thought, "Right, this is going to be a new start for us." I was going to court, back and forth to the courts fighting for me kids. And, the condition they wanted was for me to get meself off the drugs, get meself a house, everything I needed, get a house livable for the children so they could come and live with me and make sure I was able to manage with me money. So *I done it all. I got me house.* But, before that, *I came off the drugs*, the actual day we moved into the house. . . . The next morning—he said, "Well, I'll just give it [crime] this one last day, and we won't go out and do nothing else." And, I said "Well I'm not going with you" and he went on his own and got arrested and 2 years for burglary. I ended up being on me own, fighting everything on me own. *I fought for the kids* for 13 months. And in that 13 months I got the house sorted. I got meself off the drugs. I got meself on a [detox] course. I had me daughter, me third daughter, on me own. I went into the hospital and had her on me own. Nobody

> there to hold me hand. I fought for the kids and March this year I got me kids back for good. (female, age 23)

Once the going gets good, the "you," the "it," and the passive descriptions (how does one "end up going to jail" after all?) fade away, and the "I" reappears, assuming almost hypercontrol. Moreover, the "fight" against a potentially hostile environment can become an all-encompassing passion.

Whereas the "I" is granted a minor role throughout most of the compensatory story, almost everything in the future is within one's personal control. Hanninen and Koski-Jannes (1999) called this transformation of the person "from a victim or a puppet to a consciously acting independent subject" a "growth story": "In the moral sense the growth story releases the protagonist from guilt by seeing oppressive relations as the cause of problems. The responsibility of one's life required for staying sober is seen to emerge as part of the personal growth process" (p. 1843).

Others incorporate generative aspirations for their children as a part of this compensation. In other words, it may be too late for me, but I can still make a difference for the next generation.

> I used to be bad, bad on the whiskey. I think meself it was to try and hide my childhood, but you can't. I still can't. All my friends had a mother and father, they all had everything and I had nothing. . . . You can't live your life over [but] I think *my* kids can say they had a good time. (male, age 40)

In these narratives, making good involves taking control over one's life and using that life to contribute, accomplish something, and leave a positive legacy.

> I mean, most people who get off drugs just sit there with nothing to do, and you get bored, and start taking drugs. You have to occupy your time. That's what it's all about. There's no good just sitting there. What's the point of getting off drugs if you're only going to sit there like a zombie? Get off drugs and sit there like a fucking straight zombie? You might as well still be on them. You get off them to do whatever you want to do. You know what I mean? If you are going to go to college and learn whatever you are good at, then get there. (male, age 33)

There is a paradox in some spirituality-based conversion narratives whereby one gains personal control by explicitly "giving up" personal control to the will of a higher spirit. Although this narrative was not common to the Liverpool narratives, it is frequently found in U.S. samples of reformed ex-offenders (e.g., Johnson & Toch, 2000; Maruna, 1997). This apparent contradiction (giving up control in order to be free) should still be seen as agentic in nature—the person freely chooses to give over his or her life to God. According to O'Reilly (1997), the "surrender" of control involved in the twelve-step movement signifies "less a relinquishment of

'power' than a clarification of personal power's finiteness. . . . [Surrender is] a marshaling of what is available rather than a wholesale abnegation of control or initiative" (pp. 23–24).

The optimistic sense of personal control in the LDS of the desistance narratives bordered on overconfidence and brimmed with optimism. I asked each narrator whether they thought they would reoffend in the future. Considering the fact that they frequently accounted for past offending as being out of their control, one might assume that they would have difficulty answering this. Perhaps, one might expect an answer like, "Depending on the circumstances, I might." None of them did. Most likely, leaving the door to future offending even slightly open is too dangerous. Instead, the desisting person convinces himself or herself of complete control of the future.

BURNING OUT OR FIRING UP?

This image of the agentic desister contradicts the better known figure of the "burnt-out" ex-convict. In this model, defiant rebels eventually lose the youthful spirit and passion required to maintain a deviant lifestyle in the face of repeated failure. A strict ontological or maturational reform position implies that this burnout is largely due to physical reasons. They lose the youthful energy, strength, and stamina necessary to play the role of crazy armed robber, nimble thief, or intimidating drug dealer.

To examine these physical dimensions of the burnout hypothesis, I asked each research participant, "Are you in worse physical condition now than you were 5 years ago?" Whereas over half of the active offenders said, "yes," less than one fifth of the desisting participants of roughly the same age agreed that they were in worse physical shape now. In fact, those who had overcome heroin addictions frequently laughed at the question. "Look at me, mate. I'm fit as shit. Five years ago I was a bag of bones" (male, age 31). I asked one desisting participant where he channels all the energy he once used as an armed robber:

> I run 5 miles a day [laughs]. And do, em, [wind surfing], mountain climbing, em, endurance walks as well. . . . Em, I did 14 mountains in one day, the 14 mountains in Snowdonia over 3,000 feet, in one go, like 29 miles. (male, age 30)

Instead of physically burning out, career criminals might actually have to charge themselves up emotionally, psychologically, and possibly even physically in order to desist.

Indeed, members of the active offender sample seemed far more burnt out with their lives than the desisting sample did.

> There comes a time right, when you really get pissed off with [taking heroin]. I mean, like, I've been on it nearly 8 years, something like that. And, your first couple of years it's a novelty, you know what I

mean, and you going out scoring with your mates and all that. And, then you realize . . . "Look what it's done to me. Me life is just in bits." And I'm sick of it, just purely sick. You know when you're sick of something and you just want it to go away and leave you alone, and that's what I'm like now. I just want it to go away and leave me alone. But it's hard. You know what I mean. (female, age 26)

This is not to imply that desisting interviewees did not mention having become sick of criminal behavior. Quite to the contrary, most said that criminal pursuits become intolerably boring,[24] repetitive, and unfulfilling—all consistent with the burnout hypothesis. The point is that, at least in the LDS sample, the experience of burnout did not have anything like a perfect correlation with desistance. A person can, apparently, burn out, hit rock bottom, and yet carry on with criminal behavior. This, of course, is consistent with the way that the term *burnout* is used in other roles. For instance, just because a parole officer is burnt out with her job, this does not mean that she will necessarily resign and begin a new career. In fact, the burnt-out individual may become so despondent that he or she lacks the energy required for such a career move.

Equally, ex-offender narratives provide little support for the familiar picture that shows offenders as passively reformed by social mechanisms. In a fascinating variation of attribution bias, Mischkowitz (1994) found that while social workers attributed ex-offenders' change to outside factors (wives, jobs, or changing geographic locations), desisting ex-offenders attributed their ability to desist to their own "free will." While significant others are thanked for their help, participants in the LDS took full credit for changing, as well. The following speaker describes a girlfriend who stuck with him even after finding out about his criminal record:

> Like, I was expecting, "See ya, mate," but she hung in there. And I thought, "well, here y'are! You know what I mean? Someone's giving me a try here. I might as well repay the favor." But something I want to stress, though, I didn't just do it for her. I done it for meself as well, you know what I mean, 'cause it was there all the time. I wanted to change and that was just the little push I needed. (Male, age 25, *field notes*)

[24]This "routinization of adventure" (Lofland, 1969) and the dull monotony of the persistent offender's lifestyle are generally lost on conventional others, who tend to glorify and romanticize criminal pursuits. For instance, one desisting interviewee told me that I was not the first academic to show an interest in his life. Another researcher had apparently contacted him when he was involved in crime, and asked if he could observe the interviewee and his mates for a few weeks to learn about life in the gang. The interviewee said that he got the impression that the researcher was "disappointed" by the boys' rather repetitive lifestyle. "I think it wasn't as exciting, not as glamorous as he thought it'd be. He'd say, like, "Are you sure that's all you do?" I think he expected us to be more sort of glamorous, you know, gangsters and that." (male, age 26)

Deviance, for those who first experience it, can be a thrilling adventure (Katz, 1988), yet once one does the same activity long enough, whether it is taking cocaine, robbing grocery stores, or riding roller coasters, the sneaky thrills fade.

Similarly, some desisting participants expressed disdain for the well-known notion of the "geographic cure," which suggests that ex-offenders are best able to desist when they move away from their neighborhoods.

> I never trust anyone who says they are off of drugs, but yet they can't go back into their old neighborhood. I say, "Then you're not really cured are you?" (female, 30s, *field notes*)

> A lot of people, when I was in that rehab in the prison, a lot of people were saying I couldn't go back to my own neighborhood [and not be tempted to relapse]. But I said, that's one thing I want—to stay there to prove I'm off drugs. I wouldn't like to move away and everyone would think "he's just living somewhere out of the way." I want to stay and walk round with my head held high and say, "Look, it's the same me." (male, age 33)

Interestingly, several active offenders did mention the need to "just get out of this neighborhood":

> You can be down in like London or Coventry or Birmingham, wherever, and [heroin] doesn't even enter your mind. And when you get on the train, and you're coming back to Liverpool and you get to Runcorn train station right, it's horrible, 'cause you start sweating and you start feeling withdrawal symptoms, even though you haven't had it for like 6 months. It's horrible, it's dead psychological like as well, you know. And as soon as you get off the bus, I've got to find, I've got to go and find gear [drugs]. I have thought about moving out and all that, but if I did move what would I do? I wouldn't have no one to turn to, I'd have no family, I'd have no friends you know, it would just be too hard. (male, age 33)

> It's the environment I live in. I keep crying to these probation officers—that's why I don't give a shit for them—I keep telling them to get me a flat in a different area. And, what do they do? They put me right in the same, damn neighborhood. And in a few days, you get the same people back at your door. If I want to change, I have to change my area. The same environment will breed the same behavior. I've been screaming at them [probation officers] since day one. . . . I think I'd like to move into some "sticks" area, and just get a total fresh start. Get me head together. It sounds funny, but I just want to start something different. I mean, I'm 27, and I've spent 7 years in different prisons. I got to change something. (male, age 27)

This is the most frequent excuse for criminal behavior among active offenders in this sample—"it is not me, it is my environment." Therefore, the geographic cure may be part of a medical model framework of understanding deviance as outside of one's control.

Subscribing more to a compensatory model of responsibility, desisting interviewees sometimes resented the implication that they were "weak-

willed" and saw the geographic cure in part as trying to "make lepers" out of them by casting them from their homes (male, 40s, *field notes*). Similarly, I asked a desisting interviewee who described himself as a recovered alcoholic if he was "able to" walk into a pub without having a drink.

> Yeah, no problem at all. I'm one of the lucky ones. Yeah, lots of people in AA [Alcoholic Anonymous], well, lots of people in general say you shouldn't [go into pubs]. . . . [To me] the whole idea of coming off the booze is so that you can go back out there in the big, wide world. That's all I wanted. If I—I'd go back out drinking if I didn't think I could hack it in life, because the whole idea of coming off the booze is so that you can hack it every day. . . . I have to face everything head on. (male, age 32)

Going straight, according to the interviewees, is in no way about accepting defeat. Desistance was uniformly described as an active, rewarding, and even defiant process.

> Like, I am proud of myself, because I know I've done it. I've gotten over the worst of it, and I'm there now. (male, age 31)

> You know like, I'm going to college and all that now, and do brilliant and I'm the best one on the course. The teacher's wrote a note [hands me note from teacher addressed to me]. You can read that later if you want. And, em, it's just amazing the turnaround you know what I mean? I just can't believe. I'm buzzing with it. It's not as if I'm doing it 'cause other people want me to do it. I'm doing it 'cause I want to do it. (male, age 33)

> The amount of respect I had, when old friends and associates would see [my girlfriend] and say "How's he going on?" They would all ask, they would go and ask, and they were really proud of me because I'd gone against the grain. (male, age 28)

Interviewees described desistance as "going against the grain," "beating the odds," or simply "going straight," not as quitting, burning out, or giving up. Their vision of desistance is one of renewal, gaining strength, finding who they really are, or bettering themselves.

Above all, making good is not described as merely giving in to the power of the criminal justice system. Indeed, desisting people make the opposite claim. "The System," as they explain it, does everything it can to keep ex-offenders trapped in the cycle of crime and prison. Otherwise, "All them screws [prison guards] and all the bizzies [police detectives] would be out of jobs" (male, age 26). Desisting interviewees frequently insisted that they were not in the least bit "afraid of prison." For the antiauthoritarian rebel, desisting is framed as just another adventure consistent with their lifelong personality, not as a change of heart. Again, this allows the individual to frame his or her desistance as a case of personality continuity rather than change.

This evidence seems to support the use of *motivational* rather than *confrontational* approaches in offender treatment (Foote et al., 1994). After all, it seems clear that the active offenders in this sample lack hope and self-efficacy more than they lack shame (see also Kantzian et al., 1990). Motivation, however, involves more than just cajoling offenders to believe in themselves or to "take responsibility" for their futures. I am haunted by an image of ex-convicts being encouraged to spew platitudes like, "I'm good enough, I'm smart enough and, gosh darn it, I deserve it." Equally ridiculous is the image of a prison counselor encouraging inmates to "take responsibility for your behavior" while they are kept in an environment that essentially takes all responsibility and choice away from them. Research and common sense suggest that the isolation and disempowerment of the incapacitation experience can exacerbate an individual's felt lack of personal control (Blatier, 2000).

The LDS narratives support the idea that empowerment is probably about "learning through doing, and becoming transformed as a result" (Henry, 1994, p. 299). According to one of the reintegration programmers I worked with,

> You can't teach people self-esteem. These pine shelves and cabinets [made by ex-offenders in a reintegration program's woodwork training] are the vehicles for self-esteem. . . . If I had a piece of chalk in my hand and tried to lecture these guys about self-esteem all day, they'd turn and run the other way. They associate that with school, and they hated school. We teach them self-esteem by letting them prove something to themselves, challenge themselves, learn that they have the talent to accomplish something besides sitting around the house all day getting high. (Keith Midgely, Alternatives to Drugs Programme, *field notes*)

Simply put, the way to learn initiative is to "do well": "Performance accomplishments are likely to increase a person's sense of self-efficacy and appraisal of internal control" (Caspi, 1993, p. 366).

RECOGNIZING REDEMPTION

As Shover (1996) insisted, "Despite the individualistic bias and tone of [explanations for desistance], the change process, like the process of juvenile involvement in crime, is a social and interactional one" (pp. 143–144). Not only must a person accept conventional society in order to go straight, but conventional society must accept that person as well (Meisenhelder, 1982). In the narratives of desisting interviewees, this reintegration into a straight life was frequently formalized in the form of a social ritual.

The most difficult obstacle ex-offenders face in the effort to make

good is one that they have partially created for themselves. Ex-offenders zigzag between crime and noncrime, and they frequently make the claim that they are going straight "for sure this time, I really mean it," only to relapse into crime and drugs. Like the boy who cried wolf, the drifting deviant eventually loses credibility, even with himself or herself. Because employers, agents of social control, and other community members have little confidence in their own ability to discern between legitimate and illegitimate claims to personal reform, the safest option is to interpret any ex-offender's claim to going straight as "phony, feigning, unbelievable or implausible" (Lofland, 1969, p. 210). To do otherwise would be to "open oneself to the perceived possibility of being hurt, taken in, suckered, abused, put down or in some other way being made to seem a less-than-competent player of the social game" (p. 212).

Knowing this well, the LDS interviewees seemed almost obsessed with establishing the authenticity of their reform (see also Weinberg, 1996).

> I try to do good things. You know what I mean, and I do try. But me old fella [father] doesn't recognize, you know what I mean. And he calls me, like just the other night he started calling me a "waste of space" and all that, you know what I mean, an idiot and all that. Me old fella's run after me with shotguns, handguns, machetes, knives, baseball bats, you know, when I was on heroin. You know what I mean, but, you know, it is getting better slowly like, you know. I've been off it for three years now like, but me old fella just refuses to recognize the positive things. You know what I mean, he just keeps on, he just keeps on bringing up the bad things I've done, and you know, he says "You were on heroin" and all that, and you know what I mean, and he really does, honest to God you know. I even said this to him, "Back then and now are—I'm not the same person!" I'm really not. I can feel it in me soul. You know what I mean. I'm not the same person. I'm not violent in any way like. I'm not. I do lose me temper and all that you know what I mean, but like, I think if someone walked up and hit me I wouldn't be bothered you know what I mean? I wouldn't. (male, age 26)

At that point in the conversation, I felt that the speaker actually wanted me to hit him—or probably more to the point, he wants his father to hit him—just to prove the authenticity of his reform. In his case, 3 years without taking any drugs or committing crime is still not enough to convince others that he has changed. "Even outstanding conformity is likely always to be greeted by . . . suspicion and fear," according to Lofland (1969, p. 210). Therefore, desisting persons often describe passing "authenticity tests" like the "turn the other cheek" test proposed by the interviewee above.

> Me mum has told [others], "I can see a change in [him]."At one time me mum couldn't leave 20 pounds [U.S. $30] or 10 pounds or 5 pounds

> on the fire [heater] without me taking it, and now she just leaves her purse there. The first time she done it, I thought it was a trick. I thought she left it there to see if I'd take it. And, she told me, she said, "I left that there with money hanging out to see if you'd take it." And I hadn't took any. I mean, she sends me to the shops now with 10 pound notes [bills]. I mean. (male, age 31)

Presuming, legitimately, that the interviewer they were going to meet might be skeptical about their claims to successful desistance, interview participants often had supporting documents ready on hand at our interviews to establish their credentials as truly reformed. One showed me a letter from his community college teacher, testifying to his hard work and capability. Two had letters from their former probation or parole officers ready when I arrived. Three produced copies of their offense record that included the date of last convictions. Most interviewees urged me to "go ask me ma," or "talk to my bird [girlfriend], she'll tell you," which I tried to do whenever this was appropriate. "Merely individual claims of privately accomplished change carry little weight" according to Lofland (1969, p. 289). Interviewees' life stories were constantly interspersed with testimonies from those whose views have not been discredited:

> You'll see it in my file. Or [the manager of the drug treatment clinic] will tell you. Have you been to the clinic? Well, they've got this receptionist, she used to be terrified of me. Now, she says she can really see the change in me. She said, "I used to be terrified of you." I am, like, proud of myself. (male, age 31)

> Me ma's made up [pleased] with me, she can see the change in me and all that. She says I'm a "new person." (male, age 26)

While the testimony of any conventional other will do, the best certification of reform involves a public or official endorsement from media outlets, community leaders, and members of the social control establishment:

> The one policeman who stopped me was saying he was happy with me progress. He said, "I'm made up [pleased] to see you doing what you're doing." Most of them [cops] don't give a shit. They'd stitch you up [frame you] and have you back in jail sooner than have you out. Even if you were doing nothing. But this was the first genuine policeman I'd met for years. He said, "You're doing well, keep it up," and you know, it put a little spring in me step. Buzzing you know. For a policeman to be saying it to you, I must be doing something right, you know? (male, age 33)

> The paper did a story on me like a few months ago. We've got copies of it here. They were just saying how much I've achieved in the short amount of time I've been doing photography. (male, age 36)

> It's like, this Monday I'm giving a talk for the Probation [Service], you

know to the local magistrates, and that's the first step like, hopefully 'cause I want to go into something like that [as a career], you know probation or drug counseling or something, or youth counselor. It's . . . , you see, in four years the Probation have never had anyone who's done so well as me, but like 'cause I've done that well the Chief of Probation has asked me if I'll go to this meeting—every few months they have a meeting with the magistrates—and she's asked me if I'll go and like, you know talk. You know, like as a success story sort of thing. (male, age 24)

My life story? My life story has been in the papers and stuff. I was in [names three different magazines] and on the news and everything. (male, age 31)

Reformation is not something that is visible or objective in the sense it can be "proven." It is, instead, a construct that is negotiated through interaction between an individual and significant others in a process of "looking-glass rehabilitation." Until ex-offenders are formally and symbolically recognized as "success stories," their conversion may remain suspect to significant others, and most importantly to themselves. After all, only a few years ago, each participant had been officially and publicly labeled a "criminal" in the media and by social control authorities as high as judges.

I would say that four years ago, the judge's comments, "You are a menace and a danger to society. Society should be protected from the likes of you," it didn't go down well. (male, age 28)

Critical Elements of the Redemption Ritual

Building on Garfinkel's (1956) "Conditions of Successful Degradation Ceremonies," Braithwaite and Mugford (1994) described what they called "reintegration ceremonies." Whereas in the *degradation ceremony*, an actor's social identity is publicly lowered to that of deviant or outsider, in a *reintegration ceremony*, "disapproval of a bad act is communicated while sustaining the identity of the actor as good" (p. 142). These ceremonies, most frequently used with juveniles or with individuals in the early stages of a deviant career, are meant to ensure that "a deviant identity . . . does not become a master status trait that overwhelms other identities" (p. 142)

The long-term offenders in this sample, however, have long been branded with the master status of the deviant. Being publicly shamed and offering an apology, as described by Braithwaite and Mugford (1994), will probably not suffice to redeem the reputation of such individuals. Instead, they may need to undergo some sort of "elevation ceremony" (Lofland, 1969), "certification process" (Meisenhelder, 1977, 1982), or "delabeling process" (Trice & Roman, 1970). Lofland (1969) suggested that elevation ceremonies "serve publicly and formally to announce, sell and spread the fact of Actor's new kind of being" (p. 227). These include the ex-offender's

"public appearance before a formally assembled group, [and] the public profession of one's personal transformation" (p. 228). Similarly, in Meisenhelder's (1977) certification stage of desistance, "Some recognized member(s) of the conventional community must publicly announce and certify that the offender has changed and that he [she] is now to be considered essentially noncriminal" (p. 329).

For desisting participants in the LDS, these redemption rituals often emerged out of *unsuccessful* degradation ceremonies. Groups of friends, intimates, and conventional others publicly testified on the desisting person's behalf, leading an agent of social control to formally acknowledge the ex-offender's change in behavior. In almost all the cases in which this ritual occurred, the interaction was perceived as:

- *Unprecedented and unanticipated:* Narrators often said "no one had ever taken this sort of chance on me."
- *Merited:* Narrators perceived the event as long-awaited justice, not as a lucky break.
- *Formal:* Rituals involved respected community members and frequently took place under the auspices of the social control establishment. Narrators sometimes interpret the judgment as being the judgment of all of society.

Compare the following examples from desisting narratives. In all three excerpts, desisting ex-offenders, who were experiencing and enjoying productive behavior for the first time, all happened to wind up back in court. Analogous phrases in the three passages have been italicized to emphasize the uniformity of these descriptions in the narratives.

Here's one for you: I got caught in '94. *Although I was off the bottle and I'm trying to go straight*, I'd been caught for driving while disqualified [without a license] again. When I was inside [the jail], I got a visit from the police, and they'd got my prints on a [forged] check [from several months previous]. So when I was in prison I got charged with check card fraud. So I came out for the driving offense and all of a sudden, I've now got to face going to court over the check card fraud, and I was looking at 2 years [in prison]. Worst nightmare, especially when you're trying to go straight. And you think, "Oh my God, I can't believe this!" And, I've got the baby, 6 months old, at home. And I went to court and I went in, I was in and out of court, and it came to the crunch, and I went to Crown Court. Oh, I thought "I'm going to get 2 years [in prison] here." And I'm trying so hard in my life, and I just—and, anyway. The judge, everyone, I couldn't believe it. I burst into tears. *I couldn't believe it*. I'm very high on emotions by this stage in my life, and I burst into tears, because people must have seen something in me then. *Someone must have seen some good in me*, and all these people wanted to help. And they all came to court, and anyway, he [the judge] gave me Community Service. He didn't have to. He

could have, he said, "I could send you to prison." But he said, "I don't think it will do you any good." He said "And these people here, they seem to believe in you." And he, well, I got community service. (male, age 32)

In the second redemption ritual, the narrator is explaining how a roommate at a halfway house was caught possessing drugs, leading to the arrest of all the residents on suspicion of conspiracy to distribute narcotics:

> To cut a long story short, . . . all of a sudden like the house gets busted and all that like, you know. I got arrested eventually in the end. Goes to court back up in Blackpool and all that. And [my priest] give a letter [on my behalf], and [John], the manager of the hostel came and put a good word in for me. And, you know, by the time it went to Crown Court in Preston you know, honest to God, *I've never seen anything like it* in me life. I goes up in court, and I said to John, "I'm getting off [running away]," I wasn't going to turn up, right? . . . [But] I goes in court, and the judge says, "Name," you know. I could see I was going to get sent away then 'cause it was happening dead quickly, you know. "Name," and then, "Address," and all this. And then me solicitor said, "There's this man, John S ——, who'd like to say a few words on the defendant's behalf." And they started telling each other jokes! Honest to God, so I'm like that to me solicitor, "What's going on here? What's going on here?" Right? All of a sudden I just turned round like that and, "Alright Mr. A ——," and all that, "You done your training and all that. That's fine," and all that. "I'm releasing you into this man's custody. Keep up the good work." I was like that, "Whoah! What's going on here?" you know. That man turning up like that, the judge changed his mind, you know. I'd never seen anything like it in me life. You know the way they just started talking and all that like, you know. And, I had letters of you know, sort of support, off priests and, you know, people who I'd made contact with. I had one off NACRO [the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders], you know, 'cause *I was doing good you know.* It wasn't just bullshit like. I was doing good. I was trying, you know, so *they give me a chance like.* And I know it's been a slow progress and all that. You know what I mean like, as I say like, Rome weren't built in a day like. (male, age 26)

Finally, in this last example, an old crime came back to haunt the desisting interviewee:

> So I gets took to Walton Prison. For the first time in my life, like, I was really upset like. *Things were going right.* For the first time in a long time, things were going right, and it was just a total kick in the balls. So I was there for about a week. . . . So this morning the screws [prison guards] come to me door and say, "Come on mate, you're in the Crown Court." So I goes to the Crown Court and me solicitor stands up and says, this is for me Crown Court appeal which I was expecting. And, the fella from the day training [reintegration] program is also there, and he explained to the judge that I only had a couple of days left to do, and then I would have finished the Program. Well, they told him about me girlfriend and how well everything was going, and he let me go. He deferred me sentence for 6 months and that was *the best chance anyone's ever took on me,* because I paid him back with interest. You know, in that 6 month period we moved into a flat, I got a job working for a charity—that was before the job that I'm in at the moment—I got a job working for a charity and you know, everything was great. The probation officer that I got, he was like, *the first time ever that a probation officer has believed in me,* you know, was willing to give me a chance. He wrote me a brilliant, brilliant report, and all that. . . . When I went back to the court like, you know, they were made up [pleased] with me basically, because I'd stayed out of trouble, I'd completed the probation [rehabilitation] course, I'd managed to get a job, plus we had a flat, we were living in a flat together. We'd done everything required. And so, you know, it's given me the chance that I wanted basically. That's all I'd ever wanted was someone to sit there and believe in me, which like [my girlfriend] done. Like, you know, she was sent by God basically like, because without her, I'd still be in that hostel now, or in jail or dead. (male, age 24)

While the courtroom provides an ideal backdrop for recasting judgment on all three narrators' lives, the essential aspect of the ritual is the unexpected testimony of "normal-smiths" (Lofland, 1969) or conventional others who impute normality on the ex-offenders. All three narrators knew that they were "trying." They were making some progress toward staying straight. Yet, none of them had any confidence that this effort would aid them in any way in the eyes of society. Recall that desisting ex-offenders still generally view the world as unfair and assume the deck is always stacked against them. Suddenly and unexpectedly, though, there is justice. They have done well, and someone actually "believes in them."

The social impact of the redemption ritual is undoubtedly significant. In the above examples, the ex-offenders were allowed to remain in society instead of going to prison. Yet, the psychological impact of the rituals might be even more important. They realize, for what they claim is the "first time" in their lives, that they have some control over their own destinies. As in Brickman et al.'s (1982) compensation model ("It is not my fault, but it is my responsibility"), this is a newfound control, and one that carries on to other aspects of their lives.

Almost all of the narrators described "getting off" from criminal charges in the past. Yet, these were always interpreted as "lucky breaks" or random events. Under such interpretations, there is no reason not to continue offending. In fact, one might as well celebrate the good fortune. Throughout the narratives, criminal trials are described as something like a "game," based on the luck of the draw. Outcomes were decided because

the judge "was dead easy" or a "real bastard." Sometimes, the defense attorney "didn't have a fucking clue what she was doing" or else the prosecution failed to get any witnesses to testify. The difference in the redemption ritual is that there is no "cock up." Someone has finally "seen something" in the ex-offender, and now the ex-offender can see the same thing. They have the ability to act positively and be rewarded for it. As such, the redemption ritual may be ultimate authenticity test desired by desisting ex-offenders.

> [After] certification, individuals convince themselves that they have convinced others to view them as conventional members of the community. . . . They begin to feel trusted; that is, they feel their contemporaries are likely to see them as normal and noncriminal. They no longer feel suspect. Certification, then, completes the exiting, or change, process by solidifying the self-concept of the ex-offender. (Meisenhelder, 1982, p. 138)

Institutionalizing the Redemption Ritual

Importantly, in the narratives of the LDS sample, most of the redemption rituals were entirely serendipitous. As such, more formalized and systematic mechanisms for recognizing reform efforts might be worth considering.

Positive acknowledgment or recognition of rehabilitation is a rare thing in the criminal justice system. By its nature, criminal justice is almost entirely negative. When ex-offenders are "rewarded," they are generally rewarded for what they do *not* do. Additionally, their reward is *not* having something done to them. If a parolee avoids arrest, stays out of fights, passes drug tests, and shuns shady characters, they might earn the reward of getting off parole for "good behavior." Yet, this is not good behavior as much as it is "not-bad behavior." Rarely does the criminal justice system reward the *positive* things that ex-offenders accomplish. Efforts in employment settings, neighborhood groups, job training programs, family matters, self-help groups, college classes, and volunteer placements generally go officially unrecognized by the system.

There are some exceptions of course. The graduation ceremonies in correctional boot camps and in ex-offender job training programs certainly qualify as redemption rituals. Yet, it is questionable just how widely recognized or appreciated these accomplishments are once one leaves the confines of the program itself. Similarly, in prison, inmates can be credited for "program time" or even moved to an "honor wing." These distinctions serve a very important purpose in encouraging rehabilitation, but the recognition is not very meaningful for those outside of the institutional setting. In some ways, earning the distinction of "good behavior" in a prison is tantamount to being named "most likely to succeed" in Hell. It is not

something many will put on a résumé. The prison environment is simply too different from conventional society. As many inmates insist, "It doesn't matter what you do and say in here—what matters is how you act out there" (male, 20s, *field notes*).

The best existing precedent for an institutionalized system of redemption might be found outside corrections—the academic "honor roll." Teenagers, like ex-offenders, after all, are an automatically "suspect" population (Matza, 1969). When an urban teenager is shot, for instance, it is immediately assumed that he or she was probably up to no good. Yet, if the media and social control establishment report that the shooting victim was "an honor roll student," the story changes. Suddenly, the (hardly subtle) implication becomes, "This was a good kid, who did not deserve to get hurt." The identity of "honor roll student" appears to have become synonymous with innocence, just as the identity of "gang member" presupposes guilt.

The correctional system might need to adopt its own version of an "honor roll" (metaphorically, of course). Any such distinction would need to be made highly exclusive. Like the academic honor roll, the distinction would need uniform, agreed-on standards at a high enough level that only a small percentage of paroled ex-offenders can achieve them. The recognition (in whatever form it takes) would have to be a meaningful achievement not only in the eyes of the public but also to the ex-offenders themselves in order to be the "authenticity test" that desisting ex-offenders so badly want. If ex-offenders perceive that "anybody" can get this credit, it will become meaningless.[25]

Redemption rituals, especially those certified by the State, can provide a psychological turning point for ex-offenders. If police officers, judges, and wardens were to shake the hand of the desisting ex-offender, and say, "Well done" (as the judges did in the three rituals in the last section), the ex-offender would have to acknowledge some level of *justice* in the "justice system." This would take away a crucial neutralization (condemnation of the condemners) and would pull ex-offenders more deeply into mainstream society. Sincere recognition from the same authorities that certify individ-

[25] In fact, ex-offenders who make a concerted effort to go straight often express considerable concern about the authenticity (or lack thereof) of other ex-convicts' alleged conversions (see Weinberg, 1996). Frequently, during fieldwork, ex-offenders would pull me aside to explain who among a group of reintegration clients were "really" making a go at changing their lives and who were just conning the staff at the intervention. "I think this [reintegration project] is good, aye. Like, a few people who come in here don't really give a fuck, you know what I mean, one way or the other. Like, I don't want to mess, you know what I mean. There's people here who just come in here and get their money [bus fare or compensation for child care] and go home, and go and score [drugs] with the money. And it's not right 'cause it's taking the piss [making a mockery]." (male, 20s, field notes)

If the "fakers" get the same acknowledgment and status rewards that the authentic changers receive, any honor roll status will be without value.

uals as deviants could have a lasting effect on the way ex-offenders perceive the social control establishment *and vice versa*.

In the United States, the federal government is currently revisiting the idea of ex-offender reentry (Travis, 2000) and is experimenting with a variety of "reentry courts" and other innovations (Reno, 2000; Talucci & Solomon, 2000). It is hoped that one of the lessons from the turbulent history of parole in the United States that will inform these reforms is that reentry requires a sincere commitment to reward positive behaviors, as well as punish negative ones. A reentry court should therefore be empowered not only to reimprison ex-felons but also to officially recognize their efforts toward reform.

Rebiographing as Policy

Perhaps the best (and most useful) recognition an offender could receive from the system is the chance to change his or her past. The British legal system, for instance, has institutionalized a form of state-sanctioned "rebiographing" for ex-offenders. Under the 1974 Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, an individual's criminal history actually "expires" after a given number of years (depending on the length of one's sentence), and the person is no longer required by law to declare his or her criminal convictions to most prospective employers. Even when asked directly, "Have you been convicted of a crime?" the law allows the desisting ex-offender to say, "No." In this liberating model, an ex-offender is therefore legally enabled to rewrite his or her history to make it more in line with his or her present, reformed identity. After several years of good behavior, the State essentially says, "You don't appear to be the sort of person who has a criminal record, therefore you needn't have one."

Parallels, of course, can be found in the U.S. juvenile justice system, in which juvenile records are destroyed upon one's transition to adulthood, and also in the law on bankruptcy, in which credit histories can be redeemed after a set number of years. For that matter, a parallel can be found in American politicians' responses to questions about illegal drug use. Apparently, the United States permits more than a little selective amnesia or autobiographical creativity if the individual is a member of a class of people we believe in—a juvenile, a debtor, or a political animal. "Common criminals," on the other hand, often are not even allowed to vote in an election because of their criminal past, let alone run for office. This selective application of the "forgive and forget" doctrine can recreate the supposed dichotomy between Us and Them.

Of course, legal rebiographing probably should not be granted easily or automatically to *any* population. Under British law, an ex-convict might have to stay out of trouble for as many as 10 years to earn this privilege. Moreover, perhaps ex-offenders should even be required to do more than

stay out of the reach of the law. An unlikely trio of New Yorkers, Ed Koch, Al Sharpton, and Charles Ogletree, are currently circulating a "second-chance" pardon plan for nonviolent drug felons that would expunge their felonies only on the condition that they complete their sentences, receive a high school equivalency diploma, and pass their drug tests after release (Alter, 1999). A "repentant role" might also be built into the deal (Trice & Roman, 1970). Maybe an ex-offender should be expected to literally pay his or her debt to society, through community service or restitution (see Bazemore's 1998 proposal for instituting "earned redemption" into criminal justice).

Whatever the requirements, the ultimate reward for this (proactive) "good behavior" should be permission to legally move on from the past. If not "forgive and forget," at least "remember and forgive." Without this right, ex-offenders will always be ex-offenders, hence outsiders, or the Other. A *correctional* system that does not institutionalize such opportunities at redemption is at best an Orwellian euphemism for the reproduction of more of the same.[26]

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Both narrative therapy and Britain's 1974 Rehabilitation Act recognize the importance of providing ex-offenders an escape route from repeating their pasts. The persistent offenders interviewed for this project said that they wanted to make good but did not think they were capable of doing so. They felt they were "doomed" to deviance.

Not coincidentally, the reigning popular and professional discourse about offenders in Western culture suggests that criminality is probably a permanent and inescapable trait of individuals (Irwin & Austin, 1994, p. 84).

> I wanted a house, I wanted a life, stability and a future, and that [going straight] was the only way I could do it. . . . My probation officer told me that I'd never do it [make good]. In fact, to say that, the inmates around me were saying I would never, ever do it, like. (male, age 28)

Paraphrasing Martin Luther King, Jr., Sagarin (1975) called this pro-

[26]In 1910, when he was Home Secretary, Winston Churchill made a famous speech along these lines to the British Parliament, "The mood and temper of the public in regard to the treatment of crime and criminals is one of the most unfailing tests of the civilization of any country. A calm and dispassionate recognition of the rights of the accused against the State, and even of convicted criminals against the State, a constant heart searching by all charged with the duty of punishment, a desire and eagerness to rehabilitate in the world of industry all those who have paid their dues in the hard coinage of punishment, tireless efforts towards the discovery of curative and regenerating processes, and an unfaltering faith that there is a treasure, if you can only find it, in the heart of every man—these are the symbols which in the treatment of crime and criminals mark and measure the stored-up strength of a nation, and are the sign and proof of the living virtue in it." (cited in Gorringe, 1996, p. 226)

cess the "tyranny of isness" (p. 144). "The sense of helplessness and hopelessness surrounding people locked into certain deviant identities may well be derived from, or fortified by, the implicit connotation that some statuses constitute essence or isness, rather than behavior or feeling" (Sagarin, 1990, p. 808). Essentially, societies that do not believe that offenders can change will get offenders who do not believe that they can change.

Every culture has a limited range of grand narratives or meta-narratives expressed in mythology, proverbs, and folk sayings. Cultures with few models of redemption may be the cultures with more doomed deviants. At the least, in cultures like that of Israel (Rotenberg, 1978, 1987) and Japan (Braithwaite, 1989; Haley, 1996), where the idea of criminal essentialism does not seem to be as dominant, rehabilitation efforts seem to be greeted with less hostility than in the West (see also Allen, 1981). According to Braithwaite (1989),

> Japanese idiom frequently accounts for wrongdoing with possession by a "mushi" (worm or bug). Criminals are therefore not acting according to their true selves; they are victims of a "mushi" which can be "sealed off," "thus permitting people to be restored to the community without guilt" (Wagatsuma & Rosett, 1986, p. 476). The cultural assumption of basic goodness and belief in each individual's capacity for eventual self-correction means that "nurturant acceptance" ("amayakashi") is the appropriate response to deviance once shame has been projected to and accepted by the deviant. (pp. 64–65)

Although the West has its own redemption stories, "the Prodigal Son is hardly one of our leading folk heroes" (Braithwaite, 1989, p. 162). As one reintegration worker said,

> People believe that God used to be able to turn sinners into saints. He could save Saul of Tarsus on the Road to Damascus, but it's like they don't seem to think He can do that anymore. Like today's criminals are just so bad that even God can't touch them. It's sad. (male, 50s, *field notes*)

Indeed, over the past two decades, hardly anyone in the field of corrections has espoused or endorsed "Kennedyan" type idealism. (Cullen and Gilbert, 1982, may have been the last of this breed in the United States; more recent rays of hope have shone mainly from Australia and Canada.) At least since Martinson's (1974) paradigm-shifting attack on rehabilitation, a hard-nosed, cynical "realism" has characterized the study of crime and social science in general. Of course, we know where this realism led Dr. Martinson: The author of the "nothing works" thesis committed suicide soon after writing an apologetic retraction of his controversial report. American criminal justice policy has also seen this pessimistic version of "reality therapy" to its logical consequences, incarcerating 2 million American citizens and transporting them to maximum security prisons often hundreds of miles from their families and home communities.

A generalized disbelief in change is apparent even in the narratives of those people who have gone straight. Like Shover's (1996) interviewees, LDS interviewees often struggled to explain their own change in behavior.

> [I am going straight] just cause I know what it [drugs and crime] leads to like, but I always knew that. I don't know. I don't know what's happened to me. I don't know why. I can't believe it myself sometimes. (male, age 33)

Most insisted that they have not changed at all. They were good people "all along" (they simply behaved badly for a decade or so). Several of these interviewees expressed views about the essential nature of "real criminals" (people they met in prison, for instance) no less conservative than the views of police officers I spoke with. Finally, when interviewees did try to describe the change they experienced, their descriptions often dwelled in artificial-sounding clichés ("I saw the light" or "It just hit me one morning") that seemed to have little connection to the long-term change process they were describing. Not only are there few change stories readily available to ex-offenders therefore, there may not even be a language or discourse available for describing this change. The words may simply not be there.

The creation and promotion of a "replacement discourse" (Henry & Milovanovic, 1996) for the language of criminal essentialism may help ex-offenders write redemption scripts for themselves. Of course, essential to the development of this new language of reform is the sharing of success stories (see Coles, 1989). Braithwaite (1989), for instance, called for

> a culture, or rehabilitative subcultures as in Alcoholics Anonymous, where those who perform remarkable feats of rehabilitation are held up as role models—the pop star who kicked the heroin habit, the football hero who repented from wanton acts of violence—where ceremonies to decertify deviance are widely understood and easily accessible. (p. 163)

The transformative power of stories, proverbs, slogans, and folk sayings may be a neglected area of study for social scientists (Bassin, 1984; Shoham & Seis, 1993), but the power of these meta-narratives is well known to rehabilitation practitioners—and, most importantly, to desisting ex-offenders. When reformed ex-offenders share their stories with others, as the interviewees in this research have done, they are leading the effort to transform public discourse regarding crime and criminality.

By paying attention to these stories, we can learn not only about offenders but also about ourselves. According to Cressey (1963), the rationale behind involving reformed ex-offenders in the counseling of other offenders is that "the persons who are to be changed and the persons doing

the changing must have a strong sense of belonging to one group" (p. 155). This is a telling quote. In this case, the "one group" refers to ex-convicts, recovering addicts, or former offenders. Yet, on some level, we are certainly all one group. When ex-offenders share their stories with non-offenders, they are working to "actively repudiate their alien status and acknowledge membership in the same world to which the rest of us belong" (Singer, 1997, p. 295).

After all, the "myth of the bogeyman" is a narrative. Like a self-narrative, this sort of cultural narrative serves a distinct psychological purpose. This bogeyman myth allows nonbogeymen (the "Us") to relieve ourselves of the shame we feel for our shared responsibility in creating the "Them."

> The myth of pure evil confers a kind of moral immunity on people who believe it. . . . Belief in the myth is itself one recipe for evil, because it allows people to justify violent and oppressive actions. It allows evil to masquerade as good. (Baumeister, 2000, p. 96)

Indeed, maybe the myth is too entrenched to change. Perhaps, we really are too cynical, too hateful, or too "realistic" to change our thinking about deviants. Then again, as a wise man once said, "Hey, I was the worst of the worst. If I can change, anyone can" (male, age 31).

APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

CONTENT ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

Unlike most in-depth, qualitative studies, the Liverpool Desistance Study (LDS) included the use of well-validated, content-analysis systems for analyzing complex narrative data, deriving qualitative scores, and testing differences among individuals and between groups. Thematic content analysis involves "coding" or "scoring" verbal material for manifest (rather than latent) content or style to infer or assess the psychosocial and cognitive characteristics of a sample of individuals (Smith, 1992). Murray (1943) described this process of assessing characteristic thought patterns and personality from selected verbal material as "thought sampling." Our objective was to preserve the richness, spontaneity, and meaning of participants' life narratives while rendering the data comparable across individual cases and amenable to nomothetic research.

Four content dictionaries were chosen on the basis of the initial qualitative findings, the findings from a pilot research project, and existing phenomenological research on desistance. To establish the reliability of this coding, I asked pairs of graduate students to learn each of the coding schemes (see Acknowledgments). This coding was "blind" in the sense that

the coding was done independently and the coders were rating episodes or phrases that were extracted from the body of the larger text. As such, they had no way of knowing whether the passage they were coding belonged to a desisting or persisting group member or anything else about the speaker. Importantly, any passage that mentioned desistance specifically (e.g., "That is what has kept me straight these last few years . . .") was either amended or excluded from the coding.

In measures of agreement, the two independent scorers achieved Cohen's kappas between .61 and .68 on the four coding schemes. Fleiss (1981) suggested that kappas between .40 and .60 are fair, those between .60 and .75 are good, and those over .75 are excellent. Considering the complexity of the coding frameworks and the subjective nature of the data in this project, these agreement scores were considered more than adequate indications of the reliability of the coding.

Generativity Content Analysis

Stewart et al.'s (1988) coding scheme measures five primary generative themes: (a) caring for others, (b) the general desire to make a lasting contribution to society, (c) concern for one's children, (d) a need to be needed, and (e) productivity/growth (see Exhibit A.1). To correct for correlations with verbal fluency, I expressed the scores in terms of themes per thousand words of text.

Following Stewart et al. (1988), the unit of analysis was the *meaningful phrase*, with only one content category possible for each phrase. Coded passages included all hypothetical statements regarding future goals (e.g., "I want to begin spending more time with my kids, helping them out") and statements regarding the present (e.g., "I enjoy teaching my kids to read"). Prototypical examples of these themes from the interviews are listed in Exhibit A.2. When coding, descriptions of current or future involvement in criminal behavior were not coded. Although these might be examples of self-absorption or lack of caring, including such descriptions in the coding would make any proposed association between measures of generativity and desistance tautological. The two independent coders achieved a moderate Cohen's kappa of .61 ($p < .001$) in a test of interrater reliability.

Comparisons between groups revealed robust differences in the frequency with which such themes appeared in individual narratives. Although a few statistical outliers exaggerated the comparison of means, statistically significant differences were also found in comparisons of the median scores, as well as in a proportional analysis of the percentage of narrators with scores over two in each sample. Additionally, neither individual nor overall measures of generativity correlate significantly to measures of basic personality traits. According to the adult development lit-

EXHIBIT A.1
Generative Content Categories Paraphrased from Stewart et al. (1988)

1. *Caring Versus Self-Absorption and Failures of Caring*
Expressions of concern with the capacity to care for others ("a sense that includes 'to care to do' something, to 'care for' somebody or something, to 'take care of' that which needs protection and attention, and to 'take care not to do' something destructive" [E. Erikson, as quoted from Evans, 1967, p. 53]). Its absence (scored *minus*) is reflected in overt failures of caring and in self-absorption.

2. *General Concerns With Generativity*
Expressions of concerns about making a lasting contribution, especially to future generations (including through creative products) or to care for them, should score *plus*; aversions to such contributions should score *minus* whenever more specific themes cannot be scored.

3. *Children*
The care and nurturance (positive, scored a *plus*; negative scored a *minus*) for one's child. Also, sheer desires to have children score *plus*, whereas aversions to having children should score *minus*.

4. *Need to Be Needed*
Expression of an inner need to be needed by another or by others in general ("a gradual expansion of ego-interests and a libidinal investment in that which is being generated" [Erikson, 1968, p. 138]) scored *plus*. Denials of this need are scored *minus*.

5. *Productivity Versus Stagnation*
Expressions of developing and growing through generative outlets (it "encompasses procreativity, productivity, and creativity, and thus the generation of new products and ideas" [Erikson, 1982, p. 67]). Rather than simply the performance of an occupation-related task, clear emotional investment and commitment must be involved. (For example, the mere reporting of working on a product is not scored here; however, if the statement includes expressions of affect regarding the work in progress, it becomes clear that there is personal and emotional investment in the task.) Productivity also involves the further growth and development of the formulated adult self (scored *plus*) rather than stagnation (*minus*) (e.g., premature fixation with no desire for further challenge or growth).

erature, developmental concerns are not mere extensions of underlying personality traits but instead are part of a separate, more dynamic domain of personality (McAdams, 1994a).

Agency Content Analysis

To explore the theme of agency in the interview, I asked participants to describe any "important turning points" in their lives. The descriptions of these turning point episodes, as well as all other descriptions of the individual's present life situation and future plans, were scored using McAdams's (1992) coding framework for themes of agency (or control) in

EXHIBIT A.2
Examples of Generative Themes in Participant Narratives

1. *Care Versus Self-Absorption*
   Plus: Top of the list, I want to provide a secure future for me mum. She's had it rough, so it's time for her to sit down and have me look after her (desisting group, male, age 20). *Plus two.*
   Minus: I don't give a fuck about junkies. If some junkie dies [because of heroin], I say, "Good, another dead junkie" (active group, male, age 40). *Minus two.*
2. *General Concerns With Generativity*
   Plus: I'd been wanting to do something positive for quite some time. I've always wanted to get a job that I can help other people in. You know, train and get some full-time employment where I can contribute, you know, and maybe help save, even if I only saved one out of a hundred, you know (desisting group, male, age 36). *Plus three.*
3. *Children*
   Plus: I just live for me kids now, you know what I mean? I live for them kids, man (active group, male, age 33).
   Minus: I didn't think I'd have a kid this early. I wanted, I've always wanted to be a nurse, like, so when I had the baby, I just had to pack it all in then though. Not just that, it's just totally different when you have your own kid, you know what I mean? (active group, female, age 22). *Minus two.*
4. *Need to Be Needed*
   Plus: It's nice now and again to be told that you're married to them, you're loved by them, they love you and care for you. But it's nice to be able to share that with someone, to tell them, "You're all right as well" (desisting group, male, age 28).
   Minus: Anyway, I got rid of my wife. One thing I learned about women is that they're a total pain in the ass (active group, male, age 28).
5. *Productivity Versus Stagnation*
   Plus: I thought, "I'm always on the go." I work seven days a week, I love it, I love my work—I love being out there, giving life my best shot (desisting group, male, age 32). *Plus one.*
   Minus: She said, like, "If you got off heroin now, I'd come back," you know, but I'm happy the way I am. I'm just happy to plod along, and I know I've got a habit. I'm at the stage now where I'm resigned to the fact that I'm an addict and I'm going to be an addict to the day I die, and nothing's going to change that (active group, male, age 33). *Minus three*

life narratives. This coding scheme measures the occurrence of four agentic themes: (a) self mastery, (b) status/victory, (c) achievement/responsibility, and empowerment. Exhibit A.3 provides abbreviated definitions of these content categories and prototypical examples of each theme drawn from the interview data. Two independent raters achieved a Cohen's kappa of .62 in a test of agreement. Narratives were scored either a 1 or a 0 for the occurrence of these themes. Repeated themes were not scored twice. Therefore, the maximum total score would be 4, if the narrative contained all four themes.

EXHIBIT A.3
Themes of Agency in Turning Point Episodes

1. *Self-Mastery*: The participant strives successfully to master, control, enlarge, or perfect the self. A relatively common expression of the theme involves the participant's attaining a dramatic insight into the meaning of his or her own life. The participant may also experience a greatly enhanced sense of control over his or her destiny, in the wake of an important life event.

   At first it was just to like, I didn't dream of going to college or nothing like that. I [just wanted to] get meself busy . . . and give myself time to think about what I wanted to do. [But] after doing the warm-up courses like, I found I was good at photography and . . . I started at [a community college]. And, since then I just haven't looked back. It's just gotten brilliant. (male, age 36)

2. *Status/Victory:* The participants attains a heightened status or prestige among his or her peers, through receiving a special recognition or honor or winning a contest or competition.

   Winning the [prison art competition], because I originally just painted to kill time in prison and to learn about art, and I would have done the art degree even if I couldn't paint, but as it happened, I did both and won the [competition]. Basically, the first picture I ever completed was exhibited, hung up in a frame and won a prize. (male, age 47)

3. *Achievement/Responsibility*: The participant reports substantial success in the achievement of tasks, jobs, or instrumental goals or in the assumption of important responsibilities. The participant feels proud, confident, masterful, accomplished, or successful in (a) meeting significant challenges or overcoming important obstacles or (b) taking on major responsibilities for other people and assuming roles that require the person to be in charge of things and/or people.

   When, mainly when the kids got taken off me . . . I ended up being on me own, fighting everything on me own. I fought for the kids for 13 months, and in that 13 months I got the house sorted . . . I got meself on a methadone course. I had me daughter, me third daughter, on me own . . . nobody there to hold me hand. I fought for the kids and March this year I got me kids back for good. (female, age 23)

4. *Empowerment:* The subject is enlarged, enhanced, empowered, ennobled, built up, or made better through his or her association with something larger and more powerful than the self. The self is made even more agentic by virtue of its involvement with an even more powerful agent of some sort. The empowering force is usually either (a) God, nature, the cosmos, and so on or (b) a highly influential teacher, mentor, minister, therapist, or authority figure.

   Working [for a reintegration program] has been a turning point. It's helped me get a lot of confidence back. The confidence I got given here off the people who are here, I'd never had that in school or anything. And I thought, "Hold on, these people are telling me I can do this." I've never been told I could do this. . . . They've helped me out a lot, you know, it's done a lot for me and I've been more confident since I've been here. (male, age 28)

Note. Definitions from McAdams (1992), used with written permission of the author.

Attribution Content Analysis

To measure the use of concessions, excuses, justifications, and refusals in interviewees' accounts, Laurence Alison, Louise Porter, and I adapted a condensed version of Schonbach's (1990) comprehensive coding framework for first-person attributions. The complete coding system and content dictionary used in the LDS analysis can be found in Maruna (1998). Exhibit A.4 explains each of these constructs and provides an example from the LDS narratives. In total, over 1,400 such failure episodes (an average of around 30 per interview) were coded for occurrences of one of the 29 subcategories of attribution types. In a test of interrater agreement, two coders achieved a Cohen's kappa of .68.

Redemption/Contamination Sequence Coding

McAdams et al. (1997) identified two narrative strategies that appear with some regularity in self-narratives. In *contamination sequences*, a decidedly good event "turns sour." In *redemption sequences*, the opposite occurs, "something good" emerges out of otherwise negative circumstances. For examples from the narratives, see Exhibit A.5. On the basis of the findings in Maruna (1997), it was hypothesized that the stories of desisting ex-offenders would contain more of the redemptive storytelling strategies, whereas active offender stories would instead dwell on the negative consequences that follow from previously positive story sequences.

Three sections of the interview protocol were selected for examining the use hypotheses: the "peak experience" or self-described highest point of the informant's life, the "nadir experience" or lowest point, and the informants' "turning point" episodes. Again, descriptions of giving up crime itself were not included in this coding. Two independent raters coded these three episodes across all 50 interviews for the occurrence of contamination or redemption sequences. Summing scores across the two episodes, the interscorer reliability was $r = .74$.

SAMPLING CONSIDERATIONS

An effort was made to oversample female ex-offenders for this project. Whereas women made up only 5% of the adults released from British prisons in 1993 (Kershaw & Renshaw, 1997), they made up one fifth, or 20%, of the present sample. Female participants in the sample met the same criteria for being "career criminals" used for the male participants, although they tended to spend less time in prison. All 10 female participants had regularly engaged in theft, 4 primarily sold drugs for a living, 2 had stolen

EXHIBIT A.4
Major Content Categories for Attributions

1. *Reports*: A neutral admission of a failure event without describing the negative aspects of the action or offering any excuse/justification. Examples include straightforward explanations such as "We did it for the money" or "We did it because it was fun."

   I'd just walk up and hit somebody under the chin, you know, their brain bounces off the back of their heads. Pick up the laptop [computer] and walk away, because laptops at the time were like 1,500 quid [pounds]. Got into that. And then, um, I decided to go to Amsterdam . . . (male, age 30)

2. *Concessions*: Any admission of guilt or offending behavior in which the speaker takes full or partial responsibility for his or her behavior and acknowledges it as a moral or social wrong. Examples include expressions of shame, guilt, or remorse for past activities.

   My biggest regret in life was I stooped to check fraud, kiting, again. . . . I hated that, and that's a turning point in my life. . . . How can I put it, I thought, you know when you know you can make it, but you've stooped to check fraud, and it is, it's frowned upon, it's like breaking into someone's house, check fraud. I couldn't believe I was doing it. (male, age 32)

3. *Excuse*: A speaker acknowledges a failure or offense but blames extenuating circumstances. Therefore, the person recognizes the behavior as negative but denies responsibility for the event. Examples include blaming drugs or alcohol, blaming one's friends, or blaming circumstances.

   When I was about 13 or 14, my mother and father were going through a bit of a rotten patch and me dad used to come in and belt me ma and all that. It emotionally affected me you know what I mean? Then I like just turned to drugs just as a way of getting out, just getting out of a situation I found myself in, you know. (male, age 36)

4. *Justification:* A speaker admits responsibility but denies that the behavior is negative. To justify something is to make that behavior legitimate. Examples include denials of injury (no one got hurt), denials of the victim (they deserved it), and appeals to loyalty (I did it for the kids).

   We played by the book—we've never hurt anyone and we stole off the likes of shops, who can afford it, you know. (male, age 33)

5. *Refusals*: In a refusal, a person evades questions regarding offending. Examples include outright refusals to describe or account for offending behavior or else more subtle evasion tactics.

   SM: How were you affording this (consumption of $500 of heroin a week)?
   Participant: You get the money. You just get it, you get me? You have to.
   SM: So, you were involved in what, dealing? Burglary? That sort of thing?
   Participant: You just get the money. Leave it at that, yeah? (male, age 38)

cars, and 3 had burgled houses. Other reported offenses ranged from check fraud to arson.

Few differences could be found between the narratives of men and women in this sample. This of course could be due to the very small number of women in the sample. Nonetheless, the best existing research on

EXHIBIT A.5

Contamination Sequence

As I said I won 10 fights [boxing] on the trot [quickly]. . . . I won 10 on the trot. Then I started smoking [marijuana] and then I lost a fight about 3 weeks after I started smoking. I wasn't fit enough, I started feeling fucked at the end of the 2nd round, and that was it. It was fatigue that I lost the fight. So I packed [boxing] in myself. (male, age 29, persisting group)

Redemption Sequence

SM: Is there a time in your life that you consider your "lowest point"?

Participant: Having to sleep rough, in the snow in the winter. That was the only time I was homeless. I'd always managed to find somewhere, but yeah, that was rough. I was almost glad—well I was glad—when I was arrested. It was the winter and the police thought I was dead when they found me, and I was actually glad to be put into a police cell because it was warm [laughs]. (male, age 28, desisting group)

women who desist from crime (Baskin & Sommers, 1998) has uncovered subjective changes very similar to the findings in studies of male ex-offenders (see also Eaton, 1993; Graham & Bowling, 1995; Sommers, Baskin, & Fagan, 1994). Women's stories have been included in this sample primarily in an effort to uncover the universal, rather than the gender-specific, aspects of making good. It is likely that there are both.

The stigma attached to female offenders and drug addicts, especially those with children, is probably greater than that for male offenders (many of whom have children themselves). Yet, society also probably holds out greater hope that more female offenders can be reformed. In popular and media accounts, for instance, women offenders are much more often portrayed as victims of circumstances. An example of this was seen in Texas recently, when traditional death penalty supporters fought against the execution of Karla Faye Tucker. Although the alleged rationale for this unexpected compassion was that Tucker was a born-again Christian, surely she was not the first inmate on death row to accept God into his or her life. This example hardly suggests that female ex-offenders have an easier time proving their reform, however. After all, Tucker was executed, despite the efforts of the Christian Right, in 1998.

Although a similar effort was made to locate desisting ex-offenders from ethnic minority groups, only 3 of the 65 persons interviewed in this research project identified themselves as Black, and only one of those interviews was included in the quantitative comparison. According to the 1991 census, less than one half of 1% of Merseyside residents identify themselves as "Black Caribbean," "Black African," or "Black Other" (I

particularly like this last one, "the Black Other"). Moreover, minorities in the United Kingdom are notoriously underrepresented in voluntary reintegration programs (Awiah, Butt, & Dorn, 1992), through which I made several contacts. Additionally, when applied to a population as segregated as Liverpool, snowball sampling tends to produce highly segregated samples (e.g., Miller, 1998).

Hughes (1998) has done excellent research on the phenomenology of desistance in minority communities that largely corroborates and strengthens the key conclusions of the LDS. Among other generative factors, for instance, she found that desisting African American and Latino men are strongly motivated by "the development of a deep-seated respect and concern for children" (p. 146).

I purposely avoided oversampling individuals who were active members in any one particular therapeutic organization, like Alcoholics Anonymous or Phoenix House, which can provide their members with an overarching language of reform and somewhat prepackaged narratives and interpretations (Denzin, 1987). Still, unlike Biernacki's (1986) sample, many of the individuals in this study have received professional help from drug treatment counselors, probation groups, and the like and may therefore have adapted forms of "therapy speak."

In fact, almost half of the participants said at the time of the interview that they regularly saw some sort of counselor (usually a drug counselor, probation officer, or social worker) to work on their offending behavior or drug problems. The majority of this was described as "not real counseling":

> Er, yeah, I've got a drugs counselor. I don't get much counseling, though. All you do is go in and pick up your script [methadone prescription] and that's it. "How are you?" "I'm all right." That's it. They don't sit down and ask you nothing. (male, age 33)

> *Field note:* I ask K. [a rehabilitation client] why she "hates shrinks." She has no detailed explanation, except that those she knows are very "weird." She says she goes to a hospital once a month to get an "extra 20 quid [pounds] a week" on her dole check as a disability payment. She says when she is in the psychiatrist's office, she pretends to be "off her head" or paranoid, looking around the room or staring at the floor. She says she becomes so nervous about being "caught out" as a fake that she in fact does begin to shake, sweat, and behave in bizarre ways. "Loads of people do it," she assures me. At that moment, L. [another client] sits down to join us. K. asks her, "Do you see the shrink over at the hospital?" L. says that she does and illustrates her technique by beginning to shake as if uncontrollably with her head tilted toward her shoulder and her arm to her side. "'How are you today, L.?' 'Oh, I'm fine,'" she says, looking toward the ceiling. (7/22/97, field notes)

One potential source of bias in this sample may be the partial reliance on professional reintegration workers to recommend the "success stories" that they remembered among their former clients. As Lofland (1969) wrote,

> Deviants perceived by normals to have . . . high-value features [like intelligence, physical beauty, or unusual leadership ability] are more likely to be singled out, to be noticed, to be the objects of special recognition and treatment—to be, in short, more likely to have imputations of normality made upon them. They are, as a consequence more likely to be found among those ex-deviant normals who are paraded before the world as examples of successful "rehabilitation." (p. 222)

Certainly, the people "paraded" before me as success stories did seem to be, on average, slightly better looking and better spoken than those recommended to me for the persisting sample. Reintegration workers, like the rest of us, do not like to see "wasted potential," and one often hears phrases such as "The real shame of it is that he's a smart [or attractive or charming] kid." These helping professionals, therefore, may have largely introduced me to the people Schofield (1964) called YAVIS clients (young, attractive, verbal, intelligent, and successful). At least the AVI aspects may apply—I matched the samples on age, and of course, "success" was the discriminating trait I was seeking.

Nonetheless, self-presentation is not necessarily a permanent trait. Several desisting ex-offenders said, "You should have seen me 3 years ago," and 2 desisters actually showed me pictures of "past selves." In one photograph, a person who had struggled with alcoholism appeared to be 40 or more pounds heavier than he was at the time of the interview. In the other photograph, a former heroin user looked 20 or more pounds lighter, with gaunt eyes, a skeletal appearance, and nothing like the great skin and white teeth common among the so-called "heroin chic" fashion models. Indeed, part of the process of desisting might be finding enough value in one's self to maintain a presentable appearance. The ability to appear "respectable" and present oneself in a conventional manner, after all, is a consistent focus for rehabilitation and reintegration programs for ex-convicts.

The issue of IQ may be the more vexing problem. If indeed the desisting interviewees were significantly more intelligent than "average" offenders, and intelligence is indeed a stable trait of individuals (both big "ifs"), then this could provide an alternative explanation for the differences in the LDS narratives. Essentially, desisting persons may be more optimistic and see themselves as special or different, because, well, they are special and different, from other offenders anyhow. As I did not attempt to measure intelligence or IQ, this possibility cannot be dismissed. The samples are well-matched on other variables thought to be related to IQ, such as

onset of delinquent behaviors. In addition, I asked all interviewees whether they "had trouble trying to read," "had difficulty paying attention in school," "enjoyed school," and whether they "got good grades while in school." There were no statistically significant differences between groups on any of these questions. The issue of IQ and criminality, of course, will not be settled with the LDS data set.