

Moreover, we already know a good deal about how people who have middle-class social networks and "noncriminal identity interests" (Waldorf, Reinerman, & Murphy, 1991) can abandon criminal behavior. The white-collar or corporate deviant can fall back on family savings, a college education, or the support of well-connected friends to aid their transition out of crime. Witness the mainstream success of ex-offenders like Michael Milken or Oliver North (a recent news report gushed "Forget junk bonds. These days, financier Michael Milken is making his money from the boom in internet stocks"). There is little mystery in how such people manage to avoid re-arrest. The socially excluded street offenders in this sample face far more obstacles to reintegration, because in most cases they were never integrated in the mainstream in the first place. The self-transformation they describe is a more extreme and, I think, theoretically interesting case of self-change than moving from junk bonds to internet stocks.

Still, it is hoped that the ramifications of this research are not limited exclusively to ex-convicts. At the most abstract level, this research is an exploration of how *all* people can sustain radical changes in entrenched patterns of behavior. Although one should be careful about overgeneralization, past research on other examples of self-change (e.g., losing weight, quitting smoking, and overcoming alcoholism) has uncovered "robust commonalities in how people modify their behavior" (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992, p. 1110). Also, the motivational themes and perspectives herein described by reformed ex-offenders will be familiar and meaningful to even the least deviant among us on some level.

This may be especially true because, whenever possible, the argument of this book is presented in the words of this study's participants themselves. As Conway (1998) argued,

If we think of Rousseau offering statistical calculations of the likelihood that his experience correlates closely with that of other men of his generation in France, we see his claims to be a "new man" differently. But his autobiography tells us, sometimes in too much detail, just how it felt to him. And that magical opportunity of entering another life is what really sets us thinking about our own. (p. 18)

This "magical opportunity" for empathetic understanding is the explicit goal of this project, and some might suggest a fair ambition for the social sciences in general (cf. Bertaux, 1981; Matza, 1969). Although not as comforting or sensational as the myth of the bogeyman, it is hoped that the realization that the Them are a lot like Us is closer to what Burgess (1988) meant by a "fair picture of human life."

I

DISSECTING DESISTANCE

Shadd Maruna, 2001,

Making Good: How Ex-Convicts
Reform and Rebuild Their Lives

Desistance from crime is an unusual dependent variable for criminologists because it is not an event that happens, rather it is the sustained absence of a certain type of event (in this case, crime). There is an old joke along the lines of "stopping smoking is easy—I do it every week. The same can be said for persistent offenders, who often make several pronouncements that they plan to "go legitimate" or "go straight" only to find themselves returning to criminal behavior. Quitting crime or terminating a criminal career, then, also seems to be quite easy. The difficult part is to "go straight" and stay that way. Equally difficult is the process of measuring and accounting for the sustained maintenance of inactivity.

It is argued here that sustained desistance most likely requires a fundamental and intentional shift in a person's sense of self. The study of desistance may therefore similarly require something of a shift in the way that criminal behavior is studied and analyzed. This section is an attempt to summarize what is currently known about desistance and what gaps the Liverpool Desistance Study (LDS) is intended to fill.

Understanding how the process of desistance works has always been important but may be even more so in the present era of unprecedented incarceration. In the United States, it is estimated that over 500,000 inmates, many of them struggling with problems of substance abuse and addiction, will be released from correctional facilities every year for at least the next decade (Travis, 1997). Among these, approximately two-thirds are likely to be re-arrested in the 3 years following their release (Reno 2000). Accordingly, the question of how to improve the process of offender reentry or reintegration will be among the most important issues facing the country in the next few decades. There seem few better ways to start this discussion than by first understanding successful cases of desistance from lives of crime and addiction.

1

DEFINING DESISTANCE

One of the "staples" of criminological research, dating back to before the turn of the 20th century, is the concept of the chronic, incorrigible, or "hardened" criminal fated to a lifetime of criminality (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1986, p. 214). The early positivists in criminology suggested that these natural-born criminals were apelike, biological throwbacks who had not fully evolved as human beings (Rafter, 1997). Behavior reform was essentially deemed impossible for this population. Lombroso (1911), for instance, wrote that "Atavism shows us the inefficacy of punishment for born criminals and why it is that they inevitably have periodic relapses into crime" (p. 369).

Although the age of criminal anthropology with its "radical naivetés" has largely given way to social and psychological understandings of crime, the notion of intractable criminality is still very much alive in criminology and popular thought (Foucault, 1988a, p. 145). Glaser (1964) wrote,

Despite this shift from hereditary to environmental interpretations of crime, there still is a tendency to think of the person whose experiences make him [or her] a criminal as distinctly different from the noncriminal. Theories for the explanation of criminality, from "multiple causation" to "differential association" to "containment," all seem to imply that when the totality of influences making for criminality exceed the totality of influences making for noncriminality, the person becomes a criminal. . . . The implication is that once criminality results

from this process, it usually is a fairly steady state, not readily or quickly reversed. (p. 466)

In fact, Gove (1985) has argued that all of criminology's major theoretical perspectives either explicitly or implicitly suggest that criminal behavior is "an amplifying process that leads to further and more serious deviance" (p. 118; see also Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983, p. 553). Even labeling theory suggests that once a person internalizes a deviant label, the stigma is "almost irreversible" (K. Erikson, 1962, p. 311). "No systematic effort has been made to specify the social mechanisms which might operate to 'return' the stigmatized secondary deviant to a 'normal' and acceptable role in the community" (Trice & Roman, 1970, p. 539).

As such, criminology has faced a significant challenge in recent years. After all, although it is true that most adult offenders showed signs of being delinquent children, the majority of juvenile delinquents do not become adult offenders (McCord, 1980). By the time they reach age 28, around 85% of people called "offenders" seem to stop offending by most estimates (Blumstein & Cohen, 1987). For most individuals, participation in "street crimes" like burglary, robbery, and drug sales (the types of offenses of most concern to criminologists) generally begins in the early teenage years, peaks in late adolescence or young adulthood, and disappears before the person reaches age 30 (see Figure 1.1).

Some even argue that this well-known "age-crime curve" has remained virtually unchanged for at least 150 years (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; but see Greenberg, 1994; Steffensmeier, Allan, Harer, & Streifel, 1989). Of course, the age-crime relationship apparent in official records like Figure 1.1 does not itself prove that offenders mature out of criminal behavior. For instance, as offenders age, they may simply become more adept at not getting caught by the police, or else they just spend more time incarcerated (and therefore are not getting arrested). Alternatively, older offenders may simply slow down their offending to a level at which they are rarely apprehended or move into a less risky type of criminal activity, such as white-collar offending.

Still, although these hypotheses may explain some portion of the official age-crime relationship, the same pattern emerges in longitudinal research using self-report data (e.g., Farrington, 1992), long-term ethnography (e.g., Sullivan, 1989), and life history studies (e.g., Shover, 1985). There is little doubt among the research community today that the vast majority of delinquents and adult offenders reliably desist from offending behavior in later life (Rutherford, 1992).

Matza (1964) was among the first to illustrate how this widespread phenomenon of desistance from crime contradicts the majority of sociological and psychological theories of criminal behavior. In what he called an "embarrassment of riches," Matza posited that criminological theories

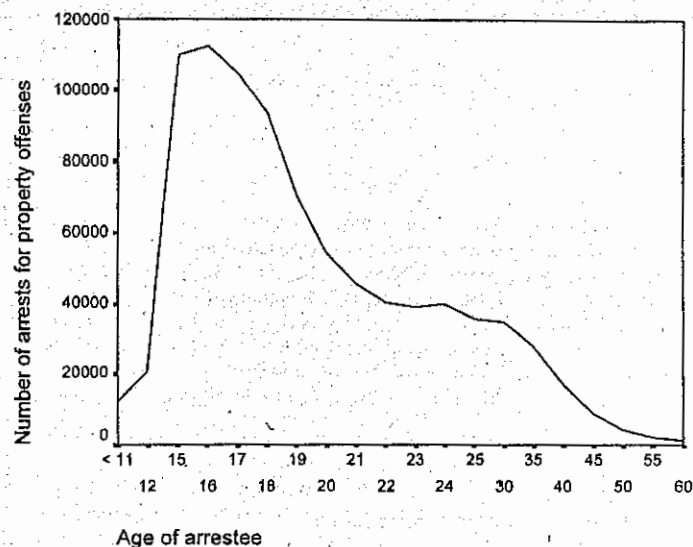


Figure 1.1. Arrests for property offenses by age. From *Crime in the United States, 1995*, by the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1996, pp. 218-219.

vastly overpredict criminal behavior partially because they fail to acknowledge the temporary and contingent nature of criminality. Matza concludes that instead of viewing criminality as a permanent property of individuals one should conceive of deviance as something that individuals sporadically "drift" in and out of during certain periods of the life course.

In the same year that Matza's (1964) *Delinquency and Drift* appeared Glaser (1964) described a typical offending history as a "zigzag path" between crime and noncrime. In his exhaustive study of former prisoners Glaser found that there was little support for the idea that criminality was a stable trait.

These are the cases that justify the maxim that no human being should ever be regarded as hopelessly criminal. Today all are law-abiding and orderly, yet a decade or less earlier most were condemned as psychopaths. They include men who were considered the most criminal and intractable prisoners in the entire federal system. (p. 56)

Consequently, Glaser concluded his book with a challenge to the field of criminology:

This view of criminality as generally an oscillating behavior pattern suggests that it may be more fruitful, for rehabilitation objectives, to

shift the focus of criminological theories from [a] search for the processes that make for persistence in crime to [the] development and test [of] a theory on the conditions that promote change from crime to noncrime and back again. (pp. 466-467)

While the Matza/Glaser challenge might be seen as the catalyst for the new "criminal career" or "developmental criminology" paradigm (e.g., LeBlanc & Loeber, 1998; Thornberry, 1997), the research community has probably not approached the sort of theoretical understanding they advocated.² In one of the most thorough analyses of the topic, Moffitt (1993) argued that the aging-out phenomenon remains "at once the most robust and least understood empirical observation in the field of criminology" (p. 675). Similarly, Hirschi and Gottfredson (1983) said that the age-crime relationship "easily qualifies as the most difficult fact in the field" (p. 553).

WHAT IS DESISTANCE?

One obstacle to understanding desistance from crime is the lack of a clear definition of just what this thing is that we hope to understand. It might be that the model of desistance used in the research literature to date has hindered our understanding of the phenomenon (Bushway et al., 2000; Laub & Sampson, 2000; Maruna, 1998).

Desistance as a Termination Event

As is reflected in the language of "burnout" and "spontaneous remission," the criminal career literature traditionally imagines desistance as an event—an abrupt cessation of criminal behavior. This assumption is made explicit in both the statistical models favored in criminal career research (e.g., Barnett, Blumstein, & Farrington, 1987) and on the rare occasion that researchers define desistance in the literature. For example, in the most enlightening, contemporary discussion of the subject in the criminological literature, Shover (1996) defined *desistance* as "the voluntary termination of serious criminal participation" (p. 121). Another recent, comprehensive review of the subject describes desistance as the "moment that a criminal career ends" (Farrall & Bowling, 1999). In this version of desistance, one

²Gottfredson and Hirschi (1986) and Shover (1996, p. 124) have both argued that criminal career research continues to focus primarily on identifying born criminals (although now called "career criminals" or "life-course persistent offenders")—a practice that was criticized by Glaser (1964) and Matza (1964). Rife with false positives, false negatives, and false promises, this prediction literature has been "plagued with high hopes yet weak results" in attempts to predict who will become career criminals, according to Sampson and Laub (1995, p. 150). Gottfredson and Hirschi (1986) wrote, "The 20-20 hindsight of career criminal research turns out to have been misleading. When asked to identify career criminals in advance of their criminal careers, the research community requests additional funding" (p. 217).

quits crime in much the same way as one resigns from a legitimate occupation. Accordingly, there has been a sustained focus on turning points, conversion experiences, and the life events that can cause this decision to "take this job and shove it."

Unfortunately, the career metaphor misses a fundamental fact about criminal behavior pointed out by Matza and Glaser: It is sporadic (Luckenbill & Best, 1981). Therefore, "termination" takes place all of the time. For example, a person can steal a purse on a Tuesday morning, then terminate criminal participation for the rest of the day. Is that desistance? Is it desistance if the person does not steal another purse for a week? A month? A year? Farrington (1986) warned that "even a five-year or ten-year crime-free period is no guarantee that offending has terminated" (p. 201). Most researchers who use terms like *cessation* or *termination* seem to imply that this is a permanent change. Yet, such permanence can only be determined retrospectively (Frazier, 1976)—presumably after the offender is deceased.

More critically, even if we do decide to study only dead desisters, we still have no real understanding of how to measure the termination "moment." For instance, suppose we know conclusively that the purse-snatcher in the previous example (now deceased) never committed another crime for the rest of his long life. When did his desistance start? Is not the voluntary termination point or concluding moment the very instant when the person completes (or terminates) the act of theft? If so, in the same moment that a person becomes an offender, he also becomes a desister. That cannot be right.

Alternatively, one could model the termination point as the moment when the person decides to quit the life of crime. So, in the case of the dead purse-snatcher, perhaps he gets apprehended by the police and this failure leads him to decide that crime is a bad idea. Research on this decision-making process (e.g., Cusson & Pinsonneault, 1986) is often referred to as the *choice* or *rational choice* model of desistance. Indeed, when analyzed in retrospective accounts, this reasoning does indeed appear to be very rational. When researchers ask former deviants *why* they quit offending, they typically receive answers like "Because I was sick of the lifestyle," "I burnt out/hit rock bottom," "It was time to do other things," "I had no alternative but to quit," and a variety of quite rational-sounding, self-interested reasons (Waldorf, 1983; W. G. West, 1978).

Yet, deciding to desist and actually desisting are two very different things. As one of the interviewees in my research stated,

Well, whenever you're in prison you see the light so to speak. "Oh, I'm never going back." So I was all that, "Oh, I'm never going back," and I done well for a while. I managed to get a job and stuff, but things started going back to the old routine. (male, age 24)

This point was empirically confirmed in an Oxford University study of recidivism (Burnett, 1992). When the researchers asked a sample of prison inmates whether they wanted to go straight, over 80% responded, yes, they were sick of the life of crime and would love to desist. Twenty months after being released from prison, almost 60% of the sample reported reoffending. Sitting in a prison cell or riding in the back of a police van, apparently, many an ex-offender decides that crime does not pay. Understanding the rationality of such decisions, however, should not be confused with understanding the *process* of going straight and *staying* that way.

Smokers can relate. Ex-smokers who give up smoking usually quit because it is bad for their health. Very rational. Yet, most smokers who give up smoking also resume smoking again in a few days (or hours) after they decided to quit for this quite rational reason (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1992). So, understanding *why* people give up smoking (because it is unhealthy) is not the same as understanding *how* people who make this decision actually maintain their resolve against short-term temptations. It is my contention that the latter question is the more important one in the study of desistance.

Although the metaphor of the "moment of clarity" conversion experience is embedded in Western discourse, research on how people change entrenched patterns of behavior contradicts the image of self-change as a moment or event (e.g., Baskin & Sommers, 1998; Maruna, 1997; Pickles & Rutter, 1991; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1992). DiClemente (1994) argued that achieving a lasting personality change can take between 7 and 10 years. Hence, the gestation period for being "born again" may actually take longer than the 9 months it took the first time around.³ Even in the literature of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), which popularized the "hitting bottom" idea of recovery, it is clear that a person's "first experience of 'bottom' is unlikely to make him [or her] amenable to the AA identity" (Lofland, 1969, p. 252). The "dramatic white-light conversion" described by AA co-founder Bill Wilson has been criticized as an unlikely and unhelpful parable even by members of AA themselves (O'Reilly, 1997, p. 103).

Most commonly, [conversion in AA] is represented not by a moment of abrupt change at a single point in the past, some cataclysmic disruption of the cognitive universe, but rather by an account of gradual accommodation to AA folkways and a set of adjustments . . . to everyday life without a drink. (O'Reilly, 1997, p. 120)

³A similar paradigm shift is taking place in sociological research on religious conversions (e.g., Neitz, 1990; Richardson, 1985). The model of the instantaneous conversion based on Paul's experience on the road to Damascus is being replaced by a framework that sees individuals more as the agents of their own conversion.

While "turning points" and rational decisions ("moments of clarity" may serve an important symbolic and psychological function, their val to the understanding of desistance has probably been overstated. Trice a Roman (1970) argued that many "hitting bottom" stories may be exaggerated to set the stage for impressive "comeback accomplishments" (p. 54). Furthermore, as Knupfer (1972) pointed out, individuals often give "strangely trivial reasons" for giving up deviant behaviors (see also Binnick, 1986). Most importantly, nothing inherent in a situation makes a turning point. One person's reason for changing their life (e.g., "hitting bottom" or else finally making the "big score" in the crime game) might be another person's reason to escalate offending ("Now I have nothing to lose" or "See how easy this is?"). As such, randomly assigning identical turning-point experiences to addicts and offenders, in the hope that they would trigger self-transformation, might be a formula for disaster.⁴

Like the person who makes a New Year's resolutions to give up chocolate, the ex-offender who decides he or she wants to desist from a life of drugs and crime often loses his or her resolve when faced with temptation and frustration. Consider the testimony of two of the recovering heroin users I (SM) interviewed as part of my research:

SM: After one of these prison sentences, did you say to yourself, "I ought to get off this (heroin)?"

Interviewee: Oh yeah, yeah I wanted to get off it definitely. I've come out of prison and I haven't touched it, you know what I mean, I have done that like. I've stayed off it, I think I stayed off it for 6 months, and that's the longest I've stayed off it. Completely off it, smack and methadone both. Then, I had all troubles with me ex-girlfriend, you know, who I had the baby to, and then like, she stopped me seeing the baby you know, and shit like this. And everything just built up and that was it. I had one (hit) and got back into the swing dead easily. (male, age 26)

As another interviewee explained:

Lots of heroin users, people on drugs, even coke, will wake up one morning and think, "I'm sick of doing this every day. I've got to stop," and then they'll want to stay away from everyone. So if you get a few of them urges where they want to come off it and then you get this big turning point and you think "That is it. I am not going to use no

⁴Lofland's (1969) notion of "disorienting episodes" probably better captures the role of these significant episodes in ex-offenders' lives than the notion of the "turning point." In a disorienting episode, individuals are forced to reconsider their typical patterns of behavior and become "amenable" to going straight or making some other change (Lofland, 1969, p. 252). Indeed, turning points have been similarly recast as "triggering events" in a recent reformulation of the sociogenic argument (Laub et al., 1998). Like a disorienting episode, a triggering event can cause a person to question one's direction; it is not, however, seen as a cause of desistance.

more." And, you've just got to try and do it, 'cause if you don't, you do go (back to drugs) like that [snaps his finger], and I've done a few of them (relapses). I've done a couple of days and couple weeks and a couple of months (of abstinence), and then I'll get some slap in the face, and I've done years on it (heroin) again. This is the longest I've ever been off now, going on a year and a half. (male, age 33)

Desistance as a Maintenance Process

Desistance might more productively be defined as the long-term abstinence from crime among individuals who had previously engaged in persistent patterns of criminal offending. The focus here is not on the transition or change, but rather on the maintenance of crime-free behavior in the face of life's obstacles and frustrations—that is, when "everything builds up" or one receives "some slap in the face." This alternative definition can be inferred from the only context in which the word *desist* is ever heard outside of criminology: the "cease and desist order." The call to *cease and desist* is a request to stop what you are doing (cease) and refrain from doing it again (desist).

The emphasis on refraining is also apparent in the colloquial terminology used for the desistance process. Although ex-offenders do not describe themselves as "desisting," they do talk about "going straight," "making good," or "going legit" (Irwin, 1970). These phrases imply an ongoing work in progress. One goes legit. One does not talk about having turned legit or having become legit. The "going" is the thing.

This language is meaningful. During a focus group with a dozen ex-offenders, for instance, I was admonished for using the term *rehabilitation* (Maruna, Naples, & LeBel, 1999). "We don't like the word 'rehabilitation'; we prefer 'recovery,'" I was told. Although synonymous at first sight, the two terms differ significantly in their linguistic implications. A person can be rehabilitated by a program or by a treatment professional, yet recovery is an individual, agentic, and purposeful process. Like "going legit," recovery is also distinctly subjective and frequently considered an ongoing process (as in the Twelve-Step notion that former alcoholics are always "recovering"). A person works at recovery, like he or she "goes" legit.

Borrowing from Foote and Frank's (1999) eloquent definition of *resistance*, then, desistance is "no end state where one can be; rather, it is a perpetual process of arrival" (p. 179). This definitional distinction will have acute implications for the study of desistance. The study of termination or cessation triggers the question of *why*. If a watch stops ticking or a heart stops beating, we look for the variable or variables that caused this change. Specifically, we look for new things that happen at about the same time as the termination event that could be responsible for the change. The study of maintenance, on the other hand, requires a different explanation,

this time sparking the question of *how*. How do some watches keep ticking (despite taking whatever licking)? How do some hearts keep beating when faced with stress and trauma? Ironically, then, the study of desistance might best be construed as the study of *continuity* rather than change—continuity of nondeviant behaviors. Continuity research focuses on the personality variables, interactions, and environmental consistencies that allow for long-term persistence in various behaviors (see especially Caspi & Moffitt's [1995] review), and not for "causes."

Importantly, the ability to *maintain* abstinence might be wholly unrelated to the initial cause (or one's initial reason) for *ceasing* the behavior in the first place. Felton Earls and his colleagues wrote, "Initiating change is but the first step. The second step involves maintaining the change . . . (and) the skills required for initiating behavior change are usually different from those required for maintaining it" (Earls, Cairns, & Mercy, 1993, p. 291). Similarly, in their research on alcoholism, Amodeo, Kurtz, and Cutter (1992) speculated that "negative" or "avoidant" motives, such as fear of arrest, physical deterioration, family breakup, or job loss, might be the most common incentives for "putting down the bottle." Yet, more positive or "approach" motives such as a sense of purpose in life or a commitment to occupational success might be more influential in *maintaining* sobriety (p. 709). Avoidant motives can be powerful catalysts for action, they suggested, but they may not be enough to sustain long-term resolve against powerful temptations.

In terms of criminal offending, there is no great mystery as to *why* a person would choose to avoid crime. The material and personal benefits resulting from most criminal behavior are miniscule, the risks are high, and prisons and jails are generally miserable places to spend one's life (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Shover, 1996). The bigger question is *how* ex-offenders are able to make good in the face of widespread social stigma, limited career opportunities, and social exclusion. Abstaining from crime under these highly criminogenic circumstances requires some explanation.

EXPLANATIONS OF DESISTANCE

The two most often cited explanations of how desistance is maintained fall into the dichotomy of ontogenetic and sociogenic paradigms (Matsueda & Heimer, 1997; Sullivan, 1996). According to ontogenetic explanations, the young offender eventually "ages out" of crime, with the "sheer passage of time" turning the offender into a responsible adult (Glueck & Glueck, 1940). According to the sociogenic accounts, what every delinquent needs to turn him or her around is "a steady job and the love of a good woman"—or man, presumably.

There are at least two other plausible stories for how people desist,

et both have fallen so far out of favor in the past three decades that they're hardly ever mentioned in discussions of desistance from crime. The first, the *medical model story*, suggests that offenders desist when they are "fixed" or corrected by psychotherapy or offender rehabilitation. The second, the *specific deterrence story*, says that offenders get sent to jail, learn their lesson, and resign themselves never to go back.

A growing body of evidence suggests that correctional interventions, especially addiction treatment programs, can in fact be very effective in reducing overall rates of recidivism (Andrews & Bonta, 1998; McGuire, 1995). Yet, even the most extreme partisans on either side of the punishment-rehabilitation debate do not suggest that either state rehabilitation or punishment can account for most ex-offenders desisting in any consistent way. The rehabilitation workers I spoke to during the fieldwork for this project maintained the philosophy that "If I can just help one kid out of 20 turn his life around, I will be successful." On the other hand, the prison officers, on the front lines of the specific deterrence business, told me, "When we release some kid, I like to say, 'See you in a few weeks,' because they always come back."

In fact, in the United Kingdom, 53% of all inmates discharged from prisons in 1993 were reconvicted within 2 years (Kershaw & Renshaw, 1997). Among people who received community penalties in 1993, the 2-year reconviction rate was almost identical, at 57% (Kershaw, 1997). This well-known fact that "they" frequently do "come back" after being "corrected" or "deterred" is precisely the reason both stories have been assigned a minor role in the scientific understanding of desistance. Although no one believes that the state plays no role in the desistance process of ex-offenders, criminologists tend to look elsewhere, to forces like the labor market, to the family, and to the offender himself or herself, to account for this highly-predictable change in behavior.

"Growing Out of Crime"

One of the first social scientists to address the question of age and crime was Adolphe Quetelet (1833/1984), who argued that the penchant for crime diminishes with age because of the "enfeeblement of physical vitality." In 1919, Goring similarly described the process of aging out of crime as a "law of nature," comparing desistance to a biological process such as puberty. Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (1940) included elements of this biology-based notion of desistance in their theory of "maturational reform," in which they argued that an intrinsic criminal impulse naturally declines after age 25. In this model, "Father Time" has an "inevitable effect upon biologic and psychologic processes" (Glueck & Glueck, 1937/1966, p. 15). Hence, "Aging is the only factor which emerges as significant in the reformative process" (Glueck & Glueck, 1940, p. 105).

Criminology's explanatory efforts "have not progressed appreciably" since the Gluecks' pioneering work, according to Shover (1985, p. 77). In fact, contemporary researchers have explicitly sought to resurrect the idea that desistance is due primarily to the "inexorable aging of the organism" (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) suggested, "Crime declines with age. Spontaneous desistance is just that, change in behavior that cannot be explained and change that occurs regardless of what else happens" (p. 136; cf. Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985, p. 145). According to proponents of this view, the effect of age on criminal behavior is "direct," natural, and invariant across social, temporal, and economic conditions (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1995, p. 135).

Usually implicit in such views is that physiological qualities of the aging individual account for the change (cf. Cline, 1980; Gove, 1985). For instance, one version of the biological argument is that the decline in criminality over time is linked to the decline in the production of testosterone over the life span. However, the link between testosterone levels and criminal behavior is anything but clear. Recent evidence suggests that in early adolescence, when differences in testosterone levels among boys are substantial, higher levels of testosterone are linked to social dominance and popularity but are actually *conversely* related to physical aggression (Schaal, Tremblay, & Soussignan, 1996). Second, even in animal studies in which it seems clear that higher levels of testosterone correlate with higher levels of aggressive behavior, it is still not clear that the testosterone causes the aggressive behavior. Just the opposite seems to be true, according to Sapolsky (1997):

Study after study has shown that if you examine testosterone levels when males are first placed together in the social group, testosterone levels predict nothing about who is going to be aggressive. The subsequent behavioral differences drive the hormonal changes, rather than the other way around.⁵ . . . Similarly, fluctuations in testosterone levels within one individual over time don't predict subsequent changes in the levels of aggression in that one individual. (p. 45)

This last point may be the most critical for the understanding of desistance: Although testosterone levels do decrease gradually with age,

⁵Sapolsky (1997) explained this frequent confusion between correlation and causation as a case of "physics envy" among scientists and scholars. Scholars: Because of a strong bias among certain scientists, it has taken forever to convince them of this point. Suppose you're studying what behavior and hormones have to do with each other. How do you study the behavioral part? You get yourself a notebook, a stopwatch, a pair of binoculars. How do you measure the hormones and analyze the genes that regulate them? You need some gazillion-dollar machines; you muck around with radiation and chemicals, wear a lab coat, maybe even goggles—the whole nine yards. Which toys would you rather get for Christmas? Which facet of science are you going to believe in more? The higher the technology, goes the formula, the more scientific the discipline. Hormones seem to many to be more substantive than behavior, so when a correlation occurs, it must be because hormones regulate behavior, not the other way around. (p. 46)

the age-testosterone curve is far from parallel to the sharply peaking age-crime curve (Farrington, 1986). As such, even if hormones play a role in criminal behavior, they do not by themselves seem to help explain why such behaviors decline so rapidly in young adulthood. The same can be said for other known, physiological changes in the human species. For instance, physical strength does not tend to peak until age 30, not 17, and the decline in physical abilities in adulthood is nowhere near as steep as the decline in criminal behavior seems to be (Adams, 1997).

Dannefer (1984) argued that explanations like the Glueck's maturational reform theory commit an "ontogenetic fallacy" by assuming that changes in behavior reflect the natural and universal "properties of the aging organism" rather than social or institutional processes (see also Greenberg, 1981; Sampson & Laub, 1993). Although aging certainly plays some role in the process of desistance, critics suggest that maturational reform explanations fail to "unpack" the "meaning" of age (Sampson & Laub, 1992). Age indexes a range of different variables, including biological changes, social transitions, and life experiences. For age to be a meaningful explanation of social behavior, according to this argument, one must ask which features indexed by age "constitute the mediating mechanisms" at work in this process (Rutter, 1996, p. 608; see also Matza, 1964; Wootton, 1959).

"A Steady Job and the Love of a Good Woman"

Beyond maturational reform, the next most influential understanding of the desistance process is the theory of social bonds or "informal social control." Social bond theory suggests that varying informal ties to family, employment, or educational programs in early adulthood can partially explain changes in criminality during the life course. Trasler (1980, cited in Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) wrote, "As they grow older, most young men gain access to other sources of achievement and social satisfaction—a job, a girlfriend, a wife, a home and eventually children—and in doing so become gradually less dependent upon peer-group support" (p. 135).

Sampson and Laub (1993) argued that these bonds provide individuals with a stake in conformity and a reason to go legit. Conversely, the theory predicts that those individuals who lack these bonds are the most likely to stay involved in criminal and delinquent behavior because they have the least to lose from social sanctions and ostracism.⁶ Warr (1998)

⁶Substantial research confirms that desistance from crime is at least weakly correlated with stable employment (Glaser, 1964; Horney, Osgood, & Marshall, 1995; Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998; Mischkowitz, 1994; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Shover, 1985), getting married (Farrington & West, 1995; Gibbens, 1984; Laub et al., 1998; Meisenhelder, 1977; Mischkowitz, 1994; Rand, 1987; Rutter, Quinton, & Hill, 1990; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Warr, 1998; Zoccolillo, Pickles, Quinton, & Rutter, 1992; but see Wright & Wright, 1992), completing education (Farrington, Gallagher, Morley, St. Ledger, & West, 1986; Rand, 1987), and becoming a parent (Hughes, 1998; Leibrich, 1993; but see Rand, 1987).

emphasized the second half of Trasler's formula, arguing that it is the pulling away from juvenile peer groups at the end of adolescence that is most facilitative of reform.

The standard criticism of sociogenic theory is that these arguments tend to downplay individual-level selection effects.⁷ Critics like Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), for instance, scoff at the notion that "jobs somehow attach themselves" to individuals, and they emphasize that "subjects are not randomly assigned to marital statuses" (p. 188). Because individuals self-select into "treatments" like "attachment to the labor force" and "cohesive marriages," they argued, the direction of causality or influence is difficult to determine. Gottfredson and Hirschi rejected the notion of peer group influence on similar grounds that "birds of a feather flock together." In other words, association with delinquents may be a product of one delinquent tendencies rather than a cause.

A more serious challenge to sociogenic explanations is that, although occasionally modeled as "events" that can be sequentially ordered, the primary dependent and independent variables of the social bond model (good marriages, labor force participation, and desistance from crime) are all purposeful, ongoing social interactions with no fixed natures. In Irwin's (1970) colorful terms:

The wife or old lady, who originally seemed so charming and beautiful often loses her charm and beauty. Debts mount, petty differences between husband and wife emerge, and the pleasant experiences between the two become rarer. . . . Often, after the passage of time, the family scene degenerates into an ugly, bickering, nagging routine, a far cry from that visualized from prison. (p. 144)

Just as desistance involves ongoing maintenance ("going legit"), stable marriages and labor force attachments also require constant care and feeding. Marriages, friendships, and careers are probably better understood as social constructions or processes than as stable conditions or events.

For this reason, sophisticated versions of sociogenic theory increasingly hold that the relationship between social ties and desistance has "strings attached" (Uggen, 1996). Sampson and Laub (1995), for instance, argued that employment "by itself" does not affect desistance. Rather, "employment coupled with job stability, commitment to work, and mutual ties binding workers and employers" reduces criminality (p. 146). Similarly, Rutter (1996) wrote, "Marriage as such has no very predictable effect. It all depends on the sort of person whom you marry, when you marry,

⁷Indeed, the exogenous nature of the institutional effects on individual behavior is an explicit assumption of sociogenic theory. According to Laub et al. (1998), "'Good' things sometimes happen to 'bad' actors" (p. 237) and "We emphasize that turning points are 'triggering events' that are, in part, exogenous—that is, they are chance events. If these events were entirely the result of conscious calculations or enduring patterns of behavior, we could not argue for the independent role of social bonds in shaping behavior." (p. 225)

and the sort of relationship that is achieved" (p. 610). Finally, Loeber, Southamer-Loeber, Van Kammen, and Farrington (1991) argued that educational opportunities do not correlate with desistance, but "attitudes towards education" do (p. 71). Hence, desistance depends not only on the existence of social attachments but also on the perceived strength, quality, and interdependence of these interactions (Laub & Sampson, 1993; West, 1982).

SUPPLEMENTING THE POSITIVIST APPROACH: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF REFORM

In a qualitative study of ex-offenders in New Zealand, Leibrich (1993) could not find "any obvious external differences in the social environment of those who were going straight and those who were not" (p. 137). Instead, she attributed desistance to "major cognitive changes" experienced by her sample (p. 86). "Although there do seem to be some differences between people who are going straight and those who are not, the differences do not lie in simple facts of life, but rather in the way that people interpret their lives" (p. 199). In other words, as in the well-known aphorism among offenders that "You rehabilitate yourself" (Meisenhelder, 1977), families, jobs, age, or time cannot change a person who does not make a personal effort to change on the inside. Adams (1997) similarly noted,

Thinking of criminal reform as self-initiated socialization highlights a side of the equation often ignored by researchers. Substantial and lasting changes in criminal behavior rarely come about only as a result of passive experience, and such changes are best conceptualized as the outcome of a process that involves significant participation by the offender, who, in many respects, acts as his or her own change agent. (pp. 334-335)

Both ontogenetic and sociogenic forces play crucial roles in the desistance process. No one can deny the importance of aging and societal attachments in the process of desisting from crime. Yet, Leibrich and Adams are not alone in arguing that what seems to be missing from both approaches to desistance is an understanding of the phenomenology of desistance (see also Clarke & Cornish, 1985; Cusson & Pinsonneault, 1986; Farrall & Bowling, 1999; Shover, 1996).

According to Caspi and Moffitt (1995), the fundamental tenet of phenomenological research is that different individuals exposed to the same environment experience it, interpret it, and react to it differently. "Each individual extracts a subjective psychological environment from the objective surroundings, and that subjective environment shapes both personality

and subsequent interaction" (p. 485). Psychology's dramatic paradigm shift from behavioristic determinism to a more cognitively sophisticated understanding of human action (e.g., Chomsky, 1959) passed "largely unnoticed by criminologists" until very recently (Clarke & Cornish, 1985, p. 160). However, with the ascendance of rational choice understandings of crime, phenomenological and sociocognitive research into "criminal thinking" is resurgent (new books by Baumeister, 1997, and A. Beck, 2000, may trigger or signal a coming wave). Additionally, cognitive theories of criminal decision making have recently had a profound impact on the applied fields of offender therapy (e.g., Andrews & Bonta, 1998; Bush, 1995; Hollin, 1989; McGuire, 1995; Ross & Ross, 1995) and substance abuse counseling (e.g., Ellis & McInerney, 1992).

Phenomenological criminology is an attempt to understand criminal decision making through an examination of the offender's self-project—the self-image they are hoping to uphold (Toch, 1969), the ends they aim to achieve (Shover, 1996), and their strategies for creating meaning in their lives (Irwin, 1970; Shoham & Seis, 1993). In his phenomenology of crime, Katz (1988) described this as the "foreground of crime." Whereas most criminology focuses on the "background" of crime (the social, biological, and psychological characteristics that predispose one to criminal behavior), foreground research focuses on the "underlying cognitive mechanisms by which information about the world is selected, attended to, and processed" (Clarke & Cornish, 1985, p. 147).

Importantly, this sort of phenomenological approach should not be seen as competing with sociogenic and ontogenetic explanations but rather as a "supplement to the positivist approach" (Toch, 1987). Burnett (1992) wrote,

Investigations into the correlates of offending and recidivism have been helpful in producing tools for prediction but are unable to answer more specific questions about how these correlates interact across time or how they impact on offenders' motivations, rationalizations and responses to opportunities to re-offend. . . . Knowledge of offenders' construction of their situation is essential to a fuller understanding of why there are different incidences of re-offending in apparently similar circumstances. (p. 181)

Analyzing the subjective experience of going straight can only strengthen criminology's understanding of the roles of social bonds and aging in the desistance process (Farrall & Bowling, 1999; Laub & Sampson, 1993).

The Gluecks, for instance, were not comfortable with the idea that biology alone could explain desistance, so they added an element of emotional or psychological maturation to their concept of maturational reform. "It was not achievement of any particular age, but rather the achievement of adequate maturation regardless of the chronological age at which it

occurred that was the significant influence in the behavior change of our criminals" (Glueck & Glueck, 1945, p. 81). Unfortunately, the Gluecks left this notion of "maturity" dangerously vague, and their explanation was deemed tautological (Wootton, 1959, p. 164). Aware of this shortcoming, the Gluecks explicitly urged future researchers to "dissect maturation into its components" (Glueck & Glueck, 1940, p. 270) and "go more deeply into what might be denominated the content of age" (Glueck & Glueck, 1945, p. 79).

The best-developed theoretical argument in this tradition can be found in the work of Neal Shover (1983, 1985, 1996), who attributed desistance from crime, in part, to changes in "identity, self-concept and the framework employed to judge oneself and others" (Shover, 1983, p. 208). According to Shover (1996), the primary elements of this process include:

1. The "acquisition of an altered perspective on their youthful self and activities" (p. 131).
2. A growing awareness of time (p. 132).
3. A "revision of aspirations" to include goals such as "contentment, peace, and harmonious interpersonal relationships." (p. 134)

Similarly, Gove (1985, p. 128) linked desistance from crime to the following internal changes:

1. A shift from self-absorption to concern for others.
2. Increasing acceptance of societal values and behaving in socially appropriate ways.
3. Increasing comfort with social relations.
4. Increasing concern for others in their community.
5. Increasing concern with the issue of the meaning of life.

The subjective changes hypothesized by Shover and Gove provide the foundations for a phenomenological understanding of how ex-offenders go legit (and stay that way) that is consistent with existing qualitative research on the lived experience of criminal desistance (e.g., Adler, 1993; Baskin & Sommers, 1998; Burnett, 1994; Graham & Bowling, 1995; Hughes, 1998; Irwin, 1970; Jolin, 1985; Leibrich, 1993; Lofland, 1969; Maruna, 1997; Meisenhelder, 1982; Shover, 1985). Research on people who have overcome addictions also indicates that similar cognitive and subjective changes play a key role in the maintenance of change (Birnacki, 1986; Denzin, 1987; DiClemente, 1994; Kellogg, 1993; O'Reilly, 1997; Ronel, 1998; Singer, 1997; Stephens, 1991; Thune, 1977; Vaillant, 1983; Waldorf, 1983). Describing a wide range of samples, from probationers in New Zealand to heroin addicts in San Francisco, these studies suggest

that there might be remarkable similarity in the explanations and self-understandings of ex-deviants.

When such persons are asked to "dissect maturation," the responses almost always stray away from behavioral manifestations (e.g., an absence of crime) and define maturity as a new way of "looking at the world" or constructing reality:

My ideas, habits, the way I see life has changed. I used to have no purpose to the day and I didn't try to do anything. Now, I have a purpose and I'm realistic. I know the pros and cons. I used to be angry . . . never used to enjoy things like nature. . . I'm more accepting now. (New York interviewee in Maruna et al., 1999)

So-called "maturation"⁸ seems to refer to a transformation in what Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) called "criminality" or the propensity/inclination toward criminal activities (Bushway et al., 2000). The psychological profile of the "mature" (the desisting mindset?), therefore, seems at least as important to understand as the nature of criminality. Both frames of mind seem to characterize people we call criminals at varying times in their lives.

⁸The word *maturity*, in this sense, is meant differently than the passive process of maturation implied in the ontological model. Maturing into an adult role requires motivation, effort, and a desire to change (Peele & Brodsky, 1991). As such, maturation need not refer to biological age. Colloquially, in fact, the term *maturity* is most often applied to those whose behavior is not in accordance with age expectations ("The student is a very mature teenager" or "The professor can be very immature for his age"). This usage implies that maturity might be a malleable personality attribute or "frame of mind" rather than a quality inherent to any particular age. However, because "maturational reform" has become associated with ontogenetic or age-related understandings of desistance, words like *maturity* probably should be used cautiously and sparingly. Additionally, some commentators have expressed concern that use of the term connotes an infantilization of deviants. In regard to maturational theories of overcoming drug addiction, for instance, Waldorf et al. (1991) wrote, "The 'maturing out' hypothesis smuggles into scholarship . . . an insupportable assumption about abstinence . . . rooted in temperance-era moralism: that fully developed human beings do not desire to alter their consciousness with drugs" (p. 236).

Persistent offenders, like people who are clinically depressed, might be "sadder but wiser" than their contemporaries who struggle to desist. The redemption 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're 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,upid, 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 Biemacki, 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 rob all over the country, that's what we used to do get up we'd be all over the place just busy all the time, making money all that energy has just gone into all legit things, you know (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 my criminal offenses, all my 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 my 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 my mum found out what I was doing [heroin use and burglary]. She came 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 my 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." According to William James, 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 my 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 plane 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

atives on this theme. On a measure of overall generativity content, median score in the desisting group was 6.71 ($M = 6.9$), compared a median of 1.79 ($M = 1.79$) in the persisting group narratives ($p < .05$). 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 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" or other experiential thrills. Desisting interviewees, on the other hand, ressed a desire for more lasting accomplishments or "something to write about" for themselves. They described newfound pleasures in creative and productive pursuits, and often expressed a special attachment or duty to their 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 (cf. 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:

My 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 myself 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 my 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 you 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, pissing 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:

fore you judge my past choices as deviant, take a long look at your own
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
based the speech to dance music. Although few of these legions of *Trainspot-*
ting fans are themselves former heroin addicts or burglars like the character
Renton in the film, discomfort regarding the transition away from de-
viance 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

²²Prior 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, "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 (cf. 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 (cf. Brown, 1991; Green, Thompson, & Fullilove, 1998; Hughes, 1998), such efforts are often questioned or considered insincere. For instance, in a favorable review of reformed 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 field-work, 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 the 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 reformatory 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 Losland, 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)

other 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 both community and victim, even if it is modest in comparison to the gravity of the crime, enables the offender to seize back pride and reas-
sume a law-respecting, other-respecting and self-respecting identity" (p. 8). 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 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 (Fallor, 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 "come-back" 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 Fallor, 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 in 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 magical 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 a 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 organically 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 bevies [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 from "tastes for oysters or dry martinis" (p. 53). The initial ences of such behavior may at first be perceived as unpleasant or ambiguous. After all, there is nothing obviously or inherently pleasurable in learning a trade, painting, raising children, or building a house. (To learn to redefine these difficult activities as rewarding and pleasurable)

Four participants, all describing different productive pursuits, use 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 desisting ex-offenders need to ground the experience in a context 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 go 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 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 no money, you know, and I'll help you 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 through interaction with more experienced "users" (straights) who have "been there" and can relate to the frustrations inherent in productive life 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 "work," they are implicitly referring to the former—the jobs that the rest of society does not want to do. The cartoonist Barbara Brandon captures 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

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 just might help "turn on" a few individuals to something besides crime 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, & Si, 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. is the "New Careers" movement. Under New Careers programs, inmates ex-convicts could earn the privilege of working as counselors, teachers, rehabilitators for other inmates or offenders under community supervision. The key principle of the movement was the idea of reciprocity or communitarity—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 help and reintegration programs. Indeed, the seventh step of the 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, in fairly low profile, these organizations can achieve an almost religious herence 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 change but have little idea of any other sort of life besides the life of drug 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