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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Social Supports and Criminal Desistance among Formerly Incarcerated Youth in

the Transition to Adulthood

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Social Welfare

by

Diane Janiece Terry

2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Social Supports and Criminal Desistance among Formerly Incarcerated Youth in

the Transition to Adulthood

by

Diane Janiece Terry

Doctor of Philosophy in Social Welfare

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Laura S. Abrams, Chair

Nearly 100,000 youth exit correctional facilities each year and reenter the community. As they attempt to resituate themselves in their former environments, many will encounter emotional, social and logistical challenges that may deter them from achieving success. Further, many will reoffend shortly after their release. In order to break cycles of crime and recidivism among youth offenders, it is necessary to explore the pathways that lead them away from crime, particularly as they transition into adulthood.

Theory asserts that criminal desistance is a process that entails individual behavioral changes, changing life circumstances, and environmental context. Little is known however,

about how young people perceive and navigate the challenges they encounter in this process. Moreover, scholars have not fully explored the relationships between social supports and desistance, including how formerly incarcerated youth perceive, utilize, and access support to help them stay out of trouble.

This study used a narrative, life history approach to explore the relationship between criminal desistance, perceptions, and use of social supports among formerly incarcerated, transition-age youth. The researcher conducted 30 in-depth qualitative interviews with 15 formerly incarcerated young men, ages 19-24. Coding and memoing were used to identify major themes related to the participants' desistance journeys and to develop a set of findings concerning the relationship between social support and criminal desistance in the transition to adulthood.

This study located three offender typologies, each holding different ideas of desistance ranging from complete abstinence from crime to committing crimes while avoiding police contact. These definitions shaped how they approached the desistance barriers they faced: appearance, feeling marked, and relationships with people and places in the environment. Three important findings emerged with regards to the study variables. First, micro-level decision making helped the participants to navigate desistance barriers. Second, successful desisters latched onto "hooks" that enabled them to transition into adulthood and away from their criminal pasts. Last, social supports served as both a barrier and a coping strategy in the desistance process. Key implications are identified regarding how to better understand the construct of desistance, and how social supports can help young men in the desistance process.

The dissertation of Diane Janiece Terry is approved.

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Michael Stoll

Laura S. Abrams, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study first to Donald. I admire and I am inspired by your passion for life and your

tenacity in fighting for a better future for yourself and your family in spite of the obstacles

you've encountered. I also dedicate this work to the young men from the Fresh Start program

who willingly shared their stories in the hopes that others could one day learn from them. Last, I

dedicate this research to all young people who have made mistakes and gotten off track from

fulfilling their life's purpose. I hope that you never give up on trying to do better in life. The

world has so much to learn from you.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Research Problem

Nearly 100,000 youth offenders in the U.S. return home from juvenile correctional facilities annually (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). During the process of community reentry, many youth will encounter significant social, emotional, and practical challenges that place them at risk for experiencing poor outcomes in the transition into adulthood. Although studies have found that youth often exit the correctional system with a desire to stay out of trouble and avoid further contact with the law (Abrams, 2007; Fields & Abrams, 2010), many are unsuccessful in achieving this goal and will return to the correctional system shortly after their release.

In addition to high rates of re-offending, formerly incarcerated youth are apt to experience challenges in other life arenas as well, such as finding stable housing and employment, completing school, and coping with negative peer pressures (Abrams, 2007; Inderbitzen, 2009). Some studies suggest that these reentry struggles stem from prior exposure to risk factors commonly associated with juvenile crime and incarceration, such as child maltreatment, poverty, learning disabilities, exposure to violence, and neighborhood disorganization (Jonson-Reid & Barth, 2000; Loeber & Wikstrom, 1993; Quinn & Rutherford, 2005; Teplin et al., 2002). The combination of these earlier risk factors along with specific reentry barriers can deter formerly incarcerated youth from actualizing their goals, resulting in continued susceptibility to criminal activity and criminal justice system involvement.

Although scholars have identified the links between individual and social barriers and continued criminal activity, less is known about young people's journey toward criminal desistance, particularly during the transition into adulthood (ages 18-24). The transition to adulthood refers to a period of life where youth are preparing themselves to take on the roles and responsibilities of adulthood. This includes practical preparation such as obtaining educational credentials, developing work skills to secure adequate employment in adulthood, and/or engaging in activities that allow them to explore who they wish to be in life (Furstenberg, Kennedy, McLoyd, Rumbaut, & Settersten, 2004). It also entails attaining a level of psychosocial maturity which enables young people to function in their interpersonal relationships, and to govern themselves without intensive adult supervision (Steinberg, 2002).

Formerly incarcerated youth are often underprepared to make the transition into adulthood (Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2005). The experience of juvenile incarceration can manifest in emotional and psychological disruptions in youths' development, which can impede their ability to master the tasks associated with adulthood (Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004). Further, residing in a correctional placement impedes upon youths' ability to develop healthy social and romantic relationships (Steinberg et al., 2004). Last, undergoing repeated spells of incarceration can limit youths' future educational and vocational opportunities, both of which can hinder their ability to prepare for independent adult functioning (Hagan, 1993).

Under-preparation for adulthood results in larger public costs. For example, when formerly incarcerated youth are unable to pursue school or find a clear vocational path, they may end up relying on government aid for economic support. Or, it may lead to their re-offending in order to support themselves financially. Additionally, it poses public safety concerns for

communities most heavily impacted by these problems, as they must determine how to protect themselves from repeated cycles of crime and violence (Anderson, 1999).

Juvenile incarceration poses particular concerns for the state of California. California confines a high number of youth offenders, and it is one of six states which is responsible for confining nearly half of the national incarcerated youth population (Davis, et al., 2008). Recidivism rates among incarcerated youth in California are extremely high. The California Division of Juvenile Justice estimates that 70% of youth who are committed to state-run facilities are rearrested within two years of their release (CJJRP, 2007). This revolving door into the penal system is costly. For example, the annual cost for incarcerating just one juvenile in California in 2007 was approximately $216,000 (Urban Strategies Council, 2007).

In addition to high incarceration and recidivism rates, California also incarcerates a large number of older youth and young adults. California's juvenile justice system houses youth up until the age of 25, which means that incarcerated youth in California tend to be older than confined youth in other states. For example, the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement indicates that the majority of committed youth nationally fall between the ages of 15-17 (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). In contrast, the average age of offenders admitted to California's Division of Juvenile Justice is 19 (CDCR, 2010). Moreover, admissions stays at California correctional facilities can be lengthy; youth residing in these facilities tend to remain in custody on average for 26 months (CDCR, Summary Fact Sheet, n.d). Thus, many of these youth will be incarcerated and/or released at the same time as they are reaching the early stages of adulthood.

As scholars and researchers are rigorously attempting to break cycles of crime and incarceration among youth who are most at-risk for future criminal activity in young adulthood, it is necessary to understand more about the pathways that lead to criminal desistance. Criminal

desistance theory suggests that a combination of individual behavioral changes and external environmental factors may cause offenders to stop committing crimes. For example, scholars have identified that aging, experiencing traumatic life events, and adopting new life roles related to marriage or employment can help individuals reduce their criminal activity. However, while these variables have been linked to desistance among adult offenders, much less is known about the processes associated with criminal desistance among youth and young adults. Further, the knowledge base lacks an understanding of how young people perceive and experience the desistance process and the barriers they encounter while trying to stay away from crime. As a result of these gaps in the literature, and the extremely high rate of recidivism among youth offenders, scholars and practitioners are still unclear as to how to prevent youth from returning to the criminal justice system upon their release.

Recent literature has emphasized the role that formal and informal support systems can play in helping formerly incarcerated youth develop lifestyles and activities that may help them to desist from crime. The research is unclear however, as to how these supports operate, or how formerly incarcerated youth themselves perceive, utilize, and access social support to help them stay out of trouble. Exploring the role of social supports in the lives of transition age young adults who were incarcerated as juveniles and how these supports might influence their desistance course will contribute to a better understanding of how cycles of crime and incarceration may be interrupted among this population.

Study Rationale and Research Questions

This study explored the relationship between criminal desistance and use of social supports for formerly incarcerated youth in the transition to adulthood. The specific research questions were:

1. How do formerly incarcerated young men (ages 19-24) navigate barriers to desistance during their transition to adulthood?

2. In what ways do young adult men perceive and utilize formal and informal social supports as they transition to adulthood?

3. How does social support relate to desistance from crime in the transition to adulthood?

Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter Two provides a description of the incarcerated youth population, including general characteristics and barriers faced during the community reentry period. This chapter also explains the significance of studying the experiences and outcomes of formerly incarcerated, transition-age youth.

Chapter Three explores theories related to criminal desistance among adults, youth and young offender populations. I explain common approaches to understanding desistance, and introduce gaps in the theory as it applies to transition-age youth. Last, I introduce the topics of social supports and perceptions as concepts that may help scholars to better understand criminal desistance patterns among formerly incarcerated youth.

Chapter Four describes the methodological approach for this study, as well as the study design, data collection procedures, study population, sampling strategies, and data analysis techniques.

Chapter Five reviews the results of the study. I provide an overview of three offender typologies that emerged from the data, and I describe the major commonalities between and across the typologies in terms of their life histories, criminal desistance, and transition to adulthood experiences.

Chapter Six offers a framework for understanding how the participants navigated their desistance journeys. I describe this framework in relation to three desistance barriers that the participants have encountered since leaving probation camp. I also provide a cross-case analysis of how each offender typology perceived and navigated their desistance journeys in relation to these barriers.

Chapter Seven discusses the study findings and the implications on research and practice in the social welfare field.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Incarcerated Youth: Background Characteristics

Juvenile crime and incarceration rates have varied dramatically within the last two decades. The 1990s brought about a surge in the number of youth coming into contact with the juvenile justice system, and between 1991 and 1999 juvenile incarceration rates increased by 43% (Sickmund, 2004). In response to the rise in juvenile crime and arrest rates and the increasingly negative portrayals of youth in the public eye, the juvenile justice system shifted from having a rehabilitative focus to a more punitive one. These social and political trends resulted in harsher sentencing for juvenile crimes, longer stays in juvenile correctional facilities, and more youth transfers to the adult penal system (Urbina, 2005). Incarceration thus became a primary tool for treating youth who were considered to be violent felons.

Despite recent declines in juvenile crime and arrests beginning in the early 2000s, the number of incarcerated juvenile offenders remains fairly high. As of 2008, there were 81,000 youth under the age of 18 residing in juvenile correctional facilities on any given day (OJJDP, 2008) and an additional 9,766 youth under the age of 19 committed to adult prisons and jails (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2009). Overall, it is difficult to grasp who the "incarcerated youth population" actually represents. It is a group that is constantly shifting, and scholars and reporting agencies often document their numbers in various ways. For example, the 81,000 youth who are housed in correctional placements captures youth who are at various stages in the correctional system on any given day, including those who have been arrested and detained for a short period of time, youth who are being held while awaiting trial, and finally, youth who are serving sentences for crimes for which they were convicted. Tracking this group is also difficult

because youth offenders can reside in various types of correctional facilities; they may be held in detention centers, group homes, shelters, juvenile halls, residential treatment centers, and/or correctional facilities.

The difficulties involved in accurately counting this population also make it difficult to understand their needs and to track their outcomes. However, scholars have generally established the following basic characteristics:

Older youth bear responsibility for a disproportionate percentage of juvenile crime. Youth ages 16 and 17 comprise 25% of the youth population between the ages of 10–17. However, national census data indicates that this age group accounts for nearly "50% of arrests of youth under age 18, nearly 40% of delinquency court cases, and more than 50% of juveniles in residential placement" (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006).

The majority of confined youth are serving sentences for nonviolent crimes. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) reports the following breakdown of offenses among committed youth offenders: 36% for property offenses (i.e. burglary, theft), 28% for public order offenses (i.e. weapons offense, disorderly conduct), 25% for person offenses (i.e. robbery, assault), and 11% for drug-related charges (OJJDP, 2006-2007). Incarcerated youth also serve relatively long sentences. The 2003 Census of Residents in Juvenile Placement indicates that youth who resided in public correctional facilities continued to remain in placement after 3.5 months, while youth confined to private facilities continued to reside there after 4 months. Moreover, 45% of youth overall remained incarcerated after a period of 6 months (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006).

Young men dominate the incarcerated youth population. Although the number of females arrested for crimes has increased substantially in the last decade, males have consistently

comprised about 85% of offenders housed in juvenile residential placements (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). Young men of color in particular are disproportionately represented in the incarcerated youth population. For example, African Americans represent 16% of all adolescent youth in the United States, however, they account for 38% of all incarcerated youth. In comparison, White youth comprise 78% of the youth population, and only 39% of youth in residential placements (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). African American youth are disproportionately represented at each point of contact with the juvenile justice system, including arrests, referrals to juvenile and adult court, detentions, and out-of-home dispositions (Kempf-Leonard, 2007). African American youth are also more likely to be incarcerated in adult facilities than offending youth of other races (Redding, 2003).

The experiences of incarcerated Latino youth are troubling as well. Latino youth comprise a nearly equal percentage of youth in the nation and in the incarcerated youth population (20%) (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). However, some studies suggest that the actual number of incarcerated Latino youth is higher than what is reported, due to the fact that reporting agencies often categorize Hispanic/Latino youth as White or as members of other ethnic groups (Hartney & Silva, 2007). When Latino youth of Hispanic background are disaggregated, it is clear that the experiences of Latino youth offenders differ from those of White youth offenders. Even when controlling for prior admissions and offense type, Latino youth have higher rates of incarceration and serve longer sentences than White youth for equivalent offenses (NCCD, 2007; Villarruel et al., 2002).

Studies estimate that as many as 100,000 youth offenders return home from correctional placements in the U.S. each year[1] (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006), and a large percentage will re-offend after their release. Due to variations in how states and counties measure recidivism,[2] a national juvenile recidivism measure does not exist. However, individual studies across states indicate that recidivism rates among youth offenders are very high. One longitudinal study of 531 incarcerated youth in Oregon found that 40% of the sample was re-incarcerated in the juvenile correctional system within one year of their release (Bullis et al., 2002). Re-arrest rates for released youth are even higher. A recent longitudinal study of nearly 2,500 youth offenders exiting a juvenile correctional agency in a large Southwest state found that 85% were rearrested at least once within a five-year period, and that nearly 80% of these arrests were for felony charges (Trulson, Marquart, Mullings, & Caeti, 2005). Even when youth participate in rehabilitation programs, recidivism rates still remain as high as 50% (Lipsey, 1999).

The Transition to Adulthood among Vulnerable Populations

A recent body of research has sought to understand how to prevent recidivism among formerly incarcerated youth. This research mostly focuses on understanding how policies and programs can best support youth during the period of community reentry, when youth are apt to experience multiple personal, logistical, and social challenges while transitioning back into life

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[1] This figure comes from the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement, which is a one-day count of youth residing in various types of correctional facilities across the nation (i.e. detention centers, boot camps, juvenile halls, etc.). Because this reentry figure includes youth at various stages in the system, it is higher than the 81,000 figure referenced earlier in this chapter.

[2] States can measure recidivism in terms of any type of criminal justice contact that offenders may have including: re-arrests, court referrals, reconvictions, or re-incarceration (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). For this reason it is difficult to compare recidivism rates across states.

"on the outs" (Abrams, 2007). These include challenges such as work and school engagement, reintegration into family and peer networks, and coping with mental health and substance abuse needs (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Mears & Travis, 2004). The underlying concern in the juvenile reentry literature is that if youth do not receive structured support to help them transition home, they may continue to experience difficulties as they transition to adulthood. The transition to adulthood refers to a period of life where young people are preparing themselves practically, emotionally, and psychologically for the roles and responsibilities associated with adulthood. Traditionally in Western society, becoming an adult is accompanied by a particular set of role transitions and accomplishments such as working, establishing independent living, marriage, parenthood, and financial self-sufficiency (Furstenberg et al., 2004). As youth transition to adulthood, they begin to take on specific tasks in order to prepare for these upcoming role transitions. This entails practical preparation such as finishing school, exploring career options, and gaining work experience. It also includes time for young people to explore various life roles and to undergo a process of self-reflection where they begin to imagine who and what they will become in life (Arnett, 2000, 2004).

Recent literature has argued that in comparison to past generations, youth today are experiencing a prolonged transition to adulthood. First, research reveals that contemporary youth conceive of and define adulthood differently than past generations of young people have (Arnett, 1997; Furstenberg, et al., 2002). Further, youth today are exploring different ways of living an adult life, such as placing an emphasis on educational advancement and self-improvement, and choosing to cohabitate rather than marry (Osgood, Ruth, Eccles, Jacobs, & Barber, 2005). For all of these reasons, contemporary young adults are attaining traditional markers of adulthood at later ages.

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Not all transition-age youth are able to delay these roles however. These delayed role transitions are more prevalent among middle-class and upper-class White youth, while other youth, particularly those who are low-income and disadvantaged, are assuming the roles of adulthood at a much faster pace (Sandefur, Eggerling-Boeck, & Park, 2005; Schoeni & Ross, 2005). Scholars have recently become interested in the transition to adulthood experiences among these "vulnerable transition-age youth," referring specifically to young people who have experienced difficulties such as incarceration, teenage pregnancy, homelessness, mental health and learning disabilities, and/or child welfare system involvement (Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2005). Scholars generally concur that adolescence unfolds much differently for young people who have dealt with these types of challenges. As a result, rather than having time to prepare for or prolong their transition to adulthood, this stage of life may instead represent a period of social, emotional, educational, and vocational upheaval and instability that leaves them underprepared to successfully assume adult roles and responsibilities (Foster & Gifford, 2005; Goerge et al., 2002; Levine & Wagner, 2005; Mortimer & Larson, 2002; Osgood et al., 2005).

Formerly incarcerated youth and the transition to adulthood.

Formerly incarcerated youth are particularly vulnerable to experiencing the aforementioned challenges of risk factors and accelerated transitions as they enter adulthood (Jonson-Reid & Barth, 2000; Loeber & Wikstrom, 1993; Quinn & Rutherford, 2005; Teplin et al., 2002). Additionally, incarcerated youth often deal with life challenges that overlap with other vulnerable groups mentioned, such as homelessness, child-welfare and special education involvement, and mental health. Thus, their transition to adulthood phase can be marked by the stress associated with accumulated life disadvantage. Resulting from these multiple risk

associations, formerly incarcerated youth are underprepared for independence in young adulthood (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004).

Extant literature has not fully explored the transition to adulthood among young adults with histories of juvenile incarceration. However, research suggests that early childhood exposure to risk factors that are commonly associated with juvenile incarceration, combined with barriers encountered during incarceration and community reentry, may prevent these youth from achieving success as they become young adults. These risk factors and community reentry barriers are commonly identified in the literature in the following domains:

Family & Housing: Due to their younger age, legal, and financial statuses, the majority of incarcerated youth return home to live with their parents or relatives upon their release (Todis et al., 2001). However, various types of disruptions in the home can jeopardize the stability of these housing situations. For example, a large proportion of incarcerated youth have experienced familial child abuse and/or neglect. In a national study of juveniles residing in correctional facilities across the United States, 72% of youth reported prior physical abuse, 20% reported neglect, and 11% had experienced one or more episodes of sexual abuse (Gover & Mackenzie, 2003). In addition to child maltreatment, incarcerated youth may experience other types of stressors in their home lives. Fifty-four percent of incarcerated youth resided in single-parent homes prior to placement, and over 50% have had at least one family member who has been incarcerated (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Snyder, 2004).

Research has suggested that positive family support and a stable living environment can help youth successfully reintegrate back into the community following incarceration, and may be helpful in preventing future recidivism (Flavin, 2004). However, when youth are returning to live in environments where family conflict was or is still present, this sense of stability may be

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compromised. For youth who do not have frequent or consistent contact with their families while incarcerated, returning home may not be an option, which may bring about a lifestyle of transience or homelessness as youth struggle to find a place to live (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Sullivan, 2004).   It is not surprising then that finding housing constitutes a primary worry for offenders returning from juvenile placements (Fields & Abrams, 2010) and that a significant proportion of this population is at risk for homelessness in adulthood (Harper et al., 2008).

Education and employment: Incarcerated youth tend to experience a number of disruptions in their education. Many scholars have attributed these disruptions to problems that youth have typically experienced prior to their incarceration, such as poor school performance, truancy, untreated learning disabilities, and school transience (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Hagner, Malloy, Mazzone, & Cormier, 2008). Further exacerbating these problems is that after exiting the correctional system, youth often encounter several barriers to educational engagement, such as difficulties re-enrolling or reentering mainstream educational settings (Giles, 2003).

Studies have found that post-incarceration school engagement is very low. In their study of the transition experiences of youth offenders in Oregon, Bullis et al. (2002) found that only 42% were enrolled in school within 12 months of exiting the correctional system. Even more distressing, another study found that 95% of released youth offenders in Kentucky were unable to transition into an educational program post-release (Stephens & Arnette, 2000). Other youth may find it hard to make up the credits they missed either while they were incarcerated, or because they have had to change schools after being incarcerated. All of these factors can prevent youth from graduating on time, if, at all (Balfanz, et al., 2003). Literature regarding the high school completion rates of formerly incarcerated youth is virtually non-existent, however,

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some authors have suggested (although with a strong empirical base) that high school diploma or GED attainment among adolescent offenders and those who become incarcerated is less than 20% (Balfanz et al., 2003; Loeber, Loeber, & Masten, 2004; Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010).

Given their educational histories, poor employment outcomes typically follow. Spells of incarceration can limit youths' ability to develop job skills and experiences that could help them to maintain meaningful employment (Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004). Even when youth do possess appropriate skill sets, they may face employment barriers due to institutional restrictions that do not permit employers in all job sectors to hire applicants who have a criminal record (Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll, 2002, 2003). For these reasons, a large percentage of formerly incarcerated youth encounter significant barriers to employment as young adults. In Bullis & Yovanoff's (2006) study of incarcerated youth offenders in Oregon, only 28% had obtained jobs one year post release. Unemployment and the inability to take care of oneself financially pose significant barriers to financial stability in adulthood.

Mental health: A large percentage of youth offenders face mental health problems before, during, and after their period of incarceration. According to national data from the 2003 Survey of Youth in Residential Placement, over 80% of youth residing in correctional facilities displayed symptoms related to extreme anger, 61% expressed symptoms related to anxiety, and 59% reported symptoms related to depression (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). Further, mental health challenges among a wider group of youth involved in the juvenile justice system are much higher than those of similarly-aged youth residing in the community (Cauffman et al,. 2007).

In addition to having diagnosable mental health problems, youth may also suffer from psychological trauma resulting from incarceration. Adult offender literature indicates that individuals who are confined in correctional institutions endure extremely stressful conditions

including tight living spaces, violence or the threat of violence among other inmates, overbearing structures and routines, as well as a lack of privacy, space, and freedom (Haney, 2001). Such conditions can produce negative psychological effects, as inmates are forced to develop specific strategies to adjust to and survive the prison experience. Examples include having to always appear tough, never being able to show vulnerabilities, and having to engage in violent acts for self-protection. Some scholars have suggested that the process of institutionalization can take an emotional toll on inmates, diminish their self-worth, and leave them feeling helpless and dependent (Haney, 2001; Sykes, 1965).

Despite the high prevalence of mental health needs, incarcerated youth do not always receive appropriate services. Mental health evaluations are not universally available in juvenile correctional facilities, and the majority of youth in custody reside in facilities where the counselors are not necessarily trained mental health professionals (OJJDP, 2010). To further complicate matters, self-perceptions of mental health needs among incarcerated youth are low, and thus many youth do not feel that they should seek help for such problems after they return home (Fields & Abrams, 2010).

Substance abuse: A large proportion of juvenile-justice involved youth struggle with substance abuse. For example, the California Division of Juvenile Justice reports that 58% of its youth offenders are in need of substance abuse treatment services (CDCR, Summary Fact Sheet, n.d). Other studies have estimated that between 30%-50% of detained and incarcerated youth meet the criteria for a substance abuse disorder including alcohol and/or drugs (Barnes et al., 2005; Robertson et al., 2004; Wasserman, Ko, & McReynolds, 2004). Last, roughly 30% of youth are estimated to have co-occurring substance abuse/mental health disorders (Barnes et al., 2005; Robertson et al., 2004).

The availability of substance abuse treatment in youth correctional facilities varies widely. The Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators indicates that 78% of juvenile correctional institutions provide substance abuse treatment to residents (Young, Dembo, & Henderson, 2007). However, in another study involving detained and incarcerated youth in New Jersey and Illinois, 42% of the sample had substance abuse problems, yet only 26% were receiving treatment services at their respective facilities (Barnes et al., 2005). A similar trend exists after youth exit these facilities, with some facilities making extensive efforts to connect youth to community substance abuse treatment after they are released, while others simply provide referrals and youth are left to make these linkages on their own. Further complicating the problem is that not all community treatment services are age-appropriate, meaning that they are not designed to meet the specific needs that adolescent substance users have (Young et al., 2007).

Very few studies have focused on the long-term outcomes for youth who exhibited substance abuse problems while incarcerated, however, some scholars suggest that many youth continue to struggle with substance abuse problems long after exiting the juvenile justice system. For example, Abram et al.'s (2009) longitudinal study of 1,653 formerly detained youth in Chicago found that 25% of youth in the sample displayed severe substance abuse problems three years later. The presence of these unmet needs can further compromise young people's coping abilities and ability to transition successfully to the adult phase of their lives.

Neighborhood risk factors and barriers: As stated earlier, incarcerated youth typically return to live in their old communities and neighborhoods upon their release, however, scholars and young people alike acknowledge that these former environments often hold multiple risks for future reoffending. Delinquent and incarcerated youth tend to live in areas characterized by

high levels of poverty, unemployment, gang activity, and/or violence. Such neighborhoods may lack social cohesion, collective efficacy and social control, and opportunities for economic development (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997; Wilson, 1987). A large body of literature has suggested that poor neighborhood conditions can indirectly and directly influence an individual's exposure to and involvement in crime. Additionally, these conditions tend to be geographically clustered in regions, meaning that there are particular areas which have high concentrations of exposure to delinquent activities, crime and recidivism (Abrams & Freisthler, 2010). Thus, many of the neighborhood-level problems that triggered youths' initial involvement in crime make them vulnerable to re-offending upon their release.

Additional literature suggests that criminal activity in low-income and/or socially disorganized neighborhoods is related to the heavy police presence that is often found within these areas. Further, residents in these communities often experience or perceive that there is an excessive police presence, use of police force, and racial profiling (Kane, 2002; Smith, 1986). As a result, when former offenders return home, they may have exposure to a high level of police contact and surveillance, thus making their probation or parole status more tenuous (Chapman, Desai, & Falzer, 2006).

In his work on transition-age youth, Arnett (2004) has suggested that emerging adulthood can be considered an opportunity for youth to make changes in the areas of their lives with which they are unhappy. Yet it is important to keep in mind that for youth with histories of incarceration, many are trying to make these life changes in neighborhoods and environments that remain unchanged. All of these factors can make it hard for youth to thrive in their former neighborhood settings after returning home from correctional placements.

Chapter III

Theoretical Review

Introduction

As established in Chapter II, the experience of juvenile incarceration can result in accumulated disadvantages that negatively affect the transition to a successful and independent adulthood. One important indicator of transition success for formerly incarcerated youth is the ability to stop offending and avoid further contact with the criminal justice system. Unfortunately, many youth are not successful in achieving this goal. As mentioned earlier, a large percentage (up to 85%) of formerly incarcerated youth are re-arrested within five years of release (Trulson et al., 2005). This figure indicates that criminal desistance is a major challenge for formerly incarcerated youth to overcome.

Research has established various risk factors for repeat offending, including being male, gang-involved, having mental health or substance abuse disorders, and residing in multiple out-of-home placements (Cottle, Lee, & Heilbrun, 2001; Dembo, et al., 1998; Trulson et al., 2005). However, while scholars have identified the risk factors for recidivism, much less is known about the pathways that lead youth offenders away from crime, particularly during the transition to adulthood. In order to interrupt cycles of crime and incarceration among formerly incarcerated youth, it is necessary for researchers to understand more about the factors and situations that can help these young people move away from their criminally-involved pasts.

Criminal Desistance Theory

Criminal desistance theory is a body of literature that seeks to understand how criminally-involved individuals eventually reoffend less or stop engaging in crime altogether. Currently, there is no one way to conceptualize and measure desistance. Many criminologists

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measure this concept in terms of whether or not an individual has terminated his/her offending according to official or self-reports. Studies that utilize this framework typically pick a particular cutoff date or time frame, and anyone who is re-arrested or re-incarcerated after this date is labeled as being a "persister" in criminal behavior. Contrarily, those who have avoided further contact with the law by this date are considered to be criminal "desisters" (Loeber et al., 2004; Massoglia & Uggen, 2007). The benefit of this approach is that it is a clear-cut measure of the extent to which an individual continues to be involved in criminal activity. Also, this approach allows researchers to link specific variables to desistance outcomes.

However, another body of research has critiqued this approach, arguing that measuring desistance solely in terms of recidivism provides a very narrow understanding of changes in criminal activity, and does not fully explain how and why individuals stop offending (Bushway, Thornberry, & Krohn, 2003; Mulvey et al., 2004). Looking solely at recidivism does not allow for researchers to detect variation among individual offenders, such as why some individuals stop offending at certain points while others do not. Moreover, the particular cutoff date used in any given study may not provide ample time for an offender to completely desist from his/her criminal activity. Last, although establishing criminal recidivism does capture reoffending behaviors, it does not capture criminal acts which offenders are not arrested for, or antisocial activity which they are engaging in which may be related to crime (such as drug use or gang involvement).

In response to these critiques, some scholars have advocated for a more comprehensive understanding of criminal desistance, which takes into account the idea that disruptions in criminal activity are not the result of a simple decision, nor do they occur at a single end-point in time. Rather, desistance can be conceptualized as a multilayered process that involves a series of

internal and external changes that prompt individuals to alter their behaviors and to adopt new

lifestyles that do not involve criminal activity (Mulvey, et al., 2004). These desistance theorists

then seek to assess the actual state of non-offending, as well as the underlying mechanisms that

lead to the "termination of offending" (Laub & Boonstoppel, 2012), including thought patterns,

activities, and events which enable people to gradually move away from their old criminal

behaviors and activities.

Criminal Desistance: Developmental, Environmental, Subjective, and Life Course Accounts

Extant literature currently has offered a range of explanations for the factors that facilitate

criminal desistance, particularly among adult offenders. Rather than viewing one explanation as

holding the key to understanding the desistance process, it is important to consider how these

explanations overlap, with each account providing some insight into how behavior change may

occur. In doing so, it becomes clear that criminal desistance is not triggered by one single factor

but rather, it is stimulated by the interaction between both internal and ecological factors

including individual behavioral and identity changes, changing life circumstances, and

environmental (neighborhood) context.

One of the most established theories regarding criminal desistance asserts that while a

large number of youth may engage in delinquent activity during adolescence, the majority will

"age out" of this behavior in early adulthood, and only a small group will go on to become "life-

course persistent" offenders as adults (Moffitt, 1993). This aging out naturally occurs as youth

enter into adulthood, explore different life options, and have more exposure to the benefits of

living a pro-social lifestyle. This literature also suggests that as youth enter into adulthood, they

experience a growth in their maturity level, which positively impacts their behaviors, problem-

solving skills, reasoning capabilities, and ability to cope with life challenges- all of which

enables them to make more mature life decisions (Gardner, 1993; Glueck & Glueck, 1943; Steinberg & Cauffman, 1996).

Biological factors may play a role in this aging out process as well. With aging comes a reduction in physical stamina, meaning that offenders do not have the same level of physical strength that is needed to sustain a criminal lifestyle (Gove, 1985). A new body of neuroscience has also shown, albeit in an exploratory fashion, that regions of the brain related to impulse control, advanced thinking and reasoning does not complete its development until around age 25 or even later. Prior to this time, young people may engage in criminal activity without a fully developed capacity to make mature or well reasoned decisions (Coalition for Juvenile Justice Fact Sheet, n.d.). Additionally, neurological research has shown that among male offenders, aging is linked to declining levels of testosterone and reduced levels of dopamine- both of which are associated with the feelings of excitement that come when one engages in thrill-seeking behavior (Farley, 1986; Joseph & Roth, 1983; Rance et al., 1993).

In contrast to these aging out theories, another body of desistance literature has asserted that it is not the process of aging itself that triggers desistance, but rather, desistance results from the new life roles and associations that accompany adulthood. This line of thought has its roots in social learning theories of delinquency, which highlight the role of environment in shaping social behavior. In other words, individuals model their behavior after what they see around them, and also by the positive and negative ways that others respond to their behavior (i.e. with rewards or consequences). According to this way of thinking, delinquent youth often have friends who engage in similar activities. However, as they mature into adulthood and their social networks begin to change, they are likely to have increased exposure to a more pro-social peer group, and they begin to imitate the behaviors and attitudes of this positive peer element (Warr,

1993). Further, social learning theorists have asserted that the new life responsibilities that come

with adulthood minimize the amount of time and effort that one has to engage in criminal

activities (Cernkovich & Giordano, 2001).

Other scholars have countered that while the biological and social aspects of aging are

important to the desistance process, there are subjective identity changes that also play a role.

Thus, in order for any life events or aging processes to lead to sustained change, an identity shift

must take place as well. In Maruna's (2001) study of criminal persisters and desisters, he found

that a key difference between the two groups was that successful desisters disassociated

themselves from their offender identities and actively took on new identities as law-abiding,

reformed individuals. This identity shift represented a key step in their desistance process. This

shift also enabled them to develop a life narrative that helped them to explain their past offending

behavior in terms of who they used to be (their "troubled" selves), and their current state of being

(their "reformed" selves). Abrams & Aguilar (2005) identified similar patterns in their

qualitative work with incarcerated adolescent males, wherein the young men constructed

narratives about their "old selves" and "possible selves" when envisioning their life outside the

institution. In more recent research, Abrams (2011) found that youth who were most motivated

to desist from crime while incarcerated were more likely to envision themselves as having a non-

offending identity in the future, and they also developed specific strategies while incarcerated to

help them achieve this future desired self.

Although diverse, these theories share an emphasis on the internal aspects of behavioral

change, or, the individual motivation and determination that individuals must exert in order to

transform their lives. Life-course theorists offer a perspective that acknowledges these

individual determinants of desistance, but that also considers how these factors are situated in

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particular social and historical contexts. The most prominent of these theorists are Robert Sampson and John Laub, who offer an age-graded perspective on desistance that emphasizes behavioral, relational, and circumstantial changes. Their major claims are rooted in a social control framework, which has asserted that criminal activity results when individuals have weak social ties to the people and places around them. However, when offenders have strong social ties to the people and places in their environment, these relationships exert an informal social control that helps them to create new life patterns and routines and to establish a more pro-social, stable lifestyle. Additionally, these relationships provide opportunities for supervision and monitoring over offenders, and an opportunity for them to change their structures and routines. Taken together, all of these factors create an environment that may encourage formerly incarcerated individuals to reduce or altogether cease their involvement in criminal activity. To support their contention, Sampson and Laub (1990) analyzed data based on the criminal experiences of a group of delinquent and non-delinquent males from childhood to age 32. They found that having strong social ties, particularly strong marital attachment and job stability, both contributed to a reduction in criminal behavior in adulthood.

Another important concept in Sampson and Laub's life course perspective is that of turning points and trajectories. Trajectories refer to long-term behavioral patterns and paths which develop over the life span. As offenders move throughout the life course, they may encounter specific turning points which enable them to shift their criminal trajectories (Elder, 1985). For example, adopting new roles such as marriage and employment in adulthood can serve as turning points for offenders, in that they provide them with opportunities to make positive behavioral and life style changes that are a key part of the desistance process (Sampson & Laub, 1993). Turning points may also result from major events that take place in offenders'

lives. For example, undergoing multiple stints in prison or experiencing the death of a friend due

to violence may prompt offenders to reduce their criminal activity as they begin to reflect on the

real-life consequences of their actions (Baskin & Sommers, 1998; Hughes, 1998). Such events

can trigger a psychological shift, or self-evaluative process, in the mind of an offender where

he/she must consider the personal costs and benefits associated with their behavior, and make a

conscious choice to either continue or end their involvement in crime.

Additionally, life-course theorists have argued that offenders' ability to actualize their

plans to desist from crime are situated in a particular context, and it is this interaction between

internal and external factors that ultimately shapes one's desistance course. Examples of this

point include changing economic conditions which limit the availability of local jobs, changes in

police practices (i.e. harsher arrest and sentencing practices), the availability of community

resources, or the historical relationships (positive or negative) that exist between community

members and institutions such as the police force or school system (Laub & Boonstoppel, 2012;

Smith, 2006). For individuals who are trying to avoid criminal and police contact, their

decisions, behaviors, and activities are partially shaped by these environmental influences. In

this way, it is clear that there are multiple pathways which lead to one's desistance from crime.

Overall, desistance seems best understood as a process that involves individuals exerting their

personal agency to change, while interacting with and responding to the opportunities, demands,

and macro-level processes presented within their specific social and life contexts (Mulvey et al.,

2004; Sampson & Laub, 1990).

Although the aforementioned studies have established correlates of criminal desistance,

most of this knowledge is based on research concerning adults. Very little research has explored

how these factors operate specifically in the lives of formerly incarcerated young men who are

undergoing the transition to adulthood, who are no longer juveniles but who have not yet reached the status of adulthood that is known to trigger changes in criminal behavior. A small body of qualitative literature focusing on desistance among formerly incarcerated youth has attempted to address this research gap, focusing mostly on internal or behavioral facets of criminal behavior change. Todis et al. (2001) conducted a five-year study that examined resiliency and coping processes among 15 formerly incarcerated adolescents in Oregon. Their study revealed that possessing strong problem-solving skills and motivation to change, along with support from positive adult role models, were most associated with youth who exhibited low or no recidivism levels. Similarly, Hughes (1998) conducted a two-year study regarding factors that facilitated desistance among a group of formerly incarcerated males (ages 18-27) using a life course theoretical framework. Hughes' work highlighted how becoming a father, having contemplation time while incarcerated to reflect on past and future decisions, and the fear of future incarceration or physical harm all served as positive turning points in the young men's criminal trajectories.

More recently, Inderbitzin (2009) studied the concept of emerging adulthood in her ethnographic study with a group of incarcerated young men who were in the process of transitioning back into the community as young adults. The study focused on internal strategies the young men used to cope with these dual transitions, and the barriers they encountered for which they had little support to overcome. Along these lines, Abrams (2005, 2006, 2007, 2009) has conducted extensive qualitative research regarding the correctional and community reentry experiences of incarcerated youth. Her work on community reentry specifically highlights how youth perceive and cope with the barriers they face while trying to adjust to life "on the outs."

Each of these studies provides some insight into the factors that may help formerly incarcerated youth to desist from crime, and they also provide support for the idea that multiple factors can trigger desistance among youth offenders. However, none of these studies focus specifically on how youth's desistance processes unfold in relation to their transition to adulthood and how young people perceive and cope with the challenges they may encounter in undergoing these dual journeys. Further, this research does not explore the external strategies that formerly incarcerated youth utilize to help them navigate these journeys/processes in their immediate environments. Inderbitzin's work comes closest to addressing this research topic, but it only examined how these experiences transpired in the initial stages of community reentry, and does not provide any insight into longer term processes. Additional research is thus needed to explore the internal <u>and</u> external processes that work to effect criminal desistance among transition-age youth.

Social Supports and Criminal Desistance

One point that each of the aforementioned studies touched on was the role of social supports in helping youth to transition home from the correctional system. Social supports are often cited in the community reentry literature as playing an instrumental role in offering youth the stability and assistance they need to cope with challenges they face post-release (Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004; Todis et al., 2001). However, quantitative and qualitative studies have shown mixed results regarding how these supports actually operate and the effectiveness of these supports in reducing criminal activity among youth who have been incarcerated.

Social Supports among Formerly Incarcerated Youth

Social supports are commonly understood in the literature as the tangible and instrumental assistance that is provided by one's social network. This social network can consist

of formal supports provided by organizations (i.e. schools, church, social welfare programs), and informal supports provided by the people in one's life (i.e. family, friends). Together, both types of networks can provide emotional support, advice, material aid, information, guidance, and helpful services (Mitchell & Trickett, 1980). Social support networks are important for individual functioning because they are enduring, and because they help people to cope with daily life (Garbarino, 1983), and during periods of stress (Collins, 2001). They are also extremely important among adolescents because they help them to better cope with their transition into adulthood (Harper et al., 2008).

From a theoretical perspective, having strong social ties to either formal or informal networks can facilitate desistance among offenders because they generate relationships which can potentially provide offenders with opportunities for supervision and monitoring, supportive environments, a change in structure and routines, and identity transformation (Laub & Sampson, 2003). However, this assertion is based on the experiences of adult offenders, while what remains unclear in the literature is how transition-age young adults build and utilize the social supports within their environment to help them navigate the desistance process.

Formal supports: In the community reentry literature, formal supports commonly refer to programs which can help offenders meet the practical, social, and emotional needs they may have after returning home from the correctional system (Altschuler & Brash, 2004). Formal services related to employment, mental health, substance, abuse, and housing for example, can provide youth with useful life skills and tools, and can help them to establish a foundation that enables healthy, independent adult functioning (Jenson, Hawkins, & Catalano, 1986). Scholars also assert that participation in formal programs can help formerly incarcerated youth establish positive habits and routines that may help them to avoid recidivism (Altschuler & Armstrong,

2002). For all of these reasons, a number of scholars and advocates in criminal justice strongly encourage youth to connect with formal support services as they are transitioning out of the correctional system (Altshuler and Armstrong, 1994; Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004).

A small number of studies have empirically demonstrated the benefits of youth offenders engaging in specific types of formal support programs post-release. Trupin et al. (2004) conducted a study regarding the effectiveness of transitional support for incarcerated youth leaving the correctional system, and found that those who received more extensive post-discharge planning or who had received community services in the one-year follow-up period were less likely to reoffend than youth who did not receive these services. Moreover, receipt of mental health support specifically within the first three months of leaving the facility was associated with a lower likelihood of reoffending. Along these lines, in a study of formerly incarcerated youth in Oregon, youth who received mental health services were 2.25 times more likely to be engaged in work or school at six months post-release than those who did not receive these services. Individuals who participated in other types of community-based services (i.e. vocational rehabilitation, public welfare) were 1.96 times more likely to be engaged in work or school one year after being released (Bullis, Yovanoff, & Havel, 2004).

Despite the benefits that these formal programs may offer, other literature indicates that structured services may *not* produce any reductions in recidivism. For example, the federal government has provided one of the most extensive formal support programs in the form of the Intensive Aftercare Program (IAP). The IAP was initiated by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in 1988 in an effort to strengthen juvenile aftercare services. In recognition of the reentry needs that youth offenders have, the IAP aimed to provide youth with a structured continuum of pre-release correctional services and community-based post-release

services designed to 1) help youth to reintegrate back into their families and communities; 2) link youth with appropriate community agencies (i.e. counseling and treatment services) and; 3) provide youth with community supervision (Altschuler, Armstrong, & Mackenzie, 1999). The OJJDP piloted the IAP program in several states across the country however it has not yet demonstrated any effectiveness. Wiebush et al. (2005) conducted extensive evaluations of 3 IAP sites and found no significant differences in recidivism rates between IAP participants and youth who did not receive these specialized services. Such outcomes raise questions about the usefulness of formal supports in helping youth offenders successfully reintegrate into the community.

When youth are left are on their own to engage in formal service programs, the outcomes are also poor. A large-scale study of youth who exited the Illinois correctional system from 1996 to 2003 for example, found that nearly one-half of the sample had little to no involvement with child-serving systems such as those providing educational, public assistance, and substance abuse-related services (Cusick, Goerge, & Bell, 2008). Ironically, those youth who were least involved with formal program services had the lowest recidivism rates in the sample.

Informal supports: The literature indicates similarly mixed results regarding the role that informal support systems play in the lives of formerly incarcerated youth and young adult offenders. Informal supports in this arena commonly refer to the emotional and instrumental forms of assistance that people within the offender's social network can provide. For example, in a number of qualitative studies, youth and young adults have suggested that family members and friends played a key role in helping them reintegrate back into the community by helping in areas related to housing, financial assistance, child care, advice and mentoring (Abrams, 2007; Inderbitzen, 2009; Sullivan, 2004; Todis, et al., 2004).

In addition to this short-term support, other studies highlight how family members and friends can potentially provide offenders with long-term structure and supervision that can be helpful in facilitating desistance (Mills & Codd, 2008). For example, in their research involving marriage and employment among adult offenders, Sampson & Laub (1993, 2001) found that it was not simply that these new life roles on their own are what prompted desistance. Rather, the social bonds found in marriage and employment triggered identity changes and self-reflection processes among offenders that eventually encouraged their behavior change. Moreover, these bonds exerted an informal social control that provided offenders with an incentive to stay away from crime.

Other literature however, calls attention to the negative influences of informal networks on the lives of ex-offenders, particularly when these networks are still entrenched in deviant activity. For example, in his longitudinal ethnographic work on 19 gang-involved young, male offenders in Chicago, Scott (2004) found that formerly affiliated youth often relied on their gang networks to provide them with benefits such as money, friendship, and a "cushion" which helped them to deal with the effects of repeated imprisonment. However, associating with these networks ultimately hindered the young men's ability to gain employment, isolated them from non-affiliated family and friends, and increased their likelihood of recidivism. Other empirical research echoes this sentiment, finding that involvement with deviant peers is associated with increased or continued criminal involvement among adolescent and young adult offenders, and that the utilization of informal neighborhood networks can inhibit youths' social mobility (Sullivan, 2004).

Social Supports and Offender Perceptions

The literature thus presents a very mixed and unclear view regarding the role that social supports play in the lives of formerly incarcerated youth as they transition to adulthood. In order to better understand how youths' support systems can be used to facilitate desistance, it is important to explore how formerly incarcerated youth perceive and draw upon these networks as they try to desist from crime. Understanding offender perceptions of their own environments can shed light on the desistance process as a whole. The way in which offenders perceive their environment can influence their decision-making processes, their behaviors, and how they interact with people and places around them (Wikstrom & Loeber, 2000). For example, in a study of adult offenders residing in high incarceration neighborhoods in Florida, Rose, Clear, & Ryder (2000) found that when adult offenders perceived themselves as carrying a social stigma because of their ex-offender status, they were less likely to interact with the people and places (and potential sources of support) within their neighborhoods. An understanding of offender perceptions can also provide insight into the underlying mechanisms of the criminal desistance process. Sampson and Laub (2005) explain that, "a focus purely on institutional, or structural, turning points and opportunities is incomplete, for such opportunities are mediated by perceptions and human decision making." In other words, an understanding of offender perceptions can bring to light how offenders respond to and deal with events and situations which they may encounter along their desistance journeys.

One way of applying this line of thought in terms of social supports is exploring how young people's perceptions of their social support networks correlate with their actual use of these systems. In a qualitative study of youth offenders preparing for release from a correctional institution in Minnesota, Abrams (2007) found that the youth had accurate perceptions about the "old friends and influences" that would pose barriers to their community reentry success once

they returned home. In response, they developed "selective involvement" coping mechanisms, wherein they made strategic decisions in regards to when and how they would interact with these friendship networks. In regards to this process Abrams asserted: "These coping strategies, while seemingly risky, reflect a realistic picture of how offenders navigated their commitment to avoid re-incarceration yet still surround themselves with people, and an environment, that was familiar to them" (p. 47).

This example of how young people navigate their social support systems raises interest in other strategies that youth utilize to help them deal with people and places in their environments which they may perceive as being either helpful or a hindrance to their desistance goals. A number of scholars and practitioners have suggested that formerly incarcerated youth should surround themselves with positive support networks, and should distance themselves from negative peer and family influences and temptations. However, this perspective does not take into account the fact that distancing oneself from peer and/or familial networks may not be a viable option, and many youth may perceive themselves as having little choice but to continue to interact with the networks and neighborhood settings that are most familiar to them. Further, in regards to formal supports, scholars have not examined how youth perceive the formal programs around them, and whether or not they perceive these systems as being helpful or even available to meet their needs. For these reasons, it is important to explore offender perceptions about their use of formal and informal social supports, and the strategies they use to navigate existing supports as they undergo the journey towards adulthood. Addressing this research gap may provide important insight into how social supports can be used to promote desistance, and may help to explain the inconsistencies regarding the role of social supports in the criminal desistance

process. This study explored these gaps in the literature by addressing the following research questions:

1. How do formerly incarcerated young men (ages 19-24) navigate barriers to desistance during their transition to adulthood?

2. In what ways do young adult men perceive and utilize formal and informal social supports as they transition to adulthood?

3. How does social support relate to desistance from crime in the transition to adulthood?

Chapter IV

Research Paradigm and Methodology

Qualitative Research Paradigm

In the previous chapter I outlined the benefits of studying desistance as a process, rather than a state or outcome. Based on this assertion, this study had two primary research goals: The first goal was to understand the process of criminal desistance among formerly incarcerated young men during the transition to adulthood. The second goal of the study was to understand young men's perceptions and utilization of social supports as this relates to the desistance process. Quantitative methodology has many merits in terms of tracking particular aspects of desistance, such as determining when and at what point changes in criminal behavior occur, and the variables that are associated with these changes. However, quantitative methodology does not necessarily provide an in-depth portrait of the *process* of criminal desistance, including why certain outcomes occur, and what underlying mechanisms lead to changes in criminal behavior. In order to capture these nuances, qualitative inquiry guided this study.

Qualitative research is a method of inquiry that seeks to understand the "meanings and perspectives of participants" (Hoshmand, 1989). It places value on collecting detailed, in-depth descriptions from individuals, including how they make sense of and give meaning to their lives and experiences. Using methods such as in-depth interviews, field observations, case studies, and/or focus groups, qualitative research studies people in their natural settings, and uses these varied sources of information in order to "describe routine and problematic moments in individuals' lives" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994 p. 2). Qualitative research allows participants to tell

their own stories, and in this way, it places their lived experiences at the center of the research process.

A qualitative framework was particularly helpful for the research questions posed in this study. The literature highlights reasons why criminal desistance may be particularly challenging for formerly incarcerated young men. Yet extant literature lacks a complete understanding of how young men can overcome these challenges and shift their criminal trajectories, and how their social networks may help (or hinder) them in this process. Criminal desistance theory provides some insight into these matters however it has not yet explored how these processes operate among transition-age young men specifically. Qualitative inquiry, with its emphasis on exploring participants' perspectives and subjectivities, illuminated these research areas that are not fully understood.

Research Methodology: Narrative Research

Narrative research was the primary methodological tool used in this study. In narrative research, researchers gather details about a person's life history, including key experiences and events, in order to construct a meaningful, explanatory story about his/her life (Creswell, 2007). Narrative research makes the assumption that human beings are constantly engaged in storytelling, and they share these stories in various forms including written texts, objects such as photographs or memos, and/or through oral stories as seen in participant interviews and testimonies (Sandelowski, 2007). However the narrative is expressed, the emphasis is on people telling a story which gives "an account of en event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected" (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 17).

Narrative research does not seek to make causal, predictive statements. Instead, through detailed storytelling, this approach allows participant to reflect on their past experiences, create

visions for the future, and generally make sense of how their lives have unfolded (Rappaport, 1993). This telling of stories leads to a type of self-reflection that can provide participants with new insights about their pasts; narrative researchers have asserted that this type of insight can only be gained in retrospect, and not when one is "in the moment" of an experience (Freeman, 1984). Storytelling thus helps both the participant and the researcher to make important connections between life events and outcomes, and to understand why certain events have happened in the subjects' lives (Bruner, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988).

Narrative research also has an emancipatory element. Sandelowski (2007) has suggested that narrative studies "illustrate how lives can be understood, revealed, and transformed in stories and by the very act of storytelling." (p. 163). The stories that people tell about themselves provide them with a model for what their lives should be, and allows them the opportunity to "protest" the past stories (or lack of stories) that have been told about them. This process of allowing individuals to negotiate their past and present selves is consistent with criminal research which also highlights the value of self-reflection in the desistance process. For example, in his work on criminal desistance among juvenile offenders, Maruna (2001) explained that incarcerated youth should have an opportunity to tell their stories, because this process allows them to make sense of their lives, including whom they have been and who they see themselves as becoming in the future. For all of these reasons, narrative research can be useful for giving voice to individuals and groups whose voices are often excluded or muted in traditional scientific research or public discourse (Beverly, 2005; Chase, 2005).

Rationale for Narrative Research

This study relied on retrospective data collection using a narrative life history approach. Narrative research was well-suited for criminal desistance studies relying on retrospective data

collection. Prospective data collection can be beneficial for a study about criminal desistance, the primary benefit being that it allows researchers to capture participants "in the moment." In this sense, the researcher is able to study the desistance process as it actually unfolds. However, prospective data collection also entails several limitations. First, it typically involves following participants over a long period of time in order to capture a depth and range of experiences. Such research requires a substantial amount of financial and staffing resources in order to retain participants over time. Additionally, the researcher is presented with the dilemma of not knowing when to end the study, as it is difficult to ascertain when someone has truly desisted. Further, sample attrition can be a problem with prospective data collection, due to the fact that participants may re-locate or be re-incarcerated during the course of the study. Last, the researcher may run the risk of influencing the participants' desistance courses, thus compromising the trustworthiness of the data.

Retrospective data collection involves research with participants who have already had some experience with the research phenomenon being studied. For this study, this approach allowed me to work with participants who had some familiarity with the criminal desistance process, and who could thus offer some insight into how and why their particular outcomes occurred. They were able to reflect back on their desistance experiences, including their successes, the barriers they encountered, and the people and places that supported them in their journey. This type of insight would not have been as easily captured with a prospective research study.

A limitation of retrospective data collection is that it relies greatly on participant recall of events. This raises concerns about the reliability of the data, in that participants may not be able to accurately recall their prior experiences. In order to address this limitation, the participants in

this study fell between the ages of 19-24. Young men who were in this age range were still in the "transition age youth" category, and as such, had greater recall of their recent experiences. Another limitation of retrospective data is that participants may overlook or omit details which they do not wish to share such as their current involvement in crime. However, it should be noted that any research involving self-reported data is subject to this limitation (Parry, Thomson, Fowkes, 1999), and thus all researchers must work to establish rapport and a sense of trust with participants in order to encourage honesty and authenticity during the course of the study.

Overall, the narrative approach was well suited for research regarding criminal desistance among formerly incarcerated transition-age youth. Through narratives, the young men were able to explain the underlying processes at work in their lives that influenced (either positively or negatively) their desistance process. Often, researchers have tracked outcomes among this group without providing any context as to how these outcomes have transpired, or how they play out in the context of becoming an adult. In relaying their life narratives and focusing specifically on the transition to adult period young men were afforded the opportunity to explain not only how these outcomes have occurred, but also the various steps involved with desistance, including both moments of success (i.e. making good choices related to criminal activity) and relapse (i.e. reoffending).

In addition to its emphasis on sharing individual life journeys and experiences, narrative research also has a contextual focus, meaning it attempts to situate the stories that people tell in the multiple contexts in which they occur. This includes personal, historical, and social context such as where one lives and works, their race and/or ethnicity, and where they are located in society (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This line of thinking fits well with the life course perspective on criminal desistance, which considers how environmental context influences the

desistance course.   The narrative approach thus allowed me as the researcher to analyze how the participants' major life events combined with contextual factors shaped their involvement in criminal activity.

To supplement the narrative methodology, I used two additional tools which allowed me to hone in on the young men's current desistance strategies, and their perceptions and use of social supports within their daily living environments. These tools are described in detail in the Data Collection and Data Analysis sections of this chapter.

Sampling

Qualitative research does not frequently lend itself to sampling procedures aimed at statistically representing the characteristics and tendencies of the general population. Instead, qualitative sampling often seeks to understand the "complex issues relating to human behavior" (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). As such, qualitative research seeks to study a diverse set of cases that have specific and intimate knowledge about the topics that are pertinent to the research. Further, qualitative sampling is naturalistic, meaning that it takes into account the individual characteristics of the participants as well as larger contextual factors that influence how an individual experiences the world around him/her.   In taking this holistic approach, a qualitative sample can achieve an in-depth understanding of all of the dynamics that are pertinent to the research.

Sampling Strategy

This study sample was comprised of young men who varied in their desistance experiences. In order to capture these diverse experiences, it was important to obtain a sample that included people who were at different points in their desistance journeys, and who had different reasons for their desistance success or lack thereof. To achieve this goal, I combined

the following two sampling strategies commonly associated with qualitative research: 1) maximum variation and 2) stratified purposive sampling.

Maximum variation. Maximum variation sampling is a way of purposefully selecting participants in order to represent a wide range of experiences with regards to the study topic. In choosing participants who vary in particular domains of interest, researchers can better detect commonalities that exist between participants in spite of these variations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this study, I aimed to have a sample that encompassed variations in desistance patterns, and individuals who had experienced varying levels of success in desisting from crime.

Stratified purposive sampling. In stratified purposive sampling, participants are specifically chosen because they represent "information-rich" cases that meet certain criteria or that have certain characteristics (Patton, 1990, 2002).   This method of sampling entails creating a sample within a sample, wherein cases are selected purposively in order to fit criteria that are relevant to the goals of the research study, and cases which vary on a particular dimension from one another (Patton, 2001, 2002). Thus the cases within each stratum are similar to each other, but they vary from the larger sample. Stratified purposive sampling does not achieve sample generalizability, but it does help to ensure that the participants share characteristics that are represented in the target population of interest.

Both techniques allowed me to purposely form a diverse group of study participants that included: a) young men who self-reported having histories of recidivism following juvenile incarceration (including re-arrests, re-incarceration, re-convictions on record subsequent to their juvenile placement as well as criminal incidents that did not go on record; and b) young men who self-reported desistance from criminal activity. This grouping strategy was consistent with

how other researchers have formed their participant pools when studying criminal desistance, and helped to achieve the goal of maximum variation (Loeber, et al., 2004; Todis, 2001).

Study Population

The participants who comprised the sampling pool had been recruited through a related study involving transition-age young adult men who were incarcerated in a juvenile probation camp in Los Angeles County between the years of 2003 and 2009. From 2009-2010, I served as a project manager for a study entitled "Educational Interventions for Incarcerated Youth: A Five-Year Follow-up Study." The purpose of this study was to track the community reentry and life experiences of formerly incarcerated young men who received transitional supports from Fresh Start- a non-profit organization serving a male probation camp in Los Angeles County. Specifically, the study was interested in documenting the young men's outcomes in the domains that are commonly linked to community reentry in the literature including education, employment, gang membership, formal and informal support systems, substance abuse, mental health, independent living, and criminal desistance.

A total of 76 young men who received services from Fresh Start within the past five years completed the telephone-administered survey. The following is a brief overview of the study's primary findings, including sample characteristics and the diverse experiences the young men have had since exiting camp:

- Education: 63% had earned their High School diploma or passed the General Equivalency Degree (GED) test;

- Employment: 53% were currently employed;

- Formal Supports: 35% had met with their Fresh Start counselors within the past year; 32% used a health clinic, and 30% used services connected with a religious organization;

- Desistance: 65% had been re-arrested since their juvenile incarceration, and 57% had spent time in jail since their juvenile incarceration;

- Gang membership: 31% were still associated with a gang;

- Independence: 71% were still financially dependent on others and 54% lived at home;

- Substance abuse: 20% exhibited traits strongly associated with alcoholism and 18% met the criteria for having a severe drug dependence problem and;

- Mental health: 23% had some indication of mental or emotional distress.

After completing the telephone survey, the young men were asked if they were willing to be contacted for a future study. Those who answered yes provided the research team with three telephone numbers where they could be reached in the future, a mailing address, an e-mail address (if applicable), and the names of three people who know where to find them. In total, 71 of the survey respondents indicated willingness to be contacted for a follow-up study. Sixty five of these youth met the age criteria for this study (i.e., 19-24), and this group comprised the sampling pool for the current study.

Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for this study included: a) a history of juvenile incarceration; b) currently between the ages of 19 to 24; c) ability to converse in English d) indicated a willingness to participate in a follow-up study in a related telephone survey and; e) were able to provide current contact information and the contact information for at least three family members or friends who knew how to locate them in case their contact information changed. Individuals who did not meet one or more of the inclusion criteria were excluded from the group of youth recruited for the study.

Recruitment

Recruitment for this study occurred in two stages. First, individuals who agreed to be contacted and who met the age criteria (n = 65) received an initial recruitment letter in the mail informing them of the goals and purpose of the current study. The letter included a phone number the young men could call if they did not wish to be contacted further about the study. It also included my name and phone number in the event that they had any questions or concerns about the study (see Appendix A). Next, individuals who did not opt out of study were contacted by phone or by email to request their participation. After this initial phone conversation, which once again relayed the goals and purpose of the study, a meeting was scheduled.

Out of the 65 participants who were eligible for the study, 17 were unreachable by phone (disconnected or wrong numbers), 8 declined to participate, and 2 had relocated. This left a total of 38 who remained eligible for the study. Of this group, I was able to interview 15 participants two times each for a total of 30 interviews.[3] This sample size is consistent with other qualitative research involving reentry youth (Abrams, 2007; Hughes, 1998; Todis et al., 2001). It was also feasible given the difficulties involved with retaining study participation among young people within this age group who have had histories of incarceration.

Table 1 provides the demographic data for each member of the final study sample, along with three additional variables that were pertinent to their desistance process: involvement with

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[3] I completed one interview with a 16th participant during the data collection period. However, despite numerous attempts to meet with him again, I was unable to schedule a second interview with him, and thus, I removed him from the study sample.

the criminal justice system since leaving camp, engagement in work or school, and gang involvement. The participants ranged in age from 19-24, with an average age of 22. Sixty percent of the sample identified as Latino or Hispanic, 26% were Black, 7% was White and 7% was Pilipino. Forty six percent of the young men were engaged in work or school, and 40% were currently involved in a gang. The young men had been out of juvenile probation camp for an average of four years and 53% had been rearrested since that time.

Table 1. Sample Demographics

Typology	Name	Age	Race	Prior Gang Involvement	Current Gang Involvement	Engaged in Work or School
1	Oscar	19	Latino	Yes	No	Yes
	John	19	Latino	Yes	No	Yes
	Eduardo	19	Latino	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Shawn	22	Black	No	No	Yes
	Mario	23	Latino	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Gabriel	24	Latino	Yes	No	Yes
	Steven	24	Latino	No	No	Yes
2	Tyrone	20	Black	No	No	No
	Cesar	23	Latino	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Greg	23	White	No	No	No
	Chris	24	Black	No	No	No
3	Carlos	20	Latino	Yes	Yes	No
	Paul	23	Pilipino	Yes	Yes	No
	Jerry	23	Latino	Yes	Yes	No
	Mike	24	Black	No	No	No

Retention

To help retain study participation in between the two interviews, I provided each participant with $25 in the form of a gift certificate for completing the first interview, and

offered an additional gift certificate in the amount of $30 upon completion of the second interview. I also maintained phone and/or email contact with the study participants in between interviews, so that the study remained fresh in their minds over the period of data collection. Further, I made sure to conduct the follow-up interview within 2 weeks of the first interview with the exception of one participant whose schedule did not allow him to be re-interviewed until two months after his first interview.

Data Collection

Data collection took place over a period of ten months. The primary data collection tool involved in-depth interviews. I supplemented the interviews using two additional instruments, described in detail below.

In-depth Interviews

Two face-to-face, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant. The majority of the interviews were conducted in pairs (including myself and another researcher), and ten of the thirty interviews were conducted by me alone.   In-depth interviews are well suited for research about criminal desistance and for the narrative methodology which guided this study. In-depth interviews are also useful when researchers want to obtain the detailed thoughts and opinions of research participants regarding a particular subject matter, and when they want to understand the meaning that people give to their life experiences (Giele, 2009). In this study, the interviews sought detailed information about the following: 1) the life histories and experiences of the participants leading up to and during their involvement in the criminal justice system; 2) how the participants navigated and the transition to adulthood and criminal desistance; 3) how the participants perceived and utilized social supports in their daily living environments.

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The interviews were semi-structured using a list of "Topic Guides" that pertained to aspects of each participant's life histories and criminal desistance journeys in the transition to adulthood. The Topic Guides helped to anchor the interviews in the study's primary research questions however, the conversation was free to flow without adherence to a particular sequencing of questions. Interview One focused on key experiences and life transitions, including topics such as family history, educational background, criminal history, mental health, important relationships, and major life events. During this interview I also asked questions related to the participants' transition to adulthood experiences including work, housing, family, the impact of being incarcerated as a juvenile and major life challenges and opportunities. Interview Two focused on social supports and desistance from crime. Questions during this interview covered perceptions and use of formal and informal support systems, barriers encountered in the criminal desistance process and community and neighborhood influences on desistance and criminal activity (see Appendix B).

I transcribed the interview recordings from Interview One prior to the start of Interview 2. This allowed me to review each participant's data to ensure that I had covered the main themes included in the Topic Guides. It also allowed me to come to Interview Two prepared to ask any pertinent follow-up questions.

Social Networking Exercises

Interview Two also included two tools for collecting social networking information. First, using the Convoy Model of Social Relations (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980), participants identified the informal social supports at work in their lives. They drew onto a circle the people who played the most significant role in their lives, and identified the function and scope of these support networks, including the type of support they received and relied on from these

individuals. Next I provided the participants with a printed map that represented their neighborhood and their surrounding environment so they could identify the informal and formal resources utilized within their daily living environments. They were asked to indicate on the map the people and places within their neighborhoods that provided them with resources such as educational, social, legal, recreational, health, employment services or emotional supports. Together, both instruments provided a visual display of the participants' perceptions of their surrounding environments, and of the people and places they thought helped them to meet their practical, emotional, and social needs (see Appendix C).

Interview Sites

For safety purposes, the interviews mostly took place at community sites located throughout Los Angeles. The sites were chosen based upon where the participants lived and were located in areas to which they could easily travel. Given that the participants lived in different places throughout Los Angeles, efforts were made to solidify at least 5 sites that were located near major bus lines in the following areas of the city: 1) Hollywood/Downtown; 2) South Los Angeles; 3) Leimert Park; 4) the San Fernando Valley and 5) Watts/Compton. Each of the sites was youth-friendly and had private spaces where the interviews were conducted. In cases when I was unable to locate a community site to conduct the interview at, the participants agreed to be interviewed in their homes.   Six participants in total had one or both of their interviews conducted in their home.

Data Management

Each interview took 1 to 2 hours and was digitally recorded. Upon completion of each interview, the interviews were transcribed and then transferred to a password-protected computer file for data analysis.

Data Analysis

I began to analyze the data midway through data collection. Miles & Huberman (1994) describe qualitative data analysis as a continuous process that involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. I began this process first by dividing the participants into two groups based on their self-reported recidivism histories since leaving camp. Nine of the 15 participants reported during their interviews that they had been rearrested in this time frame. However, after reviewing the participants' narrative histories it became clear that this recidivism variable did not accurately reflect where the participants were currently situated within their desistance journeys. Two of the nine in this group had been rearrested for new offenses and were still actively involved in crime; four had been rearrested for new offenses shortly after leaving camp, but they had taken steps since that time to desist; two were rearrested but only for minor probation violations (such as missing a meeting with a probation officer). Additionally, there were other participants who had had some involvement or were actively involved in criminal activity but had not been caught by the police.

As I continued to explore the criminal experiences of the sample, it was clear that the re-arrest variable in and of itself did not sufficiently describe the extent to which a participant was or was not still involved in crime, or the efforts a person had made towards desistance. Thus, rather than looking solely at the self-reported recidivism data I received from the narratives, I found it to be more useful for my analysis to group the young men by the *type* of offender they represented. Overall, I identified three offender typologies, each one characterized by a similar set of criminal desistance experiences.

In the next stages of my analysis I sought to accomplish the following tasks: 1) to construct individual life history narratives for each participant; and 2) to identify themes and

patterns across participants in terms of their desistance experiences and use of social supports in the transition to adulthood.

Life History Narratives

I used the information collected from Interview One to construct each participant's life history narrative. Life history narratives helped me to understand the key life experiences and turning points that shaped each participant's criminal trajectory. This part of the process constituted the "within-case" analysis, as it focused on each person's life history as an individual entity. The next step involved making comparisons between the participants regarding their life histories, criminal trajectories, and transition to adulthood experiences (cross-case analysis) (Giele, 2009). The qualitative data analysis methods of coding and memoing helped me to forge these within-case and cross-case analyses.

Coding. Coding is a key step in qualitative data analysis that entails "selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming" written data such as field observation notes or interview transcripts (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.10). Coding the data is a process that allows the researcher to organize and give meaning to the information that appears in the text (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Further, it allows the researcher to link the respondents' narratives to the larger concepts being analyzed in the study (Weiss, 1994).

In this study, I first engaged in a process of descriptive coding which entailed reviewing the interview transcripts and developing a set of descriptive codes for information that appeared to be relevant to my research questions. After developing this initial set of descriptive codes, I reviewed the codes and identified common themes that emerged across or within the narratives, which allowed me to generate a second list of more condensed codes. I then returned to the

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transcript data and reviewed them again using this condensed list. I continued this process of coding until it appeared that the major constructs in the study had been adequately explored.

Memoing. Memoing is a process of generating ideas and drawing conclusions about the codes that emerge from the text (Miles & Huberman, 1994). It allows the researcher to write down ideas that he/she may have about specific codes or concepts, in a way that helps him/her to thoughtfully make connections, or, to tie together, the data (Glaser, 1978). In this way, memos help researchers to "engage" with their research (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). Overall, memos are useful for helping researchers to explore hypotheses and relationships presented within the data.

Together, the tools of coding and memoing allowed me to construct individual timelines and life history narratives for each participant. I then analyzed each case so as to better understand each participant's background characteristics and life experiences that led up to his involvement in crime. This analysis also allowed me to examine each participant's journey in desisting from crime during the transition to adulthood. Last, this within-case analysis helped me to understand how each person's desistance course fit into or diverged from existing theories of criminal desistance.

Cross-Case Analyses: Identification of Patterns and Themes related to Social Supports and Criminal Desistance

After analyzing each case individually, I reviewed the codes and memos in order to identify important themes related to social support, the transition to adulthood, and criminal desistance. I identified these themes primarily by outlining reoccurring words and phrases as well as indigenous phrases used by the participants when describing particular experiences. Both of these strategies are common among qualitative research studies (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). I

then conducted cross-case analyses of these themes as a way of reaching tentative conclusions about the relationship between the study variables. This analysis allowed me to detect similarities and differences in these themes across cases. I conducted this analysis using a data matrix tool and by using the data collected from the social networking exercises mentioned earlier.

Data matrices. Data matrices are a way of visually displaying qualitative data in order to make cross-case comparisons in areas that are pertinent to the study's major goals. I constructed a thematic-conceptual data matrix, which is a type of matrix where one displays the data by important concepts or themes that present themselves in the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 127). This type of display allowed me to visually depict characteristics and experiences within the sample, and helped me to draw conclusions about the data that did not necessarily emerge when analyzing cases separately. I developed this matrix using the major codes and themes that emerged in the life history narratives including 1) level of social support; 2) offender typology; 3) transition to adulthood status and 4) desistance outcomes.

Social networking exercises. As mentioned, Interview Two included two social networking exercises that allowed the participants to visually depict the people and places they relied on for support. As I identified patterns and themes related to social supports and criminal desistance in the data matrix, I reviewed these social mapping tools to further draw out commonalities and differences in the types of formal and informal support systems relied on in the sample. This analysis also served as a triangulation tool that allowed me to check that the interview content related to social supports was consistent with the other forms of data collection.

Human Subjects and Ethical Concerns

Informed Consent

Prior to the start of the study, the participants were provided the opportunity for informed consent. The initial recruitment letter that they received in the mail explained the nature of the study, and included a phone number that participants could call if they did not wish to be contacted for the study. Upon meeting each participant for the first time, I again reviewed the details of the study, including confidentiality and privacy procedures, and the potential benefits and risks involved with participation in the study. Prior to the start of each interview, I answered any questions that the participants had at that time. Once these steps were completed, the participants signed a written consent form and were provided with a copy of this form to keep for their records.

Confidentiality

To protect the participants' confidentiality and privacy, all of the interviews were transcribed and stored in a password-protected computer. In the transcription process, abbreviations and then pseudonyms were used for each participant. The participants' real names and contact information were stored on a separate list on a password-protected computer. I discussed the confidentiality details and procedures of the study with each participant prior to the start of the study, and I explained that I would breach their confidentiality only in the event that someone disclosed the intent to harm himself.

Benefits and Risks

The benefits of the study included the enjoyment or sense of relief that the participants may have felt in sharing their life stories, and in having an opportunity to explain what they had achieved in life despite having been incarcerated.

Potential risks included the minor discomfort that participants may have felt in disclosing private or sensitive subject matter about their lives. I utilized my social work skills during the

interview process in order to stay attuned to any discomfort that participants were feeling, and I tried to steer away from such topics if noticed. I also made an effort to inform participants prior to the start of each interview about the possibility of us discussing potentially sensitive subject matter. I stressed at that time that the participants did not have to discuss anything which made them feel uncomfortable or distressed.

Reflexivity

I came into this study with a lifelong interest in crime and criminal behavior. This interest stems from personal and professional experiences where I have witnessed people having a very difficult time after exiting correctional institutions. The community reentry process is challenging, and even when people have good intentions to change their lives, it is very difficult for them to actualize these plans. One point that has always stood out to me is the role that people's family and friends play in helping them once they do get out of jail or prison. Yet the literature often highlights the negative aspects of these networks and how these networks do not necessarily help people in the long-run. I wanted to explore this idea in-depth in my research in order to understand these dynamics better.

Additionally, for the last three years I have had the opportunity to work in the juvenile justice system in Los Angeles County probation camps and juvenile halls. The discoveries I made about the nature of desistance in the course of this study further cemented my interest in conducting research with incarcerated populations and with youth and young adults in particular. From my perspective, many of these youth are often dismissed as already being of no future benefit to society, and this is especially apparent among youth who are facing life sentences. Watching their experiences while incarcerated and hearing some of their stories has greatly influenced my desire to share their stories through my research.

In exploring all of these dynamics I was forced to confront some of the biases that I carried regarding the efforts that the participants were making towards desistance. In some ways I found myself sympathizing with many of the struggles that the participants had endured while trying to desist and generally survive in early adulthood. On the other hand, I noticed that I had somewhat of a negative bias against participants who had a certain amount of privilege compared to others which manifested in them not having to struggle in ways that other, less-privileged participants had. I made sure to write memos and explore these biases so I could be mindful of how these thoughts could potentially influence my analysis.

Study Limitations

There were two major limitations involved with this study. First, this study primarily relied on retrospective data collection. The limitation of this approach is that it required the participants to have accurate memories regarding their life experiences, and for those with lower memory recall, the accuracy of these recollections may have been compromised. However, this study asked participants to primarily recall major life events in childhood, and to focus in more depth on recent experiences, which may have mitigated this limitation. The second limitation of the study was that all of the participants received some level of transitional support from the Fresh Start program after exiting their probation camp placement. This means that they may have been more exposed to positive social supports compared to those who exited the camp with only traditional, probation-only services. The results of this study may be somewhat biased toward young people who have experienced greater social supports following reentry, and may not be transferable to the desistance experiences of incarcerated youth who did not receive the same type of transitional supports.

Conclusion
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Despite these potential limitations, this study provided unique insight into the process of criminal desistance among young men who have histories of incarceration. Using in-depth life history narratives and tools designed to illustrate the young men's perceptions and use of various social supports, this study accounted for both the individual and environmental factors that are known to contribute to desistance. This study thus helps to 1) bridge current gaps in the literature regarding criminal desistance processes and strategies for success among transition-age males which has not been thoroughly addressed in the literature, and 2) explain how these young men were able to navigate desistance barriers and achieve success using the support systems available within their proximal environments.

Chapter V

Offender Typologies

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the three offender typologies that emerged from the data analysis process. As mentioned, the offenders were not divided into groups based solely on recidivism measures (i.e. re-arrest or re-incarceration). Instead, the participants within each typology were grouped together because they shared a similar set of criminal desistance experiences after leaving juvenile probation camp. Primarily, they made similar choices about their involvement in crime and they took specific steps to enact their decisions. Moreover, they experienced comparable successes and challenges in their transition from adolescence to early adulthood that indirectly influenced their movement towards or away from further criminal activity.

Typology 1 was comprised of young men who had made the most progress in changing their lifestyles, ending their involvement in crime, and achieving a higher degree of stability in young adulthood. The Typology 2 participants were similar to the first group in that they had initiated some positive changes in their lives and many had avoided repeated contact with the law. However, they were distinguished by the fact that they were experiencing many difficulties in early adulthood that placed them at risk for reoffending. The Typology 3 participants had experienced the least amount of success in desisting from crime. They had expressed some intent to change their lives to circumvent future re-incarceration. However, their overall reluctance to establish themselves as law-abiding young adults resulted in their continued

involvement in crime. Table 2 provides a description of the study sample by typology, along with an overview of their recidivism history since leaving juvenile probation camp.

Table 2. Sample Characteristics by Typology and Recidivism History

Typology	Name	Age	Race	Years out of camp	Rearrested since camp	Time since last arrest
1	Oscar	19	Latino	1.5	No	--
	John	19	Latino	1.5	No	--
	Eduardo	19	Latino	2.5	No	--
	Shawn	22	Black	3	No	--
	Mario	23	Latino	4	Yes	2 years
	Gabriel	24	Latino	5	Yes	4 years
	Steven	24	Latino	7	Yes	2 years
2	Tyrone	20	Black	3	Yes	1 year
	Cesar	23	Latino	5	No	--
	Greg	23	White	5	No	--
	Chris	24	Black	6	Yes	5 years
3	Carlos	20	Latino	2	Yes	6 months
	Paul	23	Pilipino	4	Yes	1 month
	Jerry	23	Latino	4	No	--
	Mike	24	Black	6	Yes	3 years

I start by presenting an overview of each of the offender typologies. Within each group I provide: 1) a brief description of each participant 2) a synopsis of their life stories, including descriptions of their families, schooling, and experiences with crime 3) a description of the commonalities shared by the participants as they moved along their criminal desistance journeys and 4) an explanation of how their criminal desistance journeys are situated within their overall transition to adulthood.

Typology 1: "Desisters in Action"

"I had to reprogram everything about me. All my habits that I had, I had to start replacing them with others."

-Oscar, age 19

Typology 1 consists of six young men who had made great strides in transitioning away from their former criminal lifestyles. This typology can be broken down into two smaller subgroups: 1) gang-involved participants whose incarceration and involvement in crime was related to their gang membership (n = 5); and 2) non-gang involved participants who did not get into serious trouble until high school (n = 2). The desistance experiences of these offenders vary by subgroup, however, there were three overarching factors which connected their journeys and served as critical components of their success. First, each individual in this typology expressed the desire to change their lives. Second, each had made strong internal changes wherein they saw a clear distinction between who they used to be when they were at the height of their criminal involvement, and the young men who they see themselves as today. Third, they had all established new life roles and associations that were conducive to their living a crime-free lifestyle. I provide a brief sketch of each participant in this typology below:

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Gabriel is a 24 year old Latino male from Watts. Gabriel became heavily involved in gangs and in the drug trade during middle school. He was incarcerated twice as a juvenile for charges related to drug possession, possession of a firearm and grand theft auto. Around the age of 17, he narrowly missed serving time in adult prison for a drug-related crime. After this incident, he decided to leave his gang, stop selling drugs, and completely change the course of his life. He has been incarcerated only once since leaving his gang for failure to check in with his probation officer. He is now married and holds a full time job.

Steven is a 24 year old Latino male from the San Gabriel Valley. His one and only incarceration happened when he was in high school and he and his friends robbed a store. He was arrested as a result of this crime, and faced the possibility of being tried as an adult for assault with a deadly weapon. Upon his release, Steven became heavily involved with drugs which led to multiple re-arrests and probation violations during early adulthood. However, after successfully completing a series of drug treatment programs, Steven became sober and has abstained from hard drugs and criminal activity since that time. He is unmarried, but is a father of one child. He works full-time as a freeway construction worker.

Mario is a 23 year old Latino male from East Los Angeles. His behavioral problems and gang activity started in early middle school. He was first arrested in the 6th grade for fighting and he was in and out of juvenile detention settings for a variety of charges including battery, grand theft auto, and numerous probation violations. He was arrested for an assault charge at age 18 and he served two years in county jail. He has remained out of jail since his release, but he is currently serving a summary probation term that requires him to stay out of trouble and away from his gang. Mario has one stepson, two biological children, and was expecting twins at the time of the interview. He lives in an apartment with his female partner and their children.

Shawn is a 22 year old Black male from Long Beach. He was involved in minor deviant acts as a teenager, mostly related to stealing and behavioral problems at school. However, he stole a jacket from a fellow bus rider when he was 17, which resulted in an arrest, incarceration, and the possibility of being tried as an adult for felony theft. He was released from juvenile camp at age 19 and has not been in any trouble since that time. He has a full time job and lives on his own.

Eduardo is a 19 year old Latino male from Pasadena. Eduardo began getting into trouble with his friends in junior high- mostly fighting and stealing- and this eventually progressed into his joining a gang at the age of 13. He was first arrested at the age of 14 for a robbery and he was continuously incarcerated until the age of 18 for fighting, assault and battery, and robberies. After his last stint in camp, he slowly began changing his behavior and ending his involvement in crime. He has since stayed out of trouble and out of jail. He works two part-time jobs and lives with his family.

Oscar is a 19 year old Latino male from South Los Angeles. He engaged in delinquent activity throughout his early childhood, and by age 13 he had joined a gang and experienced his first arrest. He was incarcerated every few months until the age of 16 when he found himself facing a murder charge. He was able to beat the charge; however the impact of that incident led him to the decision to leave his gang. Oscar has remained out of trouble and out of jail since then. He lives at home with his family while attending school. He also had a steady girlfriend who was two months pregnant at the time of the interview.

John is a 19 year old Latino male from Venice. John started using drugs and hanging around with gang members during middle school and he was initiated into his neighborhood right before turning 16. He was incarcerated for gang-related activities by age 17, but made the decision to leave his gang

while serving his probation camp sentence. He has not been re-incarcerated or involved in any trouble since making this decision.

Life History

The Typology 1 participants shared many similarities in terms of their family structures and early childhood experiences. Four of the seven young men in this group were raised by both of their parents in fairly stable households. Both Shawn and Eduardo were raised primarily by their mothers, although Eduardo's grandparents played an influential role in his upbringing as well. All of the young men had siblings except for Shawn who was an only child. Additionally, six of the participants reported that their parents were not involved in criminal activity, and at least one of their parents worked outside of the home.

John was the only person in the group who had a less than stable upbringing. He was not raised with either of his biological parents. Instead, his great aunt assumed guardianship of him when he was a baby because neither of his parents were able to care for him. In contrast to the others members of this typology, John's family had some level of involvement in criminal or illicit activity. His biological father was a gang member and his mother often fraternized with gang members. Additionally, drug use was prevalent in his home. His sister used methamphetamines and cocaine while they were growing up and continues to use today. His aunt's partner who also helped to raise him used also cocaine in the home during portions of his childhood.

The participants in Typology 1 differed in the types of relationships they had with their families. For example, only Eduardo and Shawn reported having strong bonds with their parents during their childhoods. Eduardo explained that he and his mother were close while he was growing up, and that she, along with his grandparents, has consistently served as a positive role

model for him. Shawn also shared positive thoughts about his mother. His parents divorced when he was small, and his mother worked throughout his childhood to provide for him financially and meet his basic living needs. His father played an important role in his life as well. Although they only had minimal contact when Shawn was younger, they became closer during Shawn's late teen years and remained close until his dad died unexpectedly from cancer two years ago.

The family dynamics for the other group members were more complicated. John explained that he loved his caregivers and that they had a "tight-knit" family up until elementary school, and that even though they were poor, all of their basic needs were met. However, the home dynamics began to worsen when his aunt starting using drugs and she and her partner started having relationship problems. Further, his parents' frequent absences from the home resulted in his being cared for on many occasions by his sister and her boyfriend, who were both using and producing drugs in the home.

The remaining three men- Steven, Gabriel, and Oscar- had complicated home lives as a result of their relationships with their parents. Each explained that they loved their parents while they were growing up, but they felt that their fathers in particular were overly strict. Steven recalled that he had always felt attached to his mom and under her wing as a child, whereas his father was more of a disciplinarian who strictly enforced the house rules. Similarly, Oscar loved both of his parents, but he felt that his father treated him very unkindly compared to his two siblings. As he became a teenager, their problems worsened and his father actually "disowned" him in court, saying that he could no longer control Oscar's behavior. Oscar also recalled feeling isolated from the rest of his family while growing up because no one got into the type of trouble he did. He also felt that his siblings were not disciplined as harshly when they did misbehave.

Gabriel likewise spoke about his father running a highly disciplined, strict household. He recalled how his father physically disciplined him whenever he did anything wrong. Gabriel also explained how he and his siblings did things to seek attention because their parents were always so busy working. He mentioned that part of the reason he and his sisters started getting into trouble and joining gangs was in response to growing up in this type of environment.

Mario was the one participant in Typology 1 who was the most closed about his relationship with his parents and three siblings. He did share feelings of not being close to his parents during his childhood or currently because he felt like they never supported him or helped him to stay out of trouble. He also shared that he and his siblings had always had very strained relationships. As an adult, he said that he was closer to one of his brothers who was in the same gang with him, however he felt distant from his sister because she was a member of a rival gang. He spoke highly about his grandmother because she had always supported him, even when he started getting into trouble and going to jail.

Middle school marked the time when the five gang-involved participants- Oscar, Mario, Eduardo, Gabriel, and John joined their gangs. For Oscar, Mario and Eduardo, gang initiation emerged as part of the course of delinquent activity they engaged in with their late elementary and early middle school friends. Eduardo, for example, said that his entry into gangs resulted from neighborhood and peer influences. In his words, he and his friends were "already doing the things that gang members do," such as stealing, fighting and selling illegal goods. As a result they made a conscious decision to join a gang as an extension of their behavior. Oscar and Mario's deviant behavior began much earlier. Both were getting into trouble in elementary school because of fighting and acting out at school. Further, both were arrested for the first time at the young age of 13. Mario did not disclose why he started getting into so much trouble, but it

was clear that he did not like going to school and he often engaged in delinquent activity during times when he should have been in school.

John, Oscar and Gabriel all made an intentional decision to join their gangs. John said that he specifically sought out being a gang member because he was attracted to what he perceived as a fast-paced, exciting lifestyle, and that was easy for him to get involved with especially since he had little supervision at home. In middle school he started participating in various aspects of the gang life around him. He began stealing from stores on behalf of the gang, and he also started using marijuana, crystal methamphetamines and cocaine on a daily basis. He became a full-fledged gang member by age 16 and from then he was actively involved in dangerous and illegal gang activity. Oscar explained that his bad behavior and eventual gang activity evolved because he enjoyed living up to his reputation as a neighborhood troublemaker and the "bad seed" of the family. Interestingly, the fact that his parents worked full-time also indirectly contributed to his criminal behavior. His parents often worked long hours away from home, which left Oscar without parental supervision and ample time to get into trouble. Gabriel shared similar memories of his parents' absence from the home because of their long work hours. He recalled that his family was very poor despite the fact that his parents had full-time jobs. In fact, living in poverty actually served as an impetus for his involvement in crime and drugs; he purposefully pursued these ventures because he wanted to make his own money so as not to be a financial burden on his parents.

All of the young men in this subgroup were eventually incarcerated as a result of gang-related activities. By age 14, Mario, Eduardo, and Oscar had each experienced their first arrest from charges related to fighting, robbery, and resisting arrest, respectively. They were active members of their gangs, and they each spent the majority of their adolescent years incarcerated

in juvenile halls and probation camps.   Gabriel was equally involved in crime and his gang during his teenage years, but he did not experience his first arrest until age 16 when he was arrested for grand theft auto, possession of narcotics and a firearm. John had several brushes with the law as a result of his gang activity. However, he always managed to avoid police contact until he was finally arrested at age 16 for a gun-related charge.

Steven and Shawn were the two Typology 1 participants who were never involved in gangs. Their experiences with crime differed significantly from the other group members in that neither started getting into serious trouble until high school. Steven recalled how his parents always stressed the importance of working hard and obtaining an education, which caused him to focus on school and sports. It was not until he changed high schools and was exposed to more negative influences that his behavior began changing. At age 17 he began using methamphetamines and marijuana on a regular basis. He was later arrested after robbing a store with his friends, a crime which landed him in juvenile hall, facing the possibility of being tried and sentenced as an adult.

In contrast, Shawn was involved in minor trouble on and off during his childhood. He transferred between three middle schools as a result of behavioral problems. Most of his problems centered around his bad behavior in class and fighting. Shawn also engaged in petty thefts occasionally with friends, taking items such as cell phones and he experienced his first brush with the law after he and his friends were caught with a gun during his sophomore year. However, his one and only incarceration occurred after he and his friends stole a jacket from someone on the bus and he ended up in juvenile hall facing adult charges.   Both Shawn and

Steven successfully contested these charges, but they served 2 years and 6 months respectively in juvenile hall while awaiting their trials and then serving time at probation camp.[4]

Criminal Desistance in Early Adulthood

In the course of sharing their life narratives, each of the Typology 1 participants described a certain point in their lives when they realized that they wanted to stop being involved in crime. However, each arrived at this point for different reasons. John made a conscious decision to turn his life around while at probation camp. He admitted that he had always been excited about the possibility of going to jail because it served as a symbol of his gang member status. However, right before going away to camp he began dating someone who became very important to him. He came to the realization that he could not pursue a relationship with her while being involved in the gang which ultimately led to his decision to leave his gang. He remained active to a certain extent while incarcerated for survival reasons. However, once he left camp, John went through a hiding out period where he "cut ties" with everyone he knew who was affiliated with his gang. A month later he married his girlfriend and requested permission to transfer his probation supervision to Nevada so that he could distance himself from the gang. After four months, John and his wife moved back to Los Angeles, and spent the next nine months continuing to avoid his old criminal network. He has successfully managed to stay away from the gang and out of trouble since then, although not without severe sacrifices and challenges.

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[4] In LA County, juveniles who are facing adult criminal charges can participate in a "fitness hearing" whereby a judge decides if they should be tried in adult court.
(http://probation.lacounty.gov/about/commission/resources/Understanding_The_JDS.pdf)

For Oscar, the idea of leaving his gang took root when he was being charged with attempted murder at age 16. It was not the actual charge that caused him to reevaluate his life, but rather the fact that one of his best friends in the gang informed the police that Oscar was the person who committed the crime. A judge ultimately found Oscar to be "not guilty" for the crime, but the experience of his friend's betrayal caused him to reevaluate his commitment to the gang. Ultimately this caused Oscar to disassociate himself from his gang and former associates. Since making that decision, he had only been arrested once for a probation violation because he was in close of proximity to his old gang territory[5].

For Gabriel, the realization that he needed to change his life first occurred when he was incarcerated in juvenile probation camp and he began feeling as though he was not happy with his life. Upon his release Gabriel started making small behavioral changes and he even started attending a trade school. However, when a situation arose where he needed money, he felt tempted to return to the drug trade. While dealing with these feelings, he found out that some of his former associates with whom he had sold drugs were being arrested for federal charges and facing life sentences. Gabriel did not end up getting prosecuted with his associates. However, coming so close to serving a lengthy sentence in adult prison served as a "wake-up call" for him. Gabriel solidified his decision to change his life, and gained the strength to get out of his gang and stop selling drugs. Since that time, Gabriel has stayed out of trouble except for a minor incident where he was incarcerated for one week after missing a meeting with his probation officer.

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[5] In Los Angeles County, juvenile or adult offenders who are identified as being in a gang can be issued a gang

Mario's desire to change his life also stemmed from a fear of being sent to adult jail. Upon his release from probation camp, Mario was rearrested at age 18 for an assault charge and he ended up spending two years in county jail awaiting trial. He was eventually released and cleared of all charges. He was placed on summary probation and he received a gang injunction, which required him to stay out of trouble and away from his gang. The possibility of spending any more time in confinement motivated Mario to stop engaging in criminal activity. Further influencing Mario's change process was the fact that he was beginning to feel dissatisfied with his gang life because it was not generating the money he thought it would, and also because he had lost a number of friends to gang violence. All of these factors prompted Mario to curtail his gang activity and follow the terms of his probation. He has remained out of trouble since making this decision, and has committed himself to working and taking care of his expanding family. Unlike the other gang-involved members of this typology however, although he scaled back his activities with his gang, Mario never felt it necessary to formally leave his gang. He explained, "I never got out of my neighborhood, I chilled back. Just getting away from it."

While residing in probation camp, Eduardo also had the epiphany that he would end up in adult jail if he continued his active gang lifestyle. He stated:

> I was kind of like, man this 6 months is killing me. And like how am I gonna handle it
> when I get older? You know, I probably could but at the same time it's not like
> something you wanna set yourself up to. It's not a goal like, let's see if I can do a year
> and half, or do five years, 10 years… (Interview, January 7, 2011)

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injunction which restricts their level of contact with other known gang members (http://da.co.la.ca.us/gangs.htm).

Further cementing his desire to change was the fact that his grandmother whom he grew up with became very ill which made him realize that he wanted to be with his family more than he wanted to be in jail. After leaving camp, he started working, and over time he began prioritizing his employment over his gang involvement. At this stage of his life, he still saw himself as being a part of his gang, however, unlike Mario, he had no restrictions that forbade him from being in his old neighborhood and seeing old friends.

The two non-gang involved participants, Steven and Shawn, similarly expressed a strong desire to change their lives after their periods of incarceration, although the desistance journey for each began at different points in time. Their journeys also differed greatly from the above-mentioned participants. Drug addiction served as a major barrier to Steven in trying to get his life on track. After leaving juvenile probation camp, Steven did not commit any more robberies, however, he went through a rebellious period where he was using heavy drugs on a consistent basis and getting into a lot of fights. He continued to experience various setbacks in early adulthood due to his problems with drugs. As a result Steven spent his early twenties in and out of jail and rehabilitation programs for alcohol and drug-related violations. It was during his last stint in county jail that he realized he did not want any part of the lifestyle that incarceration required such as the necessity to fight and become a "gangsta." Steven simply felt that it was time to grow up and become more responsible. After his release, Steven committed himself to sobriety. He has stayed out of trouble and away from drugs since that time.

Shawn's turning point occurred when he realized that he never wanted to be in jail again. One reason for feeling this way had to do with his overall perception of himself as someone who had gotten into minor trouble while growing up, but who never engaged in the lifestyle of a

criminal. This distinction in how he saw himself became clear while he was incarcerated and he compared himself to the other youth who surrounded him. Overall, he felt that he was much different from these youth because he only "did a bad thing" whereas those individuals were actively pursuing criminal lifestyles.

After being released from probation camp, Shawn immediately found a job which helped him to launch a process of building his life as a young adult. He also made a point to distance himself from the minor deviant acts he had been involved with prior to camp, and from people that would tempt him to become involved in crime. His ability to stay out of trouble may have been easier than any of the other young men in Typology 1 because he did not lead a criminally entrenched lifestyle prior to this arrest. As such, his process of desistance did not require him to make the major identity, friendship or lifestyle changes that the others had to make. Further, his perception of himself as someone who was so "different" from the other young men at probation camp may have indirectly helped him to stay out of trouble in that it gave him standards for how he did (and did not) want to live his life.

Criminal Desistance and the Transition to Adulthood

Part of what helped these young men to desist from crime was their steady and smoother transition into young adulthood relative to members of Typologies 2 and 3. All of the Typology 1 participants articulated set ideas about what it meant to be an adult, and the effort they put into achieving the goals they set for themselves resulted in them being more focused and responsible individuals in their daily lives. Most of the young men held very traditional perceptions of the types of priorities and responsibilities they should have as young adults. Shawn and Eduardo for example, put forward the idea that "growing up" and "becoming a man" meant starting a family,

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working, and living independently. Eduardo explained his perception of adulthood when he stated:

> An adult you gotta work, you gotta do something, you can't just be doing nothing. You
> can't just say hey I go to school, it's not the same. That's the difference- you are an adult.
> You can't say mom can I borrow this much money. It's not the same; you got to have
> your own stuff, you got to take care of yourself pretty much. (Interview, January 17,
> 2011)

Shawn expressed similar ideas about adulthood. He further emphasized that he thought adults should have a certain amount of financial security, and more importantly, they should not be getting into the same type of trouble that they did when they were younger. He elaborated on this idea when he said:

> …because my whole thing was, I was young. I always said when I turned 18 I'm a be
> straight. I already had that in my head. Like it's all cool when you're young but once
> you get older you gotta be a man. (Interview, July 24, 2011)

The perceptions that the Typology 1 offenders held about the types of lives they should be leading as young adults motivated them to pursue certain milestones. These milestones were very similar to the "hooks" that desistance scholars refer to as effective tools for helping offending individuals stay out of trouble. Starting a family for example, was consistent among some of males in Typology 1. Gabriel and John were married, and Mario was living with his long-term girlfriend and their five children. Steven was not in a committed relationship, but he did become a parent at the age of 17. He remained in close contact with the mother of his child, and he was slowly trying to build a relationship with her for the sake of their daughter. All four

of these young men articulated how their family units had assisted them in their transition from being offending youth to non-offending young adults. John stated:

It's just a lot of positive stuff. I don't know if I'd be able to do all the stuff that I'm doing without her. I think if it wasn't for her, not anything she said, but just if it wasn't for her, I'd probably still be messing up. I don't think I'd be able to…there's a lot of pressure to stay doing good, and I don't think I'd be able to handle all that pressure without her. So it's been positive. (Interview, July 29, 2011)

Maintaining steady employment appeared to be another hook for desistance and an important step in the participants' transition to adulthood. Six of the young men in Typology 1 were engaged in a job, and the remaining individual, Oscar, was enrolled full-time in community college and had lined up employment for his summer vacation. Having a job seemed to serve two important purposes for this group. First and foremost, it provided them with a steady and legal source of income. Additionally, it helped the participants to establish a highly structured, daily routine that left them with little time to engage in criminal activity. This point was especially true for the older Typology 1 members who had more familial responsibilities. Steven for example, described having a very rigid routine that involved working long hours for his job as a freeway repairman, taking care of his daughter, exercising, and praying. Similarly, Mario described how his week was filled with working two jobs, picking his children up from school, and attending auto mechanic school at night. Mario was the sole financial provider for his family, and so maintaining his employment, and accordingly his intense schedule, was essential to his family's survival. Both young men shared that they had little free time, and when they were not working they were usually either sleeping or trying to spend time with their families.

With the exception of John, the younger males in Typology 1, Eduardo, Shawn, and Oscar, did not necessarily have the same structure or family attachments as the older males in the study. None were married or had children, with the exception of Oscar who was beginning to feel some financial pressures because of his girlfriend's pregnancy. Further, all except for Shawn were living at home with their parents and thus did not carry any significant financial responsibilities. In this way, these young men were living lives that may have resembled the experiences of their peers who were of a similar age and socioeconomic status.

Although none of the Typology 1 offenders had reached all of the markers they described as being important to their status as adults and two were experiencing financial difficulties, having these goals did give them motivation for creating the type of lives they envisioned themselves having in the future. Overall, it was clear that the Typology 1 offenders had established habits and routines and an overall perspective on life that placed them on a trajectory headed away from their criminal pasts and towards a more stable and non-incarcerated future.

"I never was out in the streets gang banging this and that. Cause I knew my standards.

knew my limits. I knew what I had to do and what I couldn't do."

Cesar, age 23

Typology 2: "One Foot In, One Foot Out of the Game"

Typology 2 was comprised of four young men whose experiences with desistance can be

characterized by a series of starts, missteps, and relapses into old behaviors. For the most part,

they were similar to Typology 1 in that most had made efforts to end their involvement in crime,

and they had avoided extensive contact with the law after leaving juvenile probation camp.

However, they were all struggling to establish a sense of stability as they transitioned into

adulthood which placed them at greater risk for future involvement in crime. The following are

brief descriptions of each of these four young men.

*Chris is a 24 year old Black male from Lancaster. Chris's problems with the law started in middle
school when he and his group of friends began stealing and fighting. He was incarcerated at the age of
16 for a gun charge, and spent numerous stints in the juvenile system. He was then rearrested at age 19
for burglary and gun possession charges.   He was released from adult jail in 2007 and has avoided
further contact with the law since that time. However, he has been struggling within the last two years to
find steady employment and housing, and he has been unable to build a foundation for himself as a young
adult. Chris is currently divorced with two children and he is sharing a hotel room with a friend.*

*Cesar is a 23 year old Latino male who was born in Guatemala, but raised most of his life in the city
of Compton. Cesar's troubles started in high school when he began fighting, stealing, and selling drugs.
He was arrested twice during his adolescence for driving a stolen car. He decided to change his life
around while serving a sentence at probation camp; however, he ended up joining his neighborhood gang
shortly after his release. He has since moved out of Los Angeles to attend college, and although he still
sees himself as being part of his gang, he does not engage in any gang-related violence or illegal activity.
However, he is finding it difficult to stabilize his life in terms of meeting his financial needs, establishing
steady employment, and determining what he wants to do with his future.*

*Greg is a 23 year old White male from Chatsworth. Greg became involved in delinquent activity in
early middle school including truancy, fighting, and using drugs. He was charged with attempted murder
at age 17 for badly injuring someone during a fight. He eventually beat that charge and was released
from probation camp at age 18. Greg has not been rearrested since then, but has been involved in illegal
activity, including selling and using drugs. He is not working at the moment and he is living in the home
of an older friend.*

Tyrone is a 20 year old Black male who was born in Watts, but spent a large portion of his childhood in Carson. Tyrone was adopted as a baby, but his troubles began when the adoption was rescinded by his adoptive parents and he was sent to live in a group home. He spent his entire adolescence and early adulthood residing in multiple group home placements, and in and out of juvenile and adult jail for petty crimes such as selling drugs, stealing, running away from group homes, and train warrants. He has been out of jail since age 18, but is struggling to find stable housing and employment. He currently stays in a transitional housing program which he moved into a week prior to his interview.

Life History

The Typology 2 offenders had very different backgrounds. The major commonality amongst the group members was that none of them grew up in a household with both of their parents. Chris's parents separated when he was three and his mother was left with the primary responsibility for raising him and his three younger siblings. Cesar was raised by his mother until the age of nine at which point she passed away and his grandmother assumed legal guardianship over him and his siblings. Greg's grandparents also played a significant role in his upbringing. It was their home he moved into with his mother and two sisters after his parents divorced. Tyrone did not grow up with any members of his biological family. He was raised by adoptive parents until the age of 14 when his adoption was unexpectedly rescinded. He spent the remainder of his adolescent years living in multiple group homes and transitional housing facilities.

In contrast to the Typology 1 offenders, two of the young men in Typology 2 had family members who were involved in criminal or illegal activities. Chris's oldest brother spent large chunks of his adolescence and adulthood entangled with the criminal justice system. Both of Greg's parents were addicted to methamphetamines during his early childhood and adolescence, and his father served time in jail for selling drugs. Several of his aunts and uncles were also heavy users of methamphetamines, and his grandparents who helped raise him were addicted to

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pain medication. Cesar also mentioned having an uncle who was addicted to drugs. His younger brother was also beginning to get into some minor trouble with the law and was currently on juvenile probation.

Many of the Typology 2 participants began exhibiting delinquent tendencies at an early age, mostly in the form of drug use, fighting, and stealing. Greg began smoking marijuana in the 5th grade, and he used marijuana, cocaine, and ecstasy throughout his teenage years. During this time he also began ditching school and fighting. In fact, his one and only juvenile incarceration occurred while he was in high school and he severely injured someone during a fight. He was charged with assault with a deadly weapon and faced the possibility of being tried as an adult. However, he was able to beat the charge and ended up serving six months in juvenile probation camp. Chris started stealing with his close group of friends during elementary school. In middle school, he and his friends formed a "crew" which led to continued stealing and fighting, as well as selling drugs and carrying guns. He was incarcerated for a gun charge at age 15, and again at age 17 for a similar charge and was placed in juvenile hall and probation camp for these respective charges. Cesar also began getting into trouble in middle school. It was during this time that he formed an informal crew with his friends, and they engaged in small delinquent acts such as tagging. By high school, his crew continued to tag but they also progressed to stealing, fighting, and selling drugs. He was incarcerated for the first time at age 17 for driving a car that had an illegal weapon inside of it, and subsequently spent three months in probation camp. Shortly after that he was arrested for car theft and sentenced again to probation camp.

Tyrone experienced a much different pathway into crime than the other Typology 2 offenders. After being placed into a group home at age 14, he began a cycle of multiple group home placements and removals. He experienced bouts of homelessness and "couch surfing,"

which led him to start stealing and selling drugs in order to have money to survive. During this time he started using drugs, including marijuana which he smoked on a daily basis, along with cocaine and PCP which he used more sporadically. He was arrested for numerous crimes between the ages of 14 and 18, beginning with a burglary charge. This was followed by multiple probation violations related to running away from group homes, smoking marijuana, and acquiring warrants for riding the bus without a ticket. He spent time in various detention settings including juvenile hall and three different probation camps. Tyrone mentioned that at one point during his adolescence he joined a gang. However, his overall life transience prevented him from actually participating in gang activities or fully taking on a gang member identity.

Criminal desistance in Early Adulthood

By early adulthood, most of the Typology 2 offenders had reached a point where they were not actively engaging in crime in their everyday lives. In this sense, they were similar to Typology 1 participants in that they expressed a genuine desire to end their involvement in crime and implement positive changes in their lives. However, these young men described a greater sense of struggle in sustaining these changes and creating a life for themselves that did not involve illegal activity. Thus the hold they had on their emerging identities as non-offenders and as young adults appeared to be tenuous.

While incarcerated in the juvenile probation camp system, many of the Typology 2 offenders realized that they wanted to stay out of trouble and out of jail; however, they each struggled to actualize these intentions upon their return home. Greg for example, made many positive accomplishments while at camp such as obtaining his GED, and he intended to continue along this path upon his release. However, his mounting substance abuse problem interrupted these plans. Greg soon entered into a relapse period that involved drinking, and using and selling

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drugs on a regular basis. He attributed his behavior in part to his feelings of being "angry" and "hardened" from his incarceration experience. He explained:

> …Just more cold hearted to people. I didn't really care about people's opinions, what they were telling me I was doing wrong. I started selling weed and ecstasy… I fell into the trap of doing cocaine and ecstasy. I was doing a lot of it. (Interview, February 8, 2011)

In an effort to refocus his steps, Greg tried enrolling in community college, as well as moving out of the state to work full-time as a juvenile detention officer. However, his heavy drug use and general lack of focus prevented him from being able to fully commit to his job or to his schooling. Greg eventually stopped selling and using drugs, and during his interview he said that he was no longer involved in crime. However, he still has been unable to carve out a solid path for his future. He was adamant about not wanting to return to jail, especially because he did not want to let his family down. However, his constant marijuana use could lead to legal troubles. Moreover he may be tempted to return to what he perceives as a less serious crime, such as selling drugs, to help sustain himself economically.

Tyrone also experienced setbacks in his effort to transition out of a criminal lifestyle. He explained that he sincerely tried to turn his life around after leaving probation camp. He said he was motivated by the programs he had participated in which instilled in him a sense of hope for what he could accomplish in the future. After leaving camp he worked diligently on earning enough credits to graduate high school; however he eventually returned to selling drugs occasionally when he needed money. He did not see this activity as inconsistent with his goals,

but rather he perceived it to be a low-risk crime which would not earn him a felony if he were to get caught. He explained:

> I can't report no felony, cause I won't be able to…it'd be harder for me to make
> something happen. So I avoided getting felonies, even though I took risks. But I would
> try to be conscious of what I'd be doing. (Interview, September 2, 2011)

Similar to Greg, Tyrone tried to enroll in community college in a different part of the state. Moving so far away to college however, served as a barrier in his desistance journey because he felt socially and financially isolated, which eventually led to him reoffending:

> I stayed there for I think 4 months, for a semester and a half. But I got removed through
> a bad decision that I made out there. I had took a laptop. I had no money when I was out
> there. I just had the meal plan and the housing. And everybody else, I felt almost like
> when I was young again when I never had nothing for myself… So I thought I was being
> sneaky and I took some laptops. (Interview, September 2, 2011)

After being kicked out of school, Tyrone spent most of his early adulthood going through a cycle of homelessness, "couch surfing" in the homes of acquaintances, and living in transitional housing facilities. Throughout his interviews he adamantly stated that he did not want to return to jail because he was trying to build a foundation to reconnect with his biological family, and he could not achieve this goal with a felony on his record. Tyrone admitted that he had continued to commit minor crimes in order to survive while living on the streets. Additionally, he openly shared that he smoked marijuana on a daily basis. Tyrone did not disclose if he was currently involved in any criminal activity. However, it was unclear if Tyrone was committed to stopping this behavior, or if he had no immediate need to steal or sell drugs because his current housing facility provided him with his basic living needs. His crime-free

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status for this reason seemed more fleeting or temporary than it did for the others, and it certainly put him at risk for future crime if his current housing situation changes or he does not succeed in his placement.

Similar to Tyrone, Chris also reoffended while attending college. Immediately after leaving probation camp, he enrolled in community college, but after two months of being there he started stealing from student dorm rooms. He was eventually caught, kicked out of school, and sentenced to county jail for six months. Chris had managed to avoid further contact with the law since then, but has felt tempted to sell drugs again to generate a steady income for himself. He said that he resists this urge because of his strong desire to stay out of jail.

Cesar represented the one member of Typology 2 who had made the most progress in his desistance journey, although his process in doing so was extremely non-linear. While serving time at probation camp for the carjacking incident, he remained active with Fresh Start and with a similar reentry program, both of which provided him with critical services that helped him to shift his thinking about his future goals. These programs helped him to obtain his high school diploma and assisted him with acquiring a conditional citizenship status provided that he stayed out of trouble during his two-year post-camp probation sentence. Obtaining citizenship enabled Cesar to find legal employment and generally opened up an array of positive opportunities that were instrumental in helping him to rebuild his life.

However, while taking these positive steps towards desistance, Cesar was taking concurrent steps that were keeping him involved in crime. The biggest indicator of this point is the fact that he joined his neighborhood gang a few weeks after returning home from probation camp, and he became extremely active in gang activities. Because the gang had courted him for years and because it was the neighborhood he had grown up in, he did not necessarily see his

decision as a deterrent to his future goals. He felt this way even though his gang involvement

potentially jeopardized his probation and citizenship. To deal with these potential risks, he tried

to strike a balance between being involved with the gang but not allowing himself to get caught.

He explained:

> Oh yeah. Don't get me wrong. When I first got inaugurated I did some dirt, and I was
>
> gang banging out there. I was doing all the worst things you could think of…I couldn't
>
> get in trouble. I had to do everything real sneaky. Everything I did was on the low…So
>
> you know at the time I was going back and forth, doing all that, but I was still doing what
>
> I had to do. (Interview, December 22, 2010)

Shortly after joining his gang, Cesar received an opportunity to enroll in college in

northern California, which afforded him a chance to move out of his neighborhood and away

from his increasingly dangerous criminal lifestyle. This move had a profound impact on his life.

He described his mindset:

> And when I got the chance to go to college, it kind of, kind of took me away, like you
>
> know what, I don't have to worry about none of this no more. And you know, I can just
>
> go out and do what I gotta do. (Interview, December 22, 2010).

Although Cesar did not feel it necessary to leave his gang after moving away, attending

college did motivate him to curb his criminal activity. There were three additional factors that

also encouraged him. First, he realized that he did not want to lose his citizenship. Second, the

chance to pursue higher education caused him to reflect on the fact that he wanted to be a role

model for his family. Last, he began to develop a strong faith in God and he realized that his

actions were standing in conflict with his spiritual journey. He said that he still associates with

members of his gang when he comes home from school, but he refrains from participating in

criminal activity with them, and instead focuses on serving as a positive representation of his neighborhood.

Criminal Desistance and the Transition to Adulthood

Despite the successes that some of the Typology 2 offenders had experienced with criminal desistance, as a whole this group struggled to make the transition from adolescence to young adulthood. They held similar ideas as the Typology 1 offenders about goals and milestones they thought they should achieve, such as jobs and independent living. However, unlike the Typology 1 members, they lacked clear plans to reach these goals. In cases where the young men did attain these markers, they were often unable to sustain the positive life changes that came to their lives as a result. Thus, in contrast to the Typology 1 offenders whose smoother transition to adulthood provided them with steady anchors for their desistance goals, the Typology 2 offenders faced major challenges to independence in early adulthood that hindered their progress towards desistance.

Many of the Typology 2 offenders articulated a vision of adulthood that included having a stable career, a family, and financial security. Chris came closest to achieving some of these accomplishments as a young adult. After being released from county jail, he married his girlfriend and he spent the next few years working full-time at various fast food restaurants in order to support his wife and later, their two children. However, his stable lifestyle drastically changed after he and his wife divorced and he was forced to move back to Lancaster. He lived for a short period of time at his grandmother's house, but then his grandmother lost ownership of the house which left him essentially homeless. In order to avoid returning to crime, Chris tried opening up his own car taxi business, however, he had to close the business due to financial problems. At the time of the interview, he was sharing a rented motel room with a friend. He

was actively brainstorming new business plans in order to sustain himself financially but he lacked a clear plan to successfully launch any of his ideas. His current weekly income was approximately $500, which left him with very little money to live off of or to give to his ex-wife and two children. If he does not find stable work or housing, it is unclear how long he will be able to resist the temptation to return to crime. He seemed to share this feeling as evidenced by him stating directly that he was not 100% sure that he would not return to jail in the future.

The other members of this group equally struggled to establish the hooks that may be essential to sustained criminal desistance. Chris experienced some success because he had obtained jobs which provided him with a more structured pathway toward earning a living. In contrast, the rest of the Group 2 participants were unable to consistently find and sustain employment. Greg had worked odd jobs at warehouses and retail stores as a young adult, and he worked briefly as a juvenile probation officer while living in Texas. Since moving back to Los Angeles, Greg reported consistent unemployment, in part due to a motorcycle accident and ensuing health problems. At one point, he had his own apartment which he was sharing with a friend, but he eventually lost the apartment due to his heavy drug and alcohol use. Because he lacked a stable job and had no real income, he depended on his friends and family members to support him financially. His daily marijuana use may have hampered his motivation to find work or go to school; either could provide him with a route out of his current situation.

Cesar's employment and housing situations had also changed frequently over the years. After leaving probation camp and receiving citizenship, he obtained a series of odd jobs working at warehouses, car washes, and malls. He continued to work when he moved away to college, mostly in on-campus jobs he secured with his work study financial aid. His work study ended after two years however, and he has remained unemployed since that time. At the time of the

interview, he reported relying heavily on public assistance and family support to provide for his daily living expenses and basic needs.

Tyrone had no significant work history and was unemployed at the time of his interview as well, and he had never lived on his own. At the time of the interview, he resided in a transitional living facility for former foster youth that provided him with housing, food, and clothing vouchers. This shelter also offered therapeutic and independent living services for transition age youth up to the age of 21, and thus was a potential source of stability in Tyrone's life. However, because of his transient lifestyle prior to living at this facility, it was unclear how long he would remain there to receive this support. Tyrone himself was aware that in less than one year he would likely age out of eligibility for these housing services.

The participants in Typology 2 struggled to attain other self-identified markers of adulthood. In cases where they did establish these markers, it did not necessarily lead to substantive changes in their lives. As mentioned earlier, Greg, Tyrone, and Chris all saw the pursuit of education as a pathway that could help them get their lives on track after years of juvenile offending and confinement. Yet each encountered barriers while enrolled in a college program that prevented them from completing their education. In fact, for Tyrone and Chris going away for a college program actually contributed to their reoffending because they both felt socially and financially isolated from their classmates. Cesar had managed to stay enrolled in school despite the difficulties of attending school so far away from home, but his plan for earning his degree was somewhat undefined. He stated that he wanted to finish community college and transfer to a four-year college, but at the same time he mentioned that he might transfer to school in Los Angeles because he was tired of living in that particular area. The lack of a job or sufficient source of income was also making it difficult for him to stay. Moving back

home thus could help him meet some of his goals, but it would also place him right back in the environment that had contributed to his involvement in crime.

Similarly, being married or having a serious relationship with a significant other did not produce long-term positive changes in the lives of the participants in the same way that it did for the Typology 1 members. Greg was involved in a serious relationship with a girlfriend who he eventually became engaged to right before going to probation camp. However, that relationship ended five years later due to the fact that Greg was still getting into trouble and was not fully committed to changing his life at that point. Chris was married for a few years and he felt that he benefitted from the stability his marriage provided. However, he had been unable to recapture this sense of stability since he and his wife divorced.

Overall, it was clear that the Typology 2 offenders experienced significant challenges that impacted their ability to make a smooth transition to early adulthood. They shared many commonalities with the Typology 1 offenders in terms of envisioning a future for themselves that did not involve crime; however, they were either unsure of or they lacked tools to fully execute this vision. Without a stable job, education, or a concrete life plan which could support them in their endeavors, they were vulnerable to the possibility of reoffending despite their desistance goals.

"Once you go to jail for a way out crime, even if you do wanna change, only a few people get

lucky."

- Mike, age 24

Typology 3: Still Livin' the Life

Typology 3 was comprised of four participants who were still actively involved in criminal activity. This group was markedly different from the other two typologies in that they expressed the least motivation or desire to change their behaviors and lifestyles. Further, they had made the least amount of movement towards adulthood compared to the other groups in terms of seeking employment, developing work skills, establishing stable family lifestyles, or creating future plans for their lives that did not involve criminal activity.

Carlos is a 20 year old Latino male from East Los Angeles. He was arrested at age 15 for burglary, and then joined a gang. This led him through a revolving door in and out of the juvenile and adult criminal systems where he was continuously rearrested, often for probation violations related to drug use. He was last released from jail in 2010 (just a few months prior to the interview), and was just at the beginning of his three-year probation term at the time of his interview. Despite his probation status, he was still actively participating in gang activities, although trying to hide his activity from the authorities. He currently lives with his family.

Jerry is a 23 year old Latino male from the San Fernando Valley. Jerry joined a gang around the age of 13, and he spent the majority of his teenage years residing in various juvenile halls and camps as a result of his participation in gang activities, including selling drugs and stealing. He has not been rearrested since leaving his last camp placement at age 18. However, he is still actively involved in gang-related and criminal activity and was not shy about boasting about his activities. He does not have one residence and instead splits time between the homes of his parents and various family members.

Mike is a 24 year old Black male from South Los Angeles. Mike began stealing at a young age for reasons related to poverty and due to his mother being frequently absent from the home because of her drug use. He was first arrested for this behavior at age 10. His behavior progressed into adolescence where he was incarcerated frequently as a result of stealing-related crimes. Mike did not explicitly state that he was still involved in criminal activity, however he implied that he had a need to do so in order to survive. He was living with his grandmother at the time of his interview.

Peter is a 23 year old Pilipino male who emigrated from the Philippines and moved to Hollywood at the age of 7. Peter joined a gang in middle school and his involvement in the gang led to his first arrest when he was 14. He spent the majority of his teenage years incarcerated for assault and weapons charges, and numerous drug-related parole violations. Peter still hangs out with his gang, and frequently engages in activities with them. He also commits solo crimes on occasion, often for financial need. At

the time of his interview he was facing criminal charges for two separate offenses. He is married and he and his wife live with his mother.

Life History

The Typology 3 participants had a diverse set of life experiences with few similarities. Jerry was the only one who grew up in a home with both his mother and father. His parents were small business owners who worked hard during Jerry's childhood and moved him and his three siblings out of the housing projects in Van Nuys and into a safer neighborhood. Peter was raised in the Philippines with both of his parents until the age of 7 at which point his parents divorced and he immigrated with his mother and older brother to the United States. His mother remarried shortly after their move; however this new family unit was quickly destabilized due to domestic violence in the home.

Carlos and Mike were raised primarily by their mothers. Carlos's father died when he was a baby, which left his mother to raise him and his two siblings on her own. She began dating someone when Carlos was a toddler, and eventually they all moved in together. Although Carlos said he had always had a good relationship with his mother, he had never been close with her boyfriend. Mike's parents divorced when he was five years old. He lived primarily with his mother but maintained a relationship with his father while growing up. He even lived with him for one year when he was eight. His mother struggled with a crack addiction throughout his childhood and never held a stable job, and as a result he and his two sisters grew up extremely poor. He was acutely aware of the financial problems in his home, and he shared vivid memories of lacking basic living needs as a child.

The Typology 3 participants shared some similarities in terms of their schooling histories and pathways into crime. Peter and Carlos recalled doing well in elementary school, but both

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stated that they began to get into more serious trouble in middle school. Peter attributed much of his criminal behavior to the influence of his brother who was an active member of a neighborhood gang. As a result of this influence, Peter started smoking marijuana at age 10, and by age 14 he had also joined the gang. He was using and selling crystal meth on a regular basis, and had experienced his first arrest due to fighting. He continued to get arrested for numerous probation violations from that point on, and he rotated in and out of various juvenile correctional facilities and probation camps until the age of 19. In contrast, Carlos got into some trouble in middle school, but managed to avoid getting into serious trouble until high school when he joined a "crew" and started engaging in tagging, ditching school, and fighting. He was arrested in the 10th grade for a burglary charge, and then sent to juvenile hall where he officially joined his gang. He explained that it was necessary to be a part of a gang in that setting. Similar to Peter, he continued to get into trouble after this initial arrest, and he spent large portions of his adolescence in and out of juvenile hall and camp. He was also placed on house arrest for drug-related probation violations.

Behavioral problems for Jerry and Mike began early on in elementary school. Both recalled that they had problems understanding classroom material and they began acting out in school as a result. In Jerry's situation, his early behavioral problems progressed quickly into delinquent activities. By age 12 he was stealing cars and selling drugs with his friends. He experienced his first arrest at age 14 for strong arm robbery, and was incarcerated for a little over a year. Two months later he returned to juvenile detention for a carjacking charge, and it was during this stint that he decided to join a gang. From this point forward he was frequently arrested and incarcerated for a variety of theft-related charges, some of which he could not even recall the specific details. In contrast to the others, Mike's early behavioral problems stemmed

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not only from his learning difficulties, but also from his embarrassment over being poor. As a result, he ended up frequently ditching school because he did not want to be around other kids who had more money than him. He explained:

> Well, I used to go to school, but I missed a lot of days and stuff. Because I didn't have like the clothes and stuff that other kids had, you know? So I didn't want to go.
>
> (Interview, January 21, 2011)

Mike would try to do small jobs around the neighborhood to earn money for food and clothing when he was not in school. However, when he could not find work he would steal. He was first arrested for stealing and then sent to jail when he was just 10 years old and most of his arrests and periods of incarceration through age 18 centered around stealing. He also sold drugs occasionally to generate money. Mike never joined a gang and instead chose to commit his crimes independently for survival purposes.

Criminal Desistance in Early Adulthood

None of the young men in Typology 3 had completely stayed away from crime since exiting probation camp. For the three gang-involved participants- Peter, Jerry, and Carlos- their continued involvement in crime was linked to their active participation in their gangs. None of these young men articulated a strong desire to leave their gangs or to discontinue their involvement in gang-related activities. They did however, each talk about the need to tone down their criminal involvement. Although their motivation for doing so resulted more from a unwillingness to go back to jail rather than from a real intent to reconsider their involvement in crime. For example, after leaving camp, Peter made some efforts to stay out of trouble. He maintained his involvement in the Fresh Start program, he completed a drug rehab program, and he obtained full-time employment as an assistant manager of a coffee shop. However, these

lifestyle changes proved to be short-lived. He soon started selling drugs again. He was then rearrested at age 20 for driving a vehicle without the owner's consent, and spent ten months in county jail as a result. During this time, the immigration authorities placed a hold on him because he had never obtained citizenship. He was later arrested again for grand theft auto a month before being interviewed for this study, and then rearrested a few weeks after that for marijuana possession. Peter said that the possibility of being re-incarcerated and/or deported motivated him to stay out of trouble and away from his gang neighborhood as much as possible. At the same time however, he explained that he does have to "help out" guys from his neighborhood sometimes, which he recognizes puts him in jeopardy of reoffending.

Returning to jail was also a present fear for Carlos. Similar to Peter, he began making positive life changes after joining the Fresh Start program at probation camp. Upon his release, the program supported him in his efforts by helping him to enroll in school and find a job. However, he was arrested for a gang-related felony shortly after enrolling in school, and he was sentenced to adult county jail as a result. He was released in 2010 and is now serving a three-year probation sentence. Any violation of his probation terms will result in a mandatory 11 years in state prison. Carlos was adamant about the fact that he did not want to violate his probation and go to prison for such a long sentence. However, he still saw himself as being a part of his gang. He indicated that if people in his gang were about to go get into trouble, he would try to talk them out of it, but at the same time he would not let them go alone. In fact, Carlos was involved in a criminal incident shortly before being interviewed. He did not provide many details, but did share that he came very close to getting caught by the police for it (for this part of the conversation he preferred to have the tape recorder turned off).

Jerry also continued to be actively involved in criminal activity with his gang after leaving juvenile probation camp. He described how there were brief periods in his life where he would try to stay out of trouble. However, he never fully committed to this decision and his entrenched gang involvement did not really afford him an opportunity to do so. Unlike Carlos and Peter, he had not been rearrested since leaving probation camp at age 18, but it was difficult to ascertain the extent of his current involvement in illegal activity. In his first interview, Jerry said that he was no longer "active" in the gang, meaning that he no longer committed violent crimes in the name of his gang or with fellow gang members. He further added that while he was still involved in some illegal aspects of gang activity, he was not as engaged in it as he had been in the past. In his second interview however, it became apparent that he was more involved than he originally implied. Throughout the interview he spoke with pride about how his gang was the top gang in his neighborhood, and he talked about needing to be near this particular neighborhood where the interview took place because that was where there was "money to be made." Jerry also shared that he did not want to go back to jail, but that his strategy for continuing to evade the law was not to avoid crime, but rather, not to get caught. He stated, "I'm not going to jail. Hell no. I stepped up my game, before I was young and dumb. Just doing it. I cleaned up my tracks and before I do anything, I plot it out like a blueprint."

Mike never articulated a definitive plan to stay out of trouble after leaving probation camp, but he did exit camp with some motivation to change the course of his life. For example, he enrolled in continuation school upon his reentry, and he also obtained short-term employment through his participation in the Fresh Start program. However, Mike's involvement in crime had always resulted from a lack of money, and when his job ended, he began stealing again. He did manage to stay out of jail for nearly two years after leaving camp. He was then subsequently

rearrested for an assault charge when he was 20- a crime for which he spent about one year in adult jail. He has avoided re-arrest since his release. While he did not explicitly state that he was still involved in crime, he mentioned throughout the interview that he "does what he has to do" to survive. Out of all the other group 3 participants, he spoke most candidly about the likelihood of returning to jail, primarily because he felt that he lacked other life options.

Criminal Desistance and the Transition to Adulthood

All of the members of Typology 3 were experiencing difficulties making a transition to adulthood. Although they had all taken initial steps towards attaining adult markers of maturity, overall they had attained few milestones compared to the members of the other two typologies. Despite expressing some desire to desist from crime, they continued to intentionally place themselves in situations that involved criminal or illicit activities. Further, compared to the other two typologies, they lacked a clear vision for what they hoped to achieve for themselves in adulthood and for their futures in general.

The lack of steady employment stood out as one barrier which made it difficult for the participants to desist from crime in early adulthood. None of the participants were currently employed, with the exception of Jerry who was working "under the table" jobs such as helping out at his cousin's marijuana dispensary and breeding dogs. He boasted about the fact that his involvement in various legal and non-legal dealings generated so much income in his life as evidenced by his statement, "The underground treats you good," referring to his fancy cars and high monthly income. Thus, his employment was not helping him to transition into a lifestyle as a law-abiding young adult; rather, it was more of an extension of the underground lifestyle that he had established in the past.

The other young men in the group articulated a strong desire to work, although their motivation for wanting a job stemmed from different sources. Carlos expressed the strongest feelings about wanting employment. He had worked for a year at a baking company after being released from probation camp. He recalled during his interview how much he enjoyed the job, and how it gave him a sense of purpose and pride to always have money in his pocket. He said that obtaining a new job would allow him to regain these feelings, and would also enable him to pay the financial costs associated with his probation term. To this end, he was actively looking for work but he admitted that his gang-related tattoos, particularly those located on his face, might make it difficult for him to get an interview.

Peter and Mike also articulated a strong desire to work, and both recognized that having a stable job would lessen their need to commit crimes. Peter had the most extensive work history of the group- he had worked on and off at a coffee shop whenever he was not locked up for a period of three years in total. He had also worked at a few retail stores and also at the airport. However, he explained that he always ended up getting lured back into criminal activity because it was "quick money." Additionally, he said that his mom placed a significant amount of pressure on him to help pay for household expenses. Peter explained that the main reason he continued to "hustle" was because it allowed him to bring resources into the house. In fact, his recent grand theft auto charge resulted from him trying to earn money to give to his mother to pay for his mounting legal expenses.

Mike also expressed wanting to work, but during his interviews it became apparent that his inability to find work was related to lacking necessary requisites such as a high school diploma. He had no real adult work experience, outside of the short stint working at Foot Locker through a Fresh Start-sponsored internship. He mentioned that he was skilled at welding and

fixing cars, but he was not sure where he could put those skills to use. The reality of his current financial problems and lack of a clear path to change seemed to weigh heavily on him. He explained:

> Mike: Just however I get by. I just do what I gotta do. I mean, that's it.
>
> Interviewer: Is it stressful?
>
> Mike: Yeah, like the older you get, it gets stressful, cause it's like damn man, what you gonna do? (Interview, January 29, 2011)

Not unrelated to their work status, none of the young men in Typology 3 were living independently. Mike, Carlos, and Peter all lived with their family members, while Jerry appeared to go back and forth between living with family members and guys from his neighborhood. With the exception of Jerry, all of these young men received financial support from their families to cover their daily living expenses. Mike, Carlos, and Peter all expressed that they would consider stopping their illegal activities if they had alternative ways of making a decent income. Further, having a job might have provided them with a structure and sense of responsibility that could help them to consistently stay out of trouble, as was the case with the Typology 1 and 2 participants who were employed.

The young men in Typology 3 also lacked stable family relationships which could have provided them with a pathway into independence and away from crime. In contrast to the Typology 1 and Typology 2 offenders whose relationships motivated them to stay out of trouble, the Typology 3 participants either lacked supportive relationships or they had familial responsibilities which created more pressure for them to continue committing crime. None of the participants were married except for Peter, and this union only evolved after Peter realized that marrying his girlfriend would keep him from being deported. He did not speak of his wife

as someone who kept him out of trouble, but rather he talked about the stress involved with trying to bring money into the home to support himself and his wife. Jerry and Mike both had children. Mike was no longer romantically involved with his child's mother, but tried to maintain a cordial relationship with her for the purposes of co-parenting their child. Being a father seemed to provide him with his main source of happiness in life. However the stressors of wanting to provide financially for his child may have caused him to be even more reliant on crime. Jerry had children with two different women. He gave conflicting accounts of his relationship status, first stating that he was living with his girlfriend in their own home and then later stating that they had broken up and she and their child were residing elsewhere. Carlos had a girlfriend, and he was the only person in this group who talked about how his relationship provided him with emotional support that (potentially) keeps him out of trouble. He explained:

Carlos: Yeah, she's good. If it wasn't for her I'd probably already be in prison.

Interviewer: What does she do that helps you stay out?

Carlos: Gives me love. She's my motivation. (Interview, December 9, 2010)

Outside of these factors, the tenuous movement that the Typology 3 offenders were making towards adulthood could be partially attributed to the fact that they lacked a clear vision for their futures. Mike, Peter, and Carlos were all unable to conceive of what their futures would look like. When they were able to articulate what kind of life they wanted to have, they were not sure to how to achieve it. For example, Carlos was very unsure of what the future held for him. His feelings stemmed from the fact that he lacked basic tools that would enable him to do something different with his life. Carlos summed up his feelings when he stated, "I can't picture myself doing anything without a job or education."

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Similarly, Mike mentioned wanting to become a truck driver but he was unclear about how to reach this goal because he too lacked education and work experience. He highlighted his uncertainty about his future when he stated:

Interviewer: You just said you want to drive a truck and own a business but you don't know how to get there. Or you do? You have a plan?

Mike: I mean I could figure it out. I'm going to figure out. I mean I got nothing else to do but figure it out. (Interview, January 29, 2011)

Mike's feelings of uncertainty had actually manifested in a sense of depression that he readily acknowledged during his second interview. He had not sought any help for this problem, but instead saw it as something he just had to "deal with" on his own. It was unclear to what extent this depression was impacting Mike's ability to overcome the challenges he faced with desistance.

Peter shared a similar problem in terms of his outlook on the future. He mentioned future goals that were somewhat ambiguous such as wanting to have children at some point when he had enough money to support them. However, he was unable to think concretely about the future because he felt so entangled in his current complex web of legal problems. Peter expressed feeling trapped in a cycle of needing money to clear his criminal record, but having to commit a crime in order to get more money. Part of his problem may have been attributed to the fact that he was struggling with an addiction to methamphetamines. He admitted that he started using crystal heavily during a period of time when he felt depressed and that he had not been able to stop despite entering into drug rehabilitation programs on more than one occasion. Although Peter did not make a direct connection between his drug use and his current life situation, one might question whether or not his frequent use was impairing his decision-making

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abilities and overall capability for preparing for his future. Jerry was able to articulate what he wanted for himself in the future, however, he did not have a clear plan for achieving his goals, especially without the finances supplied from his gang activity. In fact, he stated that his plans for the future involved him being high enough in the gang that he could make decisions for the gang without having to do the actual work himself.

Conclusion

These typologies highlight three very different experiences that formerly incarcerated individuals can have in the course of trying to desist from crime. There was some overlap between groups with regards to certain aspects of desistance and the transition to adulthood. More specifically, the major commonality shared between the typology groups was that most of the young men professed a desire to stop getting into trouble, or at least, to stop going to jail. Further, it was clear that each group had encountered some challenges in early adulthood, particularly related to financial stability and independence. However, the groups were distinct from each other in the approach that each group took to pursue their desistance goals and in their overall life choices in early adulthood.

Typology 1 clearly exhibited the most success with desisting from crime. They made a distinct choice to stop committing crime, and they followed up their decision with a series of concrete steps that allowed them to achieve their goal. Their perceptions of what it meant to be an adult played heavily into their desistance journeys, in that it motivated them to establish basic aspects of independence in early adulthood which ultimately reduced their desire and need to engage in criminal activity. The Typology 2 members were somewhat similar to Typology 1 in that they were also trying to envision futures for themselves that did not involve criminal activity. However, they were also distinct from Typology 1 for two reasons. First, they did not

always make good decisions about their involvement in crime, and they continued to engage in criminal activity in early adulthood. Second, they struggled to latch onto hooks that could have helped them to transition away from their criminal pasts. Typology 3 was most different from the other two groups in that they intentionally placed themselves in situations that would require them to engage in criminal activity. They either continued their involvement in crime because they felt it was financially necessary or because they still felt an allegiance to their gangs. Moreover, they had no clear direction for their futures and as a result, they had taken few steps to achieve independence in early adulthood.

In the next chapter, I will provide further analysis of how these three typologies navigated their desistance journeys, and the role that social supports played in their overall desistance patterns.

Chapter VI

Navigating Desistance

"We are all marked. Forever. All of us. No matter how much the transformation."

Oscar, age 19

Introduction

In this chapter, I provide further analysis of the participants' desistance journeys in the transition to adulthood. I begin my analysis by describing how each typology group defined the concept of desistance in their everyday lives. It is important to start here because understanding how each group perceived desistance served as a framework for understanding their decisions and activities related to crime in early adulthood. Next, I describe three desistance-related themes that emerged from the data; each theme represented a specific challenge that the participants had to confront in the course of their desistance journeys. These included: 1) feeling marked, 2) appearance, and 3) relationships with people and places in their environment. On the basis of this in-depth analysis, I argue that navigating each of these challenges proved to be a complex process that involved daily decision-making and strategizing. Further, the strategies that the participants used to cope with these challenges were directly related to the way they defined criminal desistance in the context of their own lives.

Definitions and Perceptions of Desistance

Most of the participants reached a point in their adolescence or early adulthood when they felt that they wanted to take steps towards desistance. However, they did not all share the same ideas about what a life without crime actually looked like, nor did they have similar viewpoints about how they should actualize this vision in their everyday lives. There was some overlap between typologies with regards to their conceptions of what it meant to desist from

crime. Overall however, the Typology 1 participants held the most concrete perceptions about desistance, and they underwent both internal and external changes which cemented their desire to commit to a crime-free lifestyle in early adulthood. Typologies 2 and 3 were more similar to each other in that they struggled to articulate a clear vision for themselves in regards to criminal desistance, and they experienced fewer change processes. As a result, they were more easily tempted to reengage in crime. Overall, the young men's definitions of desistance serve as a framework for understanding their decisions related to criminal activity and their responses to life circumstances that placed them at risk for reoffending.

Traditional definitions of desistance: completely abstaining from crime. The members of Typology 1 articulated the most straightforward vision of desistance. At the beginning of their desistance journeys (usually upon leaving probation camp), most of these young men were certain that they did not want to commit any more crimes. However, achieving this goal was not the result of a simple "decision" to stay out of trouble. Rather, it was a gradual process that involved the participants making conscious decisions to change their thought processes, self-perceptions, and interactions with others.

For example, Oscar spoke extensively about the efforts he made to change his identity after making the decision to leave his gang. Specifically, he made a point to transform the way he perceived himself and the way he presented himself to others, and he intentionally tried to fashion his thoughts and words to fit the image of a person who had never been in a gang or in trouble with the law. He also highlighted how "normality" was a characteristic that he actively sought to develop during this process. He explained these specific changes:

But what I would do is sit back and not talk. And whenever I would talk to someone I would change the way that I would say my words. And I would choose my words. So

then it really started….I really started to deprogram my brain and switch everything

around…. I think a lot of it, like a big portion of it, has to do with me reaching normality.

(December 1, 2010)

John and Gabriel expressed similar ideas about the ways in which they changed their

identities, vocabulary, and thought patterns in the early stages of their desistance journeys. John

made the decision to leave his gang while incarcerated at probation camp, and upon his release

he slowly began to shift his thoughts and personality away from his gang member identity. He

spoke specifically about the changes he made to his vocabulary as a part of this process, and how

he made a deliberate effort to think and speak differently so that others would not identify him as

being a gang member. During his interview, he expressed pride in the fact that he had

successfully transformed himself in this way. He explained:

> It's different. My mindset's changed. I don't really talk like a gang member anymore.
> At least I hope not….I'm completely different from then. I think now I'm just a total
> different person. I hope I don't talk like a gang member or anything (Interview, July 29,
> 2011).

Gabriel did not initially set out to change his identity in the way that Oscar and John did.

However, he explained that as he put more distance between himself and his gang, he slowly

began changing as an individual. He started thinking and talking differently which resulted in

him having a more positive perception of himself as a man and a better outlook on life.

However, he was not aware that he had changed in this way until he eventually encountered

some of his former gang associates. Seeing these individuals caused him to reflect on the

internal transformations he had made, which he felt were reflected in his outward appearance to

others. He explained:

My look had changed. My vocabulary had changed. My attitude had changed. I didn't

look like the angry serious person that I used to pretend to be. I was more happy and

upbeat and cheerful. And I was a better person. (Interview, May 13, 2011)

Eduardo's change process took place in stages. Eduardo presented as a hard-working,

responsible, non-offending young man during his interview, however, his narrative revealed that

he had stumbled early on in his desistance journey when he was not as committed to these ideals.

He explained that when he first left probation camp, he did not fully stay away from criminal

activity, and he instead tried to desist by simply cutting back on his participation in gang

activities. However, a series of events triggered a change process within Eduardo that caused

him to shift his outlook on life. First, his grandmother died, which made him realize that he

needed to cut out any activities that might cause him to be re-incarcerated or separated from his

family. Additionally, as he began working in early adulthood, Eduardo started to shed his

identity as a gang member and adopt a new identity as a working man whose lifestyle did not

involve illegal activity. Lastly, his close friends also began lessening their involvement in the

gang, and so they were all able to support each other in creating new lives as non-offenders. All

of these factors enabled Eduardo to eventually desist from crime altogether.

Steven and Shawn also underwent internal identity changes; however, the process for

each of them was specifically triggered by their incarceration experiences. Steven admitted that

exited juvenile confinement with a more hardened nature which fueled his drug addiction and

continued run-ins with the law. During one of his stays in county jail however, Steven

encountered a situation where another inmate put pressure on him to become involved in a fight.

This encounter caused him to realize that he was not tough enough to withstand the physical

challenges of inmate life, and that he needed to get sober and become more serious about life.

He explained:

> I told myself 'you know what Steven, you better go home pay your bills, your dues
>
> because now I am not trying to get locked up' (Interview, May 13, 2011)

After returning from jail, Steven finished his DUI classes and began making concrete plans for

his future, including obtaining stable employment and taking care of his daughter.

Shawn was somewhat of an outlier among Typology 1 in that he underwent the least

intensive identity changes in his desistance journey. Even though he had gotten into some

trouble in his early adolescence, he never perceived himself as a criminal per se, so he did not

have to make the same types of identity shifts as some of the others in this typology. However,

he realized during his two-year stint in detention and probation camp that he never wanted to be

incarcerated again. While awaiting his trial and his release, he spent a great deal of time thinking

and praying about his future, and as he explained, trying to understand the plan that God had for

his life. After returning home, he held onto the new outlook on life that he had developed during

his incarceration, and committed himself to pursuing activities that could help him in his goal to

stay out of further trouble with the law.

For all of these young men, making some type of internal transformation symbolized an

important first step in their transition away from a criminal lifestyle. Further, thinking of

themselves as changed individuals empowered them to follow through with their commitment to

abstain from crime and to avoid situations that might tempt them to revert back to their old

thought patterns and behaviors.

Looser definition of desistance: trying hard to stay away from crime. The Typology 2

participants adopted a looser interpretation of desistance wherein they acknowledged that they

wanted to avoid returning to jail and they expressed some desire to cut crime out of their lives. However they also expressed being not ready, or at times, unable to completely disengage from their criminally-involved lifestyles. As such, their strategy for desisting involved them simply lessening their participation in crime or in particular types of crimes. They underwent a slower and non-linear change process and they made fewer attempts to distance themselves from situations that posed criminal temptations. Thus because they struggled to define their version of desistance, they were more susceptible to reoffending.

Cesar and Chris both made a conscious decision to abandon illegal activities at the beginning of their desistance journeys, yet both reoffended shortly after their release and were each currently leading lifestyles that placed them at risk for future recidivism. Chris said that he made the decision to desist from crime during his last stint in probation camp. He could not pinpoint exactly what triggered this decision; he just said that "something clicked" during this particular camp placement, causing him to became more focused and responsible than he had been in the past. When Chris returned from camp, he took some positive steps towards desistance and adulthood by moving out of his house and enrolling in community college. However, he was rearrested while away at school for a theft charge, which resulted in a six month stint in adult jail.

Upon reentry from adult jail, Chris went through a period where he had a renewed commitment to staying out of trouble, and he was able to maintain his commitment in large part because he had steady employment. However, he had experienced extended periods of unemployment in the last two years. He claimed that he would not turn to crime to support himself as he had when he was younger, but he was somewhat evasive about the specific ways he was financially supporting himself at the moment. While he had several business plans that

could possibly generate an income, not all of his ideas were completely legitimate, such as his idea to start a female escort service. Further, when asked about the possibility of returning to jail, he said that he was not completely confident that he would never go back. It was unclear how truthful he was in the interview about his sources of income, which led to questions about potential opportunities to reoffend.

Cesar also decided that he wanted to change the direction of his life while he was at probation camp. However, he backpedaled in his commitment to this idea when he carelessly decided to join his neighborhood gang shortly after his release from camp. He knew this decision might jeopardize his ability to maintain his citizenship status and his desistance goals; he rationalized his choice by involving himself in some gang activities, but not allowing himself to become completely immersed in the lifestyle. He explained this balance he tried to achieve when he stated, "Cause I knew my standards. I knew my limits. I knew what I had to do and what I couldn't do. So I wasn't out there acting a fool out there."

A few months after joining his gang, Cesar received an opportunity to move away to a community college which changed his outlook on life. During this time he began working and he became involved with various offender reentry programs, and slowly he started to distance himself from his old thoughts and behaviors as an offender. He made a conscious decision to remain in his gang but he has vowed to refrain from violent or criminal gang activities. Instead, he viewed himself as a positive representation of his neighborhood and a role model for other guys in the gang. In this way, he perceived himself as a desister who was in the gang but not of the gang- a mindset which left him open to adopting risky behaviors, as evidenced in his statement below:

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And so I think about it, as long as you handle your business and do what you gotta do, you should be able to have fun to a certain point if you're not hurting nobody. Not doing anything to get yourself in trouble (Interview, December 29, 2010).

Tyrone also adopted a loose interpretation of what it meant to desist from crime, but he has never been able to cut crime out of his life altogether. Tyrone had committed petty crimes throughout his adolescent years due to a need for money to survive while living on the streets. As he entered early adulthood, he realized that he wanted to establish some sort of stability in his life in terms of having consistent housing and employment, and he knew that having felonies on his record would hinder his progress in reaching these goals. However, while he expressed a desire to abstain from crime, he never fully committed himself to this idea, and instead he adopted the mindset that he could avoid jail by engaging in smaller illegal acts such as selling drugs rather than committing more serious crimes. He was different from the other Typology 2 members in that he never experienced any significant life events or relationships with people that might have triggered a change in his thinking or his behaviors. He continuously acknowledged in his interviews that he needed to change, but he did not quite know how to get there.

Interviewer: Well what do you feel like you need to change? Or why do you feel like you need to change?

Tyrone: Cause it may be something wrong if I'm in the same predicament I'm in. So you have to think like that. You always have to work towards…I just try to work towards providing for my family that I never had. I have to think differently. I have to change. (September 9, 2011)

As a result of his vague and undefined perception of what it meant to desist, Tyrone spent most of his late adolescent and early adult years drifting in and out of a criminal lifestyle with no real plan of how to establish a different type of life for himself.

Calculated approach to desistance: not getting caught. The Typology 3 offenders possessed the very different interpretation of criminal desistance; one that primarily involved not getting caught. None of the young men ever explicitly stated that they wanted to desist from crime. They did talk about wanting to lessen their involvement in crime for various reasons; most explicitly, not to go back to jail. However, they underwent the least amount of internal change to support their professed intentions and they were reluctant to take the necessary steps that would allow them to stay out of trouble. There was some overlap with Typology 2 in this regard. There were individuals in both groups who gave themselves permission in a sense to commit crime if the need arose, and they made calculated decisions about the types of crimes in which they chose to involve themselves. However, there were noticeable differences between the groups. First, the Typology 3 offenders seemed to make more intentional decisions to involve themselves in crime and they purposefully chose to put themselves in situations that involved criminal activity. Their willingness to do so may have been connected to the fact that three of the four young men in this group were actively involved in their gangs. Further, they did not seek out alternatives to committing crime in the same way that the Typology 2 members did. Thus, rather than viewing their criminal activity as a reality they were trying to move away from, they seemed content with adopting a stance on desistance that entailed them just not getting caught by the police.

Both Carlos and Peter felt like they wanted to redirect their lives and stop getting into so much trouble with the law after leaving probation camp. For example, Carlos did not explicitly

state that he wanted to leave his gang altogether, but he did acknowledge that he wanted to pursue more positive life opportunities such as legal employment and education. After leaving camp, he obtained a job and enrolled in school and he pursued both of these endeavors for approximately one year. However, just as he was beginning to envision a future for himself outside of the gang, Carlos was unexpectedly arrested for a past crime. He spent 30 days in adult jail and was then placed on a three-year adult probation sentence which included a gang injunction that prohibits him from being around other gang members or visiting his gang territory.

Since his release, Carlos was certain that he did not want to return to jail, yet he had struggled to maintain his hold on the internal and external steps he had taken towards desistance prior to his arrest. Internally, he expressed uncertainty about letting go of his gang member status that comprised a large part of his identity. Externally, he continued to hang around with fellow gang members even though he was aware that this was a direct violation of his probation. He also admitted to being involved in illegal activities that put him at risk of being noticed by the police. Yet he still perceived himself as making some progress towards his desistance goals because he was avoiding contact with the police. For example, he emphasized that even though he was still involved in his gang, he had made a conscious effort to lessen his involvement in gang activities or at least, reduce his risk of getting caught. Additionally, he explained that he no longer engaged in tagging, which was the primary cause of many of his prior arrests:

Carlos: Like I don't write on the walls no more. I don't never, I haven't touched a spray can ever since…

Interviewer: Cause that was your big charge?

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Carlos: Yeah, 15 counts of vandalism. I haven't touched a spray can since cause to me that's a waste of time. It's petty you know. (Interview, December 1, 2010)

Although Carlos had not completely desisted from all criminal activity at the time of his interview, this quote exemplified how he was making a series of smaller decisions that could possibly lead to him taking more concrete steps towards desistance in the future.

Peter shared similar struggles in his desistance journey. After leaving camp, he made some positive changes in his life as a result of his continued participation with the Fresh Start program, and he resumed working as a coffee shop manager at his old job. However, Peter never expressed a strong desire to stop offending, nor did he commit himself to his job or other life opportunities in the same way that Carlos attempted to do. Instead, he chose to involve himself even further in his gang. At the time of his interview, Peter was still associating with his gang-involved peers and participating in activities that could get him into trouble with the law. He had been arrested twice two months prior to his interviews, and he was awaiting trial for two separate cases. Despite his immersion in criminal activities, he saw himself as making smarter choices about crime in the same manner as Carlos as evidenced when he stated, "It's not that I don't bang, I just toned myself down, but still associate." However, Peter did express that he felt torn in that he wanted to put an end to the gang activities that were causing him so many legal problems, but at the same time he was not fully ready to leave this lifestyle alone.

Jerry was also heavily involved in his gang, but unlike Peter or Carlos, he never expressed any intent to leave his criminal lifestyle behind, and his interview narrative revealed that much of his identity was still tied to his life as a gang member. There was a brief period during his early twenties where he tried to do different things outside of the gang such as

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working various part-time jobs. However, he made it clear during his interviews that even while he held legitimate employment he never intended to get out of his gang or to stop selling drugs. His overall conception of desistance was based on the idea that he could take control over the operations side of his gang's criminal activity rather than being involved in the day to day activities which placed him at risk of re-arrest. Jerry had not been rearrested since leaving camp; however, the overall life he led and the decisions he was making about crime definitely placed him at great risk of recidivism at some point in his future.

Mike's views on desistance and attitudes about crime also contributed to his continued involvement in criminal activity. He was different from others in this typology in that he did not have any ties to a gang. However, in the same way that the other group members were reluctant to shed their gang member identities, Mike struggled to cast off his identity as an offender. He said that he envisioned a future life that did not include crime or jail, and there were times after exiting juvenile and adult correctional facilities during which he sincerely tried to abandon from this lifestyle. However, because he felt that his involvement in crime was a financial necessity rather than a choice, he did not truly feel that it was an option for him to desist. Similar to Tyrone from Typology 2, Mike was noticeably distressed about the life he was leading and about the fact that he did not know how to change it. He also conveyed a sense of hopelessness about his ability to desist from crime or to stay out of jail. He did not share the extent to which he was involved in crime at the time of his interview. He explained that his grandmother provides for most of his needs and that he did what he had to do to "get by," including working on cars and doing neighborhood yard work. However, without a stable job or a sufficient source of legal income, it was clear that Mike was engaging in some type of criminal activity to help him meet his financial needs.

Understanding how the participants within each typology viewed desistance provided a great deal of insight into their current lack of involvement in crime, or conversely, into the challenges that have hindered their ability to move away from a criminal lifestyle. In the following section I discuss how these conceptions of desistance influenced the strategies that the participants used to cope with problems and situations they encountered along their desistance journeys.

Barriers to Desistance

Three major themes emerged from the data in regards to the participants' desistance journeys: 1) appearance 2) feeling marked and 3) relationships with people and places in their environment. Each theme encompassed specific situations that challenged the young men's resolve to stay out of trouble with the law. The first two themes were most relevant for the young men who had been involved in gangs, while the last two impacted participants across typologies regardless of their gang affiliations.

Appearance. The theme of appearance emerged as a significant part of the participants' desistance experiences, particularly for the gang-affiliated participants whose outward appearance represented a direct link to their criminal pasts. The issues that came up most frequently in regards to this theme were choice of dress, hairstyles, and tattoos. Ultimately, the participants' perceptions of what it meant to desist from crime influenced the decisions they made about their appearance and the strategies they used to cope with being judged as a result of the way they looked. Participants from Typologies 1 and 2 who were most vocal about needing to leave their gangs were more apt to feel that their external appearance posed barriers to their desistance success. Accordingly, they were able to describe the specific actions they took to

alter their appearance in ways that made them feel less stigmatized and more accepted by society.

Choice of clothing stood out as the first issue the young men thought about with regards to their appearance. Oscar began pondering this point when he realized that even though he had internally moved past his old identity as an offender, his outward appearance was projecting a different image to the people around him, namely to the police and to other gang members. Upon having this revelation, Oscar began to make deliberate decisions to alter his appearance. He grew his hair longer because he thought that having a bald head made him look more like a criminal, and he put serious thought into changing specific aspects of his clothing. He shared his thoughts about this issue in the following excerpt.

> Oscar: Yeah and I had to start accepting myself in these kind of clothes because it was hard for me to.
>
> Interviewer: Those look like nice clothes.
>
> Oscar: Just normal clothes I guess.
>
> Interviewer: What would you be wearing?
>
> Oscar: White t-shirt and probably some dickies or something.
>
> Interviewer: And that was your whole wardrobe?
>
> Oscar: Yeah I would wear black dickies or tan dickies or blue maybe.
>
> Interviewer: A t-shirt but not a button down shirt.
>
> Oscar: Possibly a button down shirt. It would probably be a dickies suit or a t-shirt and the t-shirt will go either black or any dark colors or white.
>
> Interviewer: And your shoes?
>
> Oscar: And my shoes of course.

Interviewer: Those are important.

Oscar: Those are probably the biggest.

Interviewer: Hair and shoes.

Oscar: Those are probably the two biggest and your belt. The belt will probably the more significant than anything. A guy can be from a Crip gang and wearing all red and you pull up his shirt and he's wearing a blue belt. The blue belt and shoe laces will tell you exactly where someone's from. Whether he is a Crip or whether he is a Blood. Not so much in the Mexican gang world but in the Black gang world. 9 out of 10 times you lift up someone's shirt and you see the colored belt, that's where they are from. (Interview December 12, 2010)

Gabriel also described how changing his clothing style represented an important step in his overall desistance process. He did not develop this insight, however, until he had encountered his former gang associates after being out of his gang for a period of time. Although Gabriel had made some positive changes in his life at that point, running into his old friends made him realize that changing the way he dressed was an equally important step in his overall development. He explained:

The first thing that pops in my head was, they were all dirty. They were dirty, broke, on drugs. Just…And I sit back and I think about it and I'm like, I used to look dirty. Cause most supposedly gangsters, most of them look dirty. There's those gangsters, those supposedly ballers that dress a little bit better. And then there's the pretty boys. And even though I used to wear new clothes, I sit and think like damn, maybe I did look dirty. But I spoke to myself and was like nah, that's not what I want for myself. I wanna do better for myself… (Interview, August 19, 2011)

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Both of these excerpts illustrate the complex level of thinking and self-reflection that went into participants' decisions about changing their appearance, even down to the most minute aspects of their clothing such as belts and shoes. Thus, in the same way that they intentionally changed their vocabulary and thought patterns to create new identities as non-offenders mentioned earlier in this chapter, they took equal consideration to make sure that their appearance reflected the new people they were trying to become.

John felt a similarly strong need to change his appearance, especially since his desistance success and his overall survival hinged on his ability to separate himself completely from his old life. His desire to alter his look first came about when he became aware that how he looked was impacting his ability to find a job. He describes coming to this realization:

> …Tried to get a job. It didn't really work. I mean, I had the tattoos on my face. And I wasn't like, it wasn't like I was out of the gang for that long. So a lot of my tendencies were still like gang, like the way I dressed, and the way I acted. The way I talked too. Kind of hood almost. So it was hard to get a job out there cause everybody kind of looked at me like, you're just a fuckin thug. So I didn't end up getting a job out there. (Interview, July 23, 2011)

He went on to explain how he then made a conscious decision to grow out his hair, and he made an effort to hide his tattoos when he to job interviews. In addition to helping him find a job, making these types of changes helped him to feel safer in many settings because he no longer resembled a gang member. This strategy proved to be particularly useful for him when he and his wife lost their housing and had to temporarily move back to his old gang neighborhood. Because he knew that he had to stay out of the radar of old gang associates who might be looking

for him, he was very conscious of his need to look, act, and speak in a way that would make him unrecognizable to others.

Tattoos stood out as another issue which the gang-involved participants had to think about at the beginning phases of their desistance journeys. Nearly all of these young men had tattoos but they varied in the decisions they made regarding whether or not to keep or hide them. John (Typology 2) and Oscar (Typology 1) were the only two gang involved participants who made a conscious choice to remove their tattoos after a period of time. Both young men were acutely aware of the fact that there were people from their pasts who might want to harm them, and that having these marks drew unwanted attention from enemies, old gang associates, and the police. Thus removing their tattoos served as an important survival strategy.

In contrast, Eduardo from Typology 1 had gang-related tattoos but did not feel the need to remove them. He explained that he liked having these marks because they served as a reminder to him of the neighborhood that he was from- a neighborhood to which he still felt very connected. Similar to Oscar and John, he also felt that his tattoos caused the police to have a negative perception of him; however, he was not bothered by it because he knew that he was leading a law-abiding lifestyle. He further explained that the harassment he experienced as a result of his tattoos did not pose enough of a problem for him to go through the hassle of having them permanently removed. Gabriel also made a conscious decision not to remove his extensive gang tattoos despite the fact that he no longer felt any allegiance to his neighborhood. He was somewhat conflicted about this decision, in that he wanted to remove the images that symbolized a life that he was no longer living, but at the same time he believed that they were a part of his history and he could never fully forget his past. Although both of these participants chose to keep their tattoos, they made an effort to cover them up when they were working or looking for

employment. Thus, these marks did seem not appear to pose any significant barriers to them as they strove to meet their desistance goals.

Carlos was the one participant from Typology 3 who spoke extensively about the problems that arose because of his appearance. He had put serious thought into how and why he should make efforts to change the way he looked, and not surprisingly, he was the only member of this group who had made the most efforts to desist from crime after his stay in adult jail. One of the issues which he discussed was his hairstyle, and his perception that having a shaved head made him look like a gang banger. During the times when he was most serious about desisting from crime, he countered this image by growing his hair out and pulling it away from his face. He also tried wearing glasses so that he looked less suspicious and noticeable to other people. Carlos was reluctant to maintain these changes however, and he was generally conflicted about the extent to which he was willing to change the hairstyle which he felt was central to his identity. In the following exchange he explained his reluctance to wear his hair in a less conspicuous style.

> Interviewer: So why not grow your hair out?
>
> Carlos: I don't know. I don't feel right when it's out. I feel, I don't know. People are always telling me it makes me look older, so I just cut it.
>
> Interviewer: But if you do, that would save you some harassment. It's not worth it to you?
>
> Carlos: Yeah, I mean. I let it grow out when I go to school or something, I'll let it grow out. But I don't have to do nothing right now. I don't have a job. I kinda like being bald, not to lie. (December 1, 2010)

This excerpt highlights how Carlos was more willing to change his hair when he was pursuing activities outside of his gang such as going to school or work, but that he was unwilling to do so during periods of time where he was unemployed and would inevitably be spending more time in his neighborhood and around his old friends. In this way, his choice of hairstyle could be seen as a strategy for adapting to the specific environment in which he was operating at any given time.

Carlos was similarly conflicted about removing his tattoos, but in contrast to Gabriel and Eduardo who chose to hide their tattoos, Carlos was unwilling and unable to fully cover his marks, especially the one that was located on his face. Having a gang-related tattoo in such a visible area made it extremely difficult for him to find a job and to move away from his gang life in general. He mentioned that he had received laser treatment to remove his facial marks while he was at probation camp, and he had other tattoos removed upon his release from camp. However, he had re-tattooed his face since that time, and he was hesitant about having them removed again. His struggle with deciding how to handle the issue of his tattoos was reflective of the larger struggle he was experiencing in determining whether or not he truly wanted to desist from crime.

Feeling marked. The participants who had been gang involved all described a sense of feeling "marked" by the police, by enemies, and in some cases, by old friends, in the neighborhoods where they lived and worked. Even when they had made important adjustments such as changing their clothing or their hair, they still had to deal with the stress associated with feeling marked, such as being frequently pulled over by the police. These stressors often occurred on a daily basis. The young men used a variety of strategies to contend with this issue however, the members of Typologies 1 and 2 were more prone to take specific steps to minimize their exposure to people and places that targeted them in this way. Conversely, the individuals in

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Typology 3 were less willing to fully remove themselves from these environments, and thus they felt most strongly that "feeling marked" posed an actual barrier to their desistance progress.

Feeling marked by the police. The Typology 3 participants who were actively involved in crime felt particularly marked by the police. Carlos and Peter spoke at length about how they experienced harassment from local law enforcement because they were known gang members. Rather than leaving their gangs however, they instead devised specific strategies to avoid police contact and detection. Carlos, for example, described how evading the constant scrutiny of the police in his neighborhood comprised a large part of his daily routine. When he wanted to get together with his friends, he had to make calculated decisions about which streets he would walk or drive on because being seen with his friends was a direct violation of the gang injunctions associated with his probation. When he and his friends did get together, portions of their daily conversations were spent discussing the activities of the local gang unit and which sheriffs had been seen in their neighborhood. Finally, he had to be careful about not spending too much time at any particular location, so as to avoid police who might be looking for him or to lower his risk of being involved in a police raid of someone's home. He explained two of the strategies he used for hanging out with his friends in the following exchange:

Carlos: If you were one of my homies I'd tell you to walk across the street and walk on that side ahead of me while I'm on this side.

LA: So how do you negotiate hanging out with your friends?

Carlos: If I were to do it, I'd rather do it in a place, like a house or something. And it wouldn't be for long though. Like an hour or so, and then I'd take off to the next spot. You don't want to be somewhere too long you know? (Interview, December 27, 2010)

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Although these feelings of being marked caused Carlos a great deal of stress, in some ways they served as motivation for him to stay out of trouble, or at least avoid trouble as much as possible. He elaborated on this idea in the excerpt below:

> Like now you'd hardly catch me walking around my own neighborhood. Since I got my first car? I haven't had it in a couple months now. But since I haven't had it in these months, when I walk it feels so different. It feels stupid to walk cause I'm putting myself in the position to get shot at or pulled over by the cops, or anything could go wrong. So from being busted, I don't regret nothing. It just makes me think differently, and in a way smarter, not to be doing stupid stuff. (Interview, December 1, 2010)

This statement highlights the balancing act that Carlos had to manage in terms of trying to dodge the police while still continuing to be involved with his gang. Until he makes a definitive decision to leave his gang or change his outward appearance however, it is likely that this sense of "feeling marked" will continue to be a part of his everyday experience.

Peter likewise spoke about his feelings of being marked by the police who patrolled his gang neighborhood. Unlike Carlos however, who somewhat accepted the harassment he experienced as a consequence of being "up to no good," Peter felt that the constant presence of the police contributed to his recidivism in that contact with them usually resulted in a probation violation. His strategy for avoiding these situations was to simply limit how often he visited his old neighborhood which was partially facilitated by his current residence in another part of town. Thus he experienced more freedom in choosing when to be involved with the gang and when to get away. In contrast, Carlos lived in a much closer proximity to his gang neighborhood, so separating himself from his environment was a much more difficult decision that required more

complex and conscious solutions. Peter's strategy for limiting his contact with the police

highlights a key difference between these two young men who were equally struggling with their

decision to desist from crime. Further, it sheds light on the difficulties that can arise when a

person is trying to desist from crime yet feels constrained by his/her proximal environment.

Carlos also felt constrained in that he felt that the police targeted him because of his race.

He explained that whenever the police pulled him over, even though he may have admittedly

done something wrong, he largely felt that they were harassing him because he was "bald and

Mexican." Interestingly, Mike from Typology 3 was not gang-involved, but he was the only

other participant in the study to share feelings of being marked by the police in this way. He

explained how regardless of where he was in Los Angeles county, the police profiled him as

looking suspicious. Although he was reluctant to describe this treatment as racism, he definitely

felt that he was racially targeted because he was a Black man.

Interviewer: What makes the police so suspicious of you in particular?

Mike: Just how I look, how I dress.

Interviewer: Which is what?

Mike: I don't know, I guess how I look

Interviewer: Is it racism?

Interviewer: Yeah. I don't think it's just really like racism, it's just I am black and 'he

might be up to something'."

Interviewer: That's not racism?

Mike: No, I don't know. It's kind of racism. I don't know it's just because of how I

look. (Interview, January 29, 2011)

Both Carlos and Mike did not like being targeted by the police, yet they accepted it as a part of what goes on in the environments in which they lived- and to some extent, as a routine part of being young men of color. They may have also felt disempowered to do anything about the problem because unlike removing a tattoo or a changing one's clothing, it was not an option for them to simply change their race. However, their perception that the police would likely pull them over because of their race or appearance encouraged them to either lessen their involvement in crime, or to simply take extra precautions to ensure that they did not get caught. Both of these strategies were consistent with their overall conception of what it meant to desist from crime.

The participants from Typologies 1 and 2 who had been in gangs and were further along in their desistance journeys also shared instances of being marked by the police. However, they did not have a negative outlook about the harassment they experienced, nor did they feel the need to develop strategies to deal with the problem. Oscar explained that he dealt with this issue when he had first left his gang. He said that the police frequently stopped him because he had not yet changed his appearance at that point, and because he had made enemies of the police during his many years of gangbanging. However, his current look and lifestyle no longer attracted unwanted police attention.

Eduardo (Typology 1) and Cesar (Typology 2) both described instances of being harassed by law enforcement, however they were somewhat un-phased by it. Eduardo said that he was often pulled over by officers who remembered him from when he was actively involved with his gang. However, he chose not to be upset about this surveillance, especially because, in his words, he was "legit." Similarly, Cesar said that he was not at all threatened by the police scrutiny he received. Rather, he felt knowledgeable enough about the law to challenge the

police if they were to accuse him of wrongdoing. Although both of these young men felt that the unwanted police activity was a nuisance at times, they were similar to Mike and Carlos from Typology 3 in that they accepted that this treatment was a consequence of their former lifestyles and of the neighborhoods in which they lived. However, because they were no longer involved in illegal activities, they did not carry the fear that contact with the police would lead to an arrest.

Feeling marked by enemies. Feeling marked by gang enemies also stood out to the participants as a barrier to desistance. This included members of rival gangs as well as old gang associates who targeted the participants because they had defected. Gabriel for example, said that even though he had been out of his gang for a few years, he still felt vulnerable at times to old enemies who could potentially target him or his wife. In order to deal with this, he was very strategic about where he and his wife traveled around Los Angeles. While completing the social mapping exercise, he explained how he did not ever drive down "little" streets and instead preferred to stick to main, open roads. He also made a conscious decision to do most of his shopping and socializing in areas that were far away from his part of town. Putting this much thought into his daily activities was stressful for him and his wife at times as he explained in the excerpt below.

And she's like, oh baby we should go there. And I'm like no. She's like, well you see if you would have never got in so much trouble, we'd be able to go everywhere. But you can't go anywhere. And I just didn't know what to tell her. I wish I could say everything is fine. But it's not. (Interview, August 19, 2011)

Although Gabriel did not think that any of his old enemies were actively looking for him since he had been out of his gang for some time, he recalled instances where friends of his had left their gangs and were later murdered because they were still living in their same environment.

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Thus to keep him and his wife safe from potential harm, he felt it was necessary to take these types of precautions in his daily life.

Despite the great efforts that Oscar had made to desist from crime, leave his gang, and redirect his life, he too felt targeted by local enemies and had a constant fear that his past would one day catch up to him. This fear stemmed from the fact that one of Oscar's rival gangs ordered a "green light" on his life, which as he explained, essentially gave his gang enemies permission to kill him on sight. For this reason, Oscar matter of factly stated that in spite of the extensive life changes he had made in the last few years, he could never truly escape the markings of his past.

In order to remove himself from potential danger, Oscar was very careful to avoid people and places that he perceived as dangerous. This included major streets surrounding his house, entire neighborhoods that housed rival gangs, as well as county jail where he felt he would be killed instantly if he were to land there. He made a point to not spend too much time around his home in south Los Angeles, and he attended school and spent time with his girlfriend in areas that were far away from his home. He also talked about future plans of moving out of the state where he might have a chance to feel completely safe from harm. Oscar spoke about this constant strategizing around his survival in a very matter-of-fact manner, and even seemed aware of the possibility that he would eventually be murdered one day because of his past. This feeling further motivated him to continue working towards his future goals and encouraging other youth to achieve their dreams so that if he was to be harmed in any way, his life would not end in vain.

John also felt extremely marked by both gang enemies and from members of his own gang who he felt might try to physically harm him because of his abrupt departure from the gang. His initial strategy for dealing with these threats was to give the impression that he had moved away. He did this by hiding out in his apartment and refusing to answer the door when his gang

associates would come by looking for him. He also instructed his family to tell his friends that he was no longer living in the area. This hiding out period lasted for about a month until he received permission to transfer his probation and relocate to another state to ensure his safety.

John and his wife had since returned to Los Angeles and they lived in an area that was a solid distance away from his old neighborhood. Despite the physical distance he had put between himself and his old life however, John was very aware that trouble could find him at any point, as he learned when he was spotted by one of his old gang associates one day at work. John shared a very detailed account of this experience including the lengths he went to in order to hide from the person who spotted hiim, his fear of being hurt physically, and how he ended up having to tell his boss the truth about his prior gang involvement so that he could get permission to leave work temporarily. The following excerpt highlights the intense fear that John felt during this encounter as he tried to figure out how to remove himself from potential harm.

> And I don't think he saw me at first, but I totally made it awkward because I turned my back completely and was facing this way, while he was talking to the other guy. And so my back was to him the whole time and I was like just trying to keep my face away from him. And I was able to hear them talking, so I was able to hear when they started walking this way. So each time he took a step, I would start turning myself like this so he couldn't see me….And I started running to the back of the store, and I looked over. And as soon as I looked over, he was staring at me the whole time. (Interview, July 29, 2011)

The experience of this dangerous encounter made Oscar even more hyper-aware of his surroundings from that point forward. He was mindful of not being alone in public spaces such as bus stops and parking lots, and he constantly scanned his environment for people who might recognize him. He was also aware of potential danger posed by gang members who resided in

his current neighborhood, and he took extreme care to avoid them when he had to leave his apartment including walking blocks out of his way just so that he did not come across them. John and Oscar's stories about how they were somewhat living in a constant state of fear and worry about being targeted by their old enemies or by old friends from the gang highlight some of the extreme challenges involved with survival even after one has made the decision to desist from crime.

Jerry was the only participant who conveyed a rather fatalistic view about feeling targeted by enemies. During his first interview, he spoke with a great deal of bravado about how he was not fearful of anyone because his gang maintained authority and power over other gangs in the area. In his second and more candid, interview, however, he talked about how there were enemies everywhere so he always had to watch his back because people knew where to find him. His perspective was particularly interesting given the fact that he had the option to live with family members in other parts of the city where no one knew him or and no one would confront him with gang violence. Thus, he had the choice to avoid being targeted by enemies in the same way that Peter did from Typology 3. However, because Jerry had no intentions of leaving his gang, he did not exercise this freedom and instead chose to live his life without worrying about who might harm him. He explained:

> Destiny is going to get you either way. Everybody takes a road you know. If you want to go left, right, straight. You make your bed. You lay in it so they basically made their beds so they're going to lay in them. Ain't nobody crying for me when I was in jail. (Interview, May 13, 2011)

Relationships with people and places in their environment: social support networks as a coping strategy and desistance barrier. Relationships with people and places within the

environment stood out as an important theme in the interview narratives. In listening to the

participants' life histories, it was clear that their social support networks played an influential

role in their criminal desistance and transition to adulthood journeys.   Most of the young men

had different types of social networks at work in their lives, consisting of people and/or resources

that could assist them with meeting their daily living needs. Often, these networks included both

positive and negative influences which forced the participants to make calculated decisions about

how and when to use the supports offered by those around them. In some cases, they opted to

cut people from their lives who they perceived were a hindrance to their desistance goals. The

strategies they used to balance the strengths and weaknesses of their social support networks

resulted in one of the following outcomes: 1) their networks became a tool that the participants

could use to help them deal with barriers to their desistance and transition to adulthood journeys

or 2) their networks became a barrier that negatively influenced their decisions and activities

around crime.

> Informal support systems: family, friends, and significant others. Across typologies,

nearly all of the participants listed their family members as the primary and most important

component of their social support networks. When completing the Convoy exercise, they listed

their families as providing them with concrete forms of assistance including housing, food,

transportation, child care, legal aid, and employment referrals. The three typologies merged

together in regard to informal supports in that all of the young men who received family support

perceived it as being crucial to their basic survival and to their ability to stay afloat in early

adulthood.

> The resources that family members provided had distinct implications for the

participants' desistance patterns. Ultimately, their assistance either helped the participants to

abstain from criminal activity, or conversely, it enabled them to continue making poor choices around their involvement in crime. For example, some participants described how years of legal troubles and incarceration experiences had resulted in them having very tense and strained relationships with their families. Therefore it was not a given that their families would help them once they were ready to change their lives, and instead, it took time and effort on their part to prove that they were worthy of receiving familial assistance. Many of the young men in Typology 1 experienced this dynamic. Gabriel and Steven for instance, explained how they had to carefully rebuild their relationships with their parents after returning home from probation camp and in Steven's case, adult jail. In fact, it was not until they obtained steady employment that their parents started believing that they were serious about staying out of trouble. In the quote below, Gabriel described his mother's response to his professed intent to change his life:

> Once she saw that I was taking things serious with my wife and we ended up getting married and we moved in together, I had a minimum wage job and I was working 40 hours a week, so she was like okay, maybe he wants to change. Maybe that's what he wants. (Interview, May 17, 2011)

Similarly, Steven said that he had worked a series of jobs after making the decision to stay out of trouble and out of jail. However, when he finally earned a full-time job that paid permanent wages, his father finally began to look at him "like a man." From that point forward, his father began respecting him more and started to truly believe that he was capable of leading a responsible, sober, life as a young adult. Steven explained that this behavior motivated him to continue working hard. For both Steven and Gabriel, once they were able to demonstrate their intent to change, their families were more open to the idea of offering them emotional and material forms of support.

For other participants, their family members continued to support them even though they did not show evidence of changing their lives in any way. While this unequivocal support helped to prevent the young men from having to commit crimes based on economic need, it did not discourage them from continuing get into trouble. This was especially true for the Typology 3 offenders. For example, Peter's mother was financially supporting him and his wife, and he acknowledged that her assistance was critical to his everyday survival. Despite this fact, he said that his mother put pressure on him to give her money, even knowing that he did not have a legal source of income. As a result, he felt compelled to engage in illegal activity that would bring money into the household. Jerry also received a great deal of assistance from his family, particularly with housing. His parents provided him and his baby's mother with a home in Valencia. He also had the freedom to live with other family members such as his sister and his aunt at any given time. Unlike his other Typology 3 counterparts however, Jerry was very nonchalant about the help he received and knowingly took advantage of it at times as he described when he stated, " And then I would tell my mom I am not working…shoot me some money and she would shoot me thousands at a time. Just party."

Many of the Typology 2 participants perceived their families as being unable or unwilling to support them in the way that they needed. Thus, they adopted a survival strategy of having to do things for and by themselves. This did not pose a problem for the young men who had help from other people in their lives or who had their own resources to support themselves. However, those who lacked outside resources and who were generally struggling to make the transition to adulthood found it much harder to get by without any family assistance, particularly during times of need. As a result, they were more vulnerable to turning to crime when they faced economic challenges.

Chris perceived his family as being very inconsistent in the type of help they gave him. For example, he said that he was very appreciative of his grandmother for allowing him to live in her house after he and his wife divorced. However, when his grandmother was evicted from the house unexpectedly, none of his nearby relatives were able to offer him rent money or a place to stay, and he ended up having to move into a motel room with a friend. He expressed disappointment over the fact that he could not count on his family to help him when he needed it the most:

> Chris: Don't nobody just look out. Just look out, look out.
>
> Interviewer: So when you realized you needed a place to stay, you didn't call your cousins?
>
> Chris: Yeah I did. I put it to use. I said let me see if you know, see how it really is. And I asked everybody. And people promised things like "oh yeah I can do this if this happens," and then not follow through. And then say, "well I said I can do it." Things like that. Like my other brother, he helped me out in the past- my other one.
>
> Interviewer: What kinds of stuff has he done for you?
>
> Chris: If I was short on my phone bill or something, he helped me out on my phone bill. He'll look out. But I just don't really depend on nobody. I don't really like calling on nobody. But when I needed rent I did call everybody. I called everybody and ain't nobody give me nothing but my grandmamma. (Interview, September 14, 2011)

Tyrone also perceived his family as unable to provide him with tangible forms of support. Tyrone was the one participant in the study who grew up in the child welfare system and had no close ties to either his biological or foster families. As a result of this upbringing, he lacked the sense of kin and family that many of the other participants could turn to for help with their post-

incarceration needs. He tried to build a relationship with his biological siblings over the years, but they were limited in the amount of help they could really offer him due to the fact that they were experiencing their own problems in life. He described the nature of support he received from his family:

> Interviewer: So are there people in your life who you feel like you can call if you had a problem and you just needed someone to talk to?
>
> Tyrone: Yep. I'll call my sister, or I'll call my brother, or I could call my other brother.
>
> Interviewer: And what would they do? You call them and-
>
> Tyrone: I think we'll just talk. I just do things by myself. I'm telling you. Cause they have no way to get over here. I just have myself right now. I need to only worry about myself, cause I'm gonna be the one on the bus. I'm gonna be the only one handling my business. I'm gonna be the only one- I need to do me. So I love everybody from a distance.

He further explained that even though he knew he could call his siblings if he had a problem, he rarely did because he did not want to burden them with bad news. For this reason, he chose to contact them only when he had positive life updates to share. Sadly, he still listed his biological family members as the most supportive and central to his life in the Convoy exercise, even though his narrative conveyed a sense of having distant relationships with them.

Mario from Typology 1 was one of the few participants who shared strong feelings of being unable to count on his family. However, his situation was different from the other participants in that he had always had a very strained relationship with his parents (for reasons which he did not want to disclose during the interview) and he had purposely chosen to keep them at a distance. He did not list his family members as playing any type of supportive role in

his life, and he said that his grandmother was the only person who he talked to regularly and who had a relationship with his children. Not having his family in his life however did not appear to impact his transition to adulthood or desistance experiences as he was working full-time, attending school, and brought in enough money to support his live-in girlfriend and their children. His experience highlights an important point about the role of familial social support in one's criminal desistance journey. Mario lacked this type of support but he still exhibited positive desistance patterns possibly because of the other resources he had available to him through his job, school, and family. In contrast, Tyrone and Chris were struggling to provide for themselves as young adults and they could have benefitted from extra help from their families at such a critical point in their lives. This support may have also helped them to feel as though they had other options outside of illegal activity to help them meet their basic living needs.

    <u>Friends and significant others</u>. Relationships with significant others and friends represented the next major component of the participants' social support networks. Most of the participants had support networks consisting of friends, associates, or significant others who they could turn to for favors, advice, or emotional support. Who they chose to include in these networks was determined using one of the following strategies: 1) limiting their networks to people who would only offer them positive forms of support or 2) maintaining a balance of positive and negative influences within their network and selectively choosing when to be around them and how to rely on them for help.

    There were a small group of participants from Typology 1 who purposefully chose to completely cut ties with old friends that posed a threat to their desistance goals. In the early stages of their desistance journeys for example, Mario, Gabriel, Oscar, and John all made a conscious decision not to associate with their old friends from their gangs or to hang out in their

old neighborhoods. They each came to this decision for different reasons; but ultimately, they felt that hanging around their old network of friends would only result in ongoing trouble with the law. Further, out of all the participants, they were most worried that contact with their old networks could compromise their safety. Thus they focused on surrounding themselves with people who could support their efforts to abstain from crime, and who could encourage them to pursue more constructive opportunities with their time.

Making this decision had a positive impact on their desistance journeys, but it did come with some drawbacks. For instance, the participants acknowledged that separating themselves from all of their old friends was lonely at times, and that it was often difficult to forge relationships with new friends. This was primarily true for the former gang members who, when they decided to leave their gangs, also left behind the people who provided their primary source of friendship, companionship, and support. John for example emphasized the point that what attracted him to his gang was the sense of family and friendship that came with it, and how he had to leave all of these friendships behind after deciding to leave his gang. He described the difficulties involved with this in the quote below:

> I cut ties with everybody. Even the people that weren't from the gang-like the girls around the neighborhood that I was friends with, the guys around the neighborhood that I was friends with. And they weren't even from the gang. I had known them from before even. They were like my friends from before the neighborhood and everything. I had grown up with them. Like elementary school, I went to school with them. I just couldn't tell any of them. I still don't talk to them. So yeah. That sucks. (Interview, July 29, 2011)

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John later explained that even though he did not regret his decision to leave his gang, there were times when he truly missed his old network of friends.

Gabriel expressed similar feelings, and said that occasionally he made plans with some of his old friends just to see how everyone was doing. However, he always ended up canceling because he realized that any socializing would only result in a negative outcome. He explained his thinking around this issue below:

> I make up a date and I tell em where we're gonna go, and I get them all pumped up, and they're like, yeah we'll do this and we'll do that. And you know, it's like, at the end you know, my wife even turns around and says, are you gonna hang out with them? And I don't respond. I don't respond. I would like to hang out with them and say you know what guys, let's go to a pool bar. We'll play pool, have one or two drinks. Everybody goes home. But they're not about that. They always wanna be out there just causing wreck. Just causing trouble. That's who they are. And I'm not cool with that.
>
> (Interview, August 19, 2011)

Additionally, Gabriel felt that reuniting with his old friends might put him in a situation where he would be encouraged to start engaging in illegal activities. In fact, it was an old friend of Gabriel's who pushed him to start selling drugs again when he was having financial problems while attending school. For this reason, Gabriel had a hard time placing trust in his old friends because he was unsure of whether or not they were truly supportive of his life changes.

As a result of their decision to surround themselves with positive influences and the difficulties involved with associating with former friends, these young men struggled to describe a support network in the Convoy exercise. Ultimately, none of these young men were able to identify a large network of friends they felt they could rely on for social support. Many

attempted to fill this void through their relationships with their significant others. In the early stages of their desistance journeys, Oscar, John, Gabriel, and Mario all became involved in serious relationships. Each of these young men acknowledged that their relationships provided them with their primary source of socialization and friendship. Further, they provided them with emotional support that motivated them to stay out of trouble and avoid situations that might tempt them to reengage in crime.

Not all of the young men who were successful in their desistance journeys made the decision to limit their social networks in this way. Some chose to keep many of their old friends around them but they made deliberate decisions about when to hang out with these people and what type of help to get from them. Eduardo (Typology 1) and Cesar (Typology 2), for example, never really left their gangs and thus they did not feel the need to stop associating with people from their gangs. Eduardo explained that the core group of friends who grew up with him in the gang all still claimed to be a part of their neighborhood. However, because they had all made similar choices to change their lives, their friendships did not hinder his desistance goals. He admitted having contact with younger members of his gang who were engaged in criminal activity, and while he did not stop their participation in these activities, he did try to give them advice for how they could better handle the situations in which they were involved.

Cesar also admitted to the presence of people in his neighborhood who were still involved in criminal activity, however, he did not feel any pressure to participate. He explained that his peers were proud of him because of his accomplishments and the life changes he had made, and they did not expect him to get involved in what they were doing. Both Eduardo and Cesar had achieved a balance of maintaining their friendships while at the same time not putting themselves in a position to stumble in their own walks. What may have helped them achieve this

balance was their involvement in other activities and the experience of positive forms of social

support that could potentially counter any negative influences of their fellow gang members.

Participants who were not involved with gangs also used this strategy of selective

involvement with friends. Shawn and Steven from Typology 1, and Tyrone, Chris and Greg

from Typology 2 all explained that their primary friendships consisted of other young men who

were not involved in crime and who did not pose any serious risk to their desistance goals.

However, in the same way that Cesar and Eduardo had criminally-involved friends from their

gangs, they did have old friends from their pasts who were involved in antisocial behaviors such

as using and selling drugs; they hung out with these friends at times but generally kept their

friendship at a distance. Chris elaborated on this method for dealing with friends when

describing the relationships he had with cousins who were still involved in crime:

> Cause I didn't cut everybody out of my life. They still, I'm still accessible to them. But
>
> it's limited. Because when we kick it, we cool. They know we close. But they just also
>
> know that I'm not that type to…that like a lot of company, that depend on you or have
>
> you depend on me. None of that (Interview, September 14, 2011).

Shawn had similar thoughts about the types of friends he allowed into his social network.

He recognized that certain friends could be in his life for social reasons; however he was careful

about how much time he spent with them and what type of role he allowed them to play in his

life. Overall, he was very conscious about not allowing anyone to deter him from reaching the

goals he had for himself as a young adult. He explained his thinking about his friendships when

he explained:

> If you kickin it with people that's just trying to rob, or doing things like that, you might
>
> not necessarily be trying to do it either, but it get in your head and you be thinking those

things, and then before you know it, you kinda doing those things… that's why I try to keep my circle tight, and people that are a little bit on the rowdy side, it's like you're still my friend or whatever, so it's like hey whassup, but I'm not gonna stay too long. I'm gonna go do my thing.   (Interview, July 28, 2011)

Tyrone also used this strategy with his friendships, but he was different from the others in that his dependence on his friends was due to a pressing need for survival more so than a desire for friendship. Throughout his interviews, Tyrone referenced having an extensive informal support network in his life consisting of people from various neighborhoods he had lived in who would let him sleep on their couches if he needed a place to stay, or help him find ways to make money. Although he did not provide a great deal of detail about these individuals, it was clear that they did not positively influence his desistance journey. He explained that over the years, these people had helped him to get involved with selling drugs, gangs, and even prostitution at one point. He was reluctant to describe these people as friends, and he did not even want to list them as people who were a part of his support network in the Convoy exercise, despite the fact that they had played a critical role in his survival over the years.

The Typology 3 offenders were not nearly as worried about the potentially negative influences within their support networks. Those who were still active in their gangs mostly fraternized with other members of their gangs. However, unlike some of the gang-involved participants mentioned above, these young men did not have other friends or family members in their lives that could provide them with a different perspective or encourage them to refrain from criminal activities. Thus, the presence of these gang-affiliated networks was more likely to lead to recidivism. Many of the Typology 3 members   recognized that their friendships could be potentially harmful for them at times, and thus they devised their own set of strategies to cope

with these influences. Jerry for instance, was aware that his friends from his gang could not help him stay out of trouble in any way and thus it was up to him to remove himself from potentially harmful environments. He described his thoughts on the matter when he stated, "Well to get away from things, I gotta do that on my own….Yeah not with the homies. Cause the homies do a lot of stupid stuff. They get into stuff." This strategy matched Jerry's viewpoint on desistance, which centered around not getting caught for his illegal activities. Carlos tried to employ this strategy, but it was harder for him because of the internal conflict he was experiencing in regard to wanting to change his life, but not being ready to fully remove himself from people and situations that could get him into trouble. He explained how he tried to handle the situation when people in his gang were about to go out and commit a crime:

> No. I talk some sense into their head. I'll tell them just…I'll just tell them think it out. So that's what I'll tell them. Don't just do it. I'm not saying I'm gonna try to get away from the situation, cause they still are my friends… (Interview, December 1, 2010)

Peter and Mike were more conflicted about the ways in which their friendship networks negatively impacted their ability to desist from crime. Both were very dependent upon their friends because they provided them with support that was crucial for their survival. For example, Peter explained how he was in desperate need of money because of his extensive legal fees and as a result, he sometimes engaged in illegal side hustles with his friends, such as selling parts from cars they had stolen for extra cash. Despite knowing that this activity was illegal, Peter still listed these individuals as some of the few people he could truly count on in life. Similarly, Mike recognized that the people in his life were not necessarily the most positive influences, but he also felt that he lacked alternative sources of support to turn to for help. He

talked about this dilemma when discussing the possibility of moving outside of Los Angeles so that he could have a fresh start in life:

> Yeah, I thought about leaving LA, but I ain't got nowhere to go, so it's like, this is where I'm at. This is what I know. These are the people that I know. If I leave here, it's like it's hard for me here, so if I go somewhere else it's gonna be even harder. (Interview, January 21, 2011)

Peter and Jerry had potential sources of positive support from their significant others; however, unlike the other young men described earlier whose partners encouraged them to stay out of trouble, these women tended to be more complicit in their lifestyles. The mother of Jerry's baby, who he had an on again/off again relationship with, was very aware of his involvement in crime yet she did not appear to challenge him in any way to change his behavior. He described her nonchalant attitude towards his criminal involvement:

> Jerry: She knows, she's right there when they call, she even drops me off.
>
> LA: She doesn't care though.
>
> Jerry: Well she says don't get in trouble.
>
> LA: So the main thing is not getting caught.
>
> Jerry: Because she don't mind going out, going to Vegas, spending money, getting expensive coats and purses like Louis <Vuitton> and all those (Interview, May 13, 2011).

Peter described his wife as being slightly more helpful as far as encouraging him to stay out of trouble. He said that being married forced him to stay in the house more often and it helped him to think through his decisions in a way that he did not do when he was still single. At the same time however, his wife was acutely aware of their financial troubles and of his need to bring money into the house, and she herself was limited in being able to help in this area because

she had a criminal record that restricted her own job options. Thus while she did make attempts to keep Peter out of trouble, her encouragement was not enough to help him overcome the pressure and temptation to engage in illegal activities.

Formal supports. Very few participants used formal support services to help them navigate their life challenges. All of these young men had participated in Fresh Start while incarcerated and for a brief period of time after their release. Most reported that the program helped them during camp and continued to provide them with important reentry services such as school enrollment, job leads, and encouragement. However, outside of this program, the participants overwhelmingly felt that they relied on their informal support systems more than formal agencies or public welfare services. There were a few exceptions in that some participants listed formal programs or staff members as part of their support networks or they acknowledged receiving public assistance in the form of food stamps; however most did not.

Gabriel and Oscar from Typology 1 and Cesar and Chris from Typology 2 stood apart as four participants who had positive perceptions of the services offered by formal agencies. and consequently, their involvement in these programs indeed led to positive outcomes in their lives. After leaving probation camp, each of these young men maintained their involvement with the Fresh Start program and received immediate reentry services such as job placement, school enrollment, and general encouragement to stay out of trouble. All of these young men perceived this help as playing a significant role in their early desistance success. In addition to participating in Fresh Start, these young men were also willing to engage with more traditional formal agencies that were not targeted solely towards individuals with criminal records. For instance, Oscar and Cesar both made a conscious effort to establish relationships with

businesses, agencies and community organizations that could support them in reaching their

future career aspirations. Cesar explained the importance of these networking strategies:

> I figured all that out from the beginning. When I go to speak to people and hear people's
>
> speeches, there's a lot of people that talk to me, and they're like "oh you need a job?
>
> Here's my card." And just networking. (Interview, December 22, 2010)

He was also one of the few participants to seek out public assistance such as food stamp

programs and even homeless services to help him stay afloat after he moved away to college.

Chris also utilized these services to help him, especially in recent times as he has struggled to

find consistent work and housing. At the time of the interview, he was currently on the waiting

list for a county-sponsored program that could provide him and his roommate with permanent

housing.

Tyrone also actively sought help from formal service agencies. He had extensive

knowledge of county programs as a result of his experiences growing up within the child welfare

system, and due to his different history, he was likely the savviest about navigating these

programs to meet his needs. Despite this extensive knowledge of social support services, Tyrone

was still struggling much more in life compared to his counterparts who were involved with

formal support programs. Tyrone described for instance, how he had received substantial help

from Fresh Start to enroll in housing assistance programs, which was extremely helpful for him

during his early adulthood. However, he never really latched on to these programs in terms of

developing a relationship with a program mentor or fully engaging in classes that could teach

him independent living skills. Further, he carried a sense of hopelessness about how well these

programs could really support him and in some ways even resented having to rely on these

programs because his pressing need to achieve independence through his own efforts. As a

result of all of these factors, he mainly used these services for survival, but he never reached a point where he could effectively utilize them to attain concrete skills that might help him avoid reoffending. Without any true attachments to friends or to the formal programs he had participated in, Tyrone found himself receiving bits of help at times but never truly latching onto anything that could steer his life in a better direction.

Other participants were very hesitant to use formal programs even though they knew these programs could offer them valuable assistance. John from Typology 2 was open to receiving support from anyone that could help him with his desistance goals, but his status as a gang defector left him very cautious about openly participating programs that were targeted towards former gang members. He explained for instance how he appreciated the help that Fresh Start offered him, but he was unwilling to participate in their group social events that required him to be around other people who were still in the process of transitioning out of their gangs. This was largely due to the fact that he was extremely nervous about being around large groups of people who he did not know, and because he did not want to run into someone from his past. He explained his feelings when he stated, "Hanging out with all these people who still have their mindset- their mindset is not changed yet. So it's uncomfortable for me." For all of these reasons, John tended to avoid formal support programs that were well known among formerly incarcerated youth and former gang members, including services for free tattoo removal, as well as places such as neighborhood community centers where gang members frequently congregate.

Other participants were wary of using formal support systems because they doubted their overall effectiveness. Mike for example, said that he enjoyed many of the programs he became involved with at probation camp, particularly programs that taught him hands-on skills. However, overall, he had a very dismal view about how much help a program could really offer

him outside of a correctional setting. Mike was also reluctant to use these services due to feelings of embarrassment. For example, now that he is an adult, Mike admitted that he could benefit from agencies that could provide him with tangible help such as job or educational assistance. The lack of a work history and a high school diploma represented two of Mike's greatest desistance and transition to adulthood barriers; receiving help in these specific areas might have greatly improved Mike's chances of staying out of jail. However, he felt very ashamed to use these services based on past experiences where his involvement in these agencies shed light on the fact that he could not read well and had limited work skills. Without help from formal or informal supports, both of which were essential to the other participants who had been able to desist from crime, it was difficult to see how Mike would ever be able to move away from his criminal lifestyle.

Carlos also had mixed feelings about the effectiveness of formal support programs, particularly those offered to ex-gang members and ex-offenders. He had positive memories of a gang intervention program he had participated in through his probation school. The leader of the program was a member of his rival gang, but he appreciated the advice he gave him about needing to change his life. Carlos explained,

> Cause I knew this guy had been where I been before. He had been in my shoes. He knows about the life I live and he just like you know? He relates to me. So I could share a little bit more with him and listen to him a little bit more. (Interview, December 1, 2010)

Carlos also praised the Fresh Start program, which he wholeheartedly felt played a key role in his early desistance success. He participated in a similar program that provided reentry and gang intervention programs, however, he was more critical of their helpfulness. He

explained that the program did not necessarily cause individuals to change their lives, and that many of the youth involved were still gang-banging, using drugs, and fighting in the streets, in spite of the help they were receiving. Thus, while he was open to participating in these programs for services such as tattoo removal, he did not necessarily perceive them as being helpful for his own desistance journey.

All of the participants were asked about their perceptions of the services they received from the Probation Department. Many felt that the Department and the regimented nature of its probation terms only led to more problems in their lives, and very few felt that the Department represented a positive source of support. Not unrelated to this feeling, nearly every individual in the study was resentful that they had been rearrested at some point in their lives (either before or after their probation camp experience) for probation violations- which they considered a way to keep them in trouble and in the system. There were a few participants who said they had received useful services while on probation. Carlos for example, mentioned specific probation officers with whom he had good experiences. He even listed his current probation officer in his Convoy social support network because he provided him with information about jobs, and encouraged Carlos to call him if he was ever "in trouble." However, he felt that this type of support was not consistently represented within the Probation Department and that overall, the department was a "set-up" for individuals in his situation. Thus, with few exceptions, these young men did not perceive the one organization that was mandated to service most of them upon their release from jail as helpful to them in their desistance journeys.

The last major deterrent to using formal support programs stemmed from participants simply feeling as though they did not need outside help or that they were capable of handling their problems on their own. This was especially true when it came to issues of drug addiction.

Over half of the participants across the three typologies struggled with addiction to various substances including at some point in their lives. Those who sought professional help to overcome their addiction were much further along in their desistance journeys. In contrast, those who chose not to get help and were still using on the other hand had a much harder time desisting from crime.

Steven and Gabriel from Typology 1 both shared experiences of being addicted to methamphetamines and each of them participated in numerous drug rehabilitation programs to help them overcome their problems. For Steven specifically, his drug use was the primary source of his legal troubles in early adulthood. Oscar from this group also admitted to using PCP heavily. He did not receive professional help for this problem, but explained that his frequent incarceration throughout his entire adolescence helped to wean him from the drug; he was never out of jail long enough to truly succumb to his addiction.

Tyrone and Greg (Typology 2) and Peter (Typology 3) were all battling drug addiction, yet none of them had received substantial help to deal with these problems. Tyrone and Greg both used marijuana on a daily basis, and both came into contact with the police as a result of their habit. Tyrone's drug use specifically resulted in him being kicked out of several housing facilities, and for both young men, their habit hindered their ability to find employment. Yet, neither had stopped smoking nor did they think they needed professional assistance to help them stop. This was especially troubling for Tyrone given that the facility he lived at mandated that he stay sober and they reserved the right to drug test the residents if any suspicion of drug use arose. Greg's case was also concerning in that several of his family members were addicted to hard drugs and he himself had only recently stopped using cocaine. However, because he had given up cocaine without attending any type of treatment program, he felt he could do the same with

marijuana, if or when he ever felt the need to stop. Despite the overall negative impact that

marijuana use had had on both young men's lives, neither truly made a connection between their

drug use, their decision-making and their inability to move to the next phase of their adult lives.

Similarly, Peter had struggled with an addiction to methamphetamines and marijuana

since he was a teenager and mentioned during his interview that he was still "on that shit." Peter

also appeared to suffer from depression and admitted that his drug use increased during periods

where he felt extremely sad. Despite this history, Peter did not truly perceive himself as having a

problem; he said that it was not hard to stop using meth and that he could stop for months at a

time if he desired. He had participated in at least two drug rehabilitation programs, but he never

fully committed to getting sober, and implied that he only attended these programs to look better

in court. Similar to Tyrone and Greg, one might wonder if his frequent meth use was impairing

his decision-making abilities in other areas of life such as his involvement with gangs and crime.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyzed how the participants perceived criminal desistance and how

their perceptions influenced the manner in which they responded to life challenges. The three

major themes that arose from the interview narratives - appearance, feeling marked, and

relationships with people and places in their environment - represented areas of the participants'

lives that presented the most challenges in their desistance journeys. The analysis indicated that

there was a strong relationship between offender perceptions and desistance patterns, in that their

assumptions of what it meant to desist from crime dictated the strategies they used when

confronted with desistance barriers.

The boundaries between typologies became somewhat less defined with regards to how

the types of navigation strategies the participants used. By and large, all of the Typology 1

offenders and a few Typology 2 offenders who were most committed to the idea of staying out of trouble were better able to navigate the challenges posed by their appearance and by the stressors presented by the people around them. However, Typology 1 adhered to a very straightforward notion of desistance, and this manifested in them having a very clear and straightforward approach when they came across situations that hindered their progress. Typology 2 struggled to define desistance and their navigation strategies more closely matched the approach taken by the Typology 3 offenders who were reluctant to change or remove themselves from situations that offered criminal temptations; instead, both groups made calculated choices to minimize their risk of being caught by the police for their actions. Regardless of their specific approach, it was clear that navigating desistance was a process that involved strategic, conscious, and daily decision-making.

There were more commonalities between typologies when it came to the issue of social supports. With the exception of a few who restricted their networks to a few close friends and family, most of the young men maintained networks of family, friends, and significant others who could offer them different types of support at different points in time. The strategy of selective involvement as a tool for maintaining their networks was effective for the participants who had latched onto positive hooks associated with adulthood such as work or school or who also had members of their peer group who were not involved in any trouble. It was clear however, that young men who lacked any positive influences from their support networks, and who were faring more poorly in the transition into early adulthood had worse desistance outcomes overall.

Overall the data highlighted the complexity that is involved with making the transition out of a criminal lifestyle. None of the typologies were exempt from this reality. Although not

all of the participants navigated these complexities as well as others, it was clear that each

typology had made some deliberate effort to change the direction of their lives.

Chapter VII

Discussion

Introduction

Scholars and practitioners alike readily concur that young people with histories of

juvenile incarceration are vulnerable to experiencing a host of challenges that place them at risk

for recidivism and negative outcomes in early adulthood (Abrams, 2007; Inderbitzen, 2009).

The purpose of this study was to examine the desistance experiences of a group of formerly

incarcerated young men who were in the early stages of adulthood. I specifically sought to

understand how these young men navigated the day to day situations that posed barriers to their

desistance success, and how they utilized the resources around them to navigate this particular

life stage. In this chapter I will discuss key findings from the study related to these research

areas, along with theoretical and practical implications.

Theoretical Implications

Criminal Desistance: Phases within the Process of Change

An underlying question of this research study was to understand "what is criminal

desistance" among formerly incarcerated youth. I came into this study with an assumption that

desistance could not be defined by simple recidivism measures. However, I did not realize how

difficult it would be to arrive at a clear-cut definition. There were young men in the study who

had clearly desisted from crime, despite having experienced recidivism beyond juvenile

probation camp. Further, there were young men who fell into a gray area, in that they were not

actively involved in crime, but their lifestyles could not be accurately summed up by the term

"desister." Thus, defining desistance for myself and for the study sample was as much of a process as the construct itself.

Scholars have long established that desistance from crime is a multilayered process that changes form and can evolve over time. For this reason, researchers have argued that it is not necessarily effective to measure desistance outcomes by a specific endpoint (i.e. within a certain time frame). Instead, they have advocated for a more comprehensive approach to understanding desistance, which takes into account the myriad of factors that lead individuals away from criminal behavior over time (Mulvey, et al., 2004; Laub & Boonstoppel, 2012). The findings from this study were very much in line with this body of knowledge. Nearly all of the participants reached a point in their lives where they wanted to stop getting into so much trouble with the law, but actualizing their decision to change did not take place quickly. Instead, the participants who were particularly motivated to change made gradual transformations in their lifestyles, attitudes, and behaviors that enabled them to move away from their criminal pasts over time. Moreover, the process of desistance was mostly a non-linear one that included both moments of success and failure. Many of the participants experienced sustained periods of time when they were not actively participating in crime. Yet they also made mistakes that hindered their overall progress in meeting their desistance goals, such as probation violations, or forays back into gang activity or crime.

Although my finding about the non-linear process of desistance is not unique, what this study adds to the literature is the idea that there may be different phases of change that can occur within the process of desistance. It was clear that in this study, desistance could be seen as a spectrum of decisions, activities, and experiences related to crime. The three offender typologies that emerged from the data illustrated how former offenders can fall at different points along this

spectrum. Where they fell was characterized not by their recidivism or incarceration histories, but by a specific mindset that they had about crime and by the steps they had taken to move away from their criminally-involved lifestyles. Typology 1 consisted of young men who had made the most progress in ending their involvement in crime. Typology 2 was comprised of young men who had taken some steps towards desistance but had not completely committed to living a crime-free life. Last, Typology 3 included young men who were struggling with the decision about whether or not they wanted to leave crime alone. Within each typology, the young men were at a very similar stage in the desistance process. They shared commonalities in the way they defined desistance, in the strategies they used to desist from crime, and in the decisions they made about whether or not they would participate in crime. Further, the individuals within each group had comparable successes and challenges in their transition to adulthood which indirectly impacted their desistance trajectories.

Understanding desistance from the perspective of each typology has implications for desistance research and theory. First, it provides further insight into the *process* of desistance itself. Each typology helped to clarify what desistance can mean at different points along the spectrum of change- whether it be completely refraining from criminal activity or making decisions to lower one's level of involvement in crime. Further, it illustrates how there are specific desistance challenges that individuals have to face regardless of where they are in their journey. The participants from Typology 3 experienced challenges in trying to sort out their feelings about desistance. Conversely, the members of Typology 1 had not been involved in crime for some time, but they still encountered situations that challenged their resolve to maintain this status. Moreover, it allowed me to understand how formerly incarcerated youth can make incremental progress in reaching their desistance goals even as they are experiencing

relapses back into crime. The perspectives of each typology also had implications for understanding different types of desistance *outcomes* in terms of the underlying factors that can cause individuals to exhibit different types of desistance patterns. For example, I was able to see how even when an individual has a high level of motivation to change, he/she may still struggle to fully walk away from crime. Each of these insights helped to paint a picture of what criminal desistance looks like, and the different forms it can take for this specific population.

Navigating Desistance: Decisions, Barriers, and Strategies

A primary research question that this study sought to address was how formerly incarcerated young adults perceived and navigated the barriers they encountered in the course of their desistance journeys. Overall, there were three major themes that emerged from the life history narratives with regards to this subject. They were 1) appearance, 2) feeling marked and 3) relationships with people and places in their environment. Participants from all three typologies identified these specific themes as significantly impacting their trajectories. Interestingly, these themes do not match what other scholars have identified in their work on formerly incarcerated youth. Much of the research in this area focuses on specific domains of life that are likely to pose barriers for incarcerated youth such as housing, employment, mental health, and education (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Mears & Travis, 2004). With the exception of employment, the participants in this study did not highlight these areas as being a major hindrance to them in reaching their goals. However, the three barriers that they named did provide some insight into reasons *why* young people may experience poor outcomes within these domains or conversely, why some are able to thrive in spite of the difficulties these domains posed. I discuss these specific connections later on in this chapter.

How the participants defined or perceived desistance provided a framework for understanding how they navigated the barriers they identified. Each offender typology had its own ideas about what it meant to desist from crime, and each group took steps towards desistance based on their ideas. The Typology 1 offenders had the most successful desistance outcomes in large part because they perceived desistance to mean complete abstinence from crime. In order to achieve this goal, they completely stopped engaging in crime and they cut themselves off from people, places, and situations that hindered their progress. Typologies 2 and 3 were more similar to each other in that they had a looser perception of what it meant to desist from crime. Both groups acknowledged to a certain degree that they wanted to change their lives, but they gave themselves permission to participate in crime when they deemed it necessary or urgent. The Typology 2 members tended to revert back to crime when they encountered financial troubles or when they made impulsive decisions to engage in crime without fully thinking through the consequences. Their mindset of having "one foot in, and one foot out of the game" often interrupted the progress they were making towards desistance. The Typology 3 participants held even looser perceptions in that they thought they could achieve some form of desistance by maintaining their involvement in crime, but avoiding contact with the police. The perceptions of both groups ultimately led them to reoffend in early adulthood.

There were a few important points to note about how the typologies perceived desistance. First, the participants did not necessarily start off their desistance journeys having the same definition of desistance that they did at the time of the study. Some matured in their definitions as a result of various life circumstances, while others started off with a strong definition and then wavered in their commitment to this ideal because of the life challenges they faced. Moreover, having a particular definition of desistance did not preclude the young men from making

mistakes along their journeys. In fact, a few of the Typology 1 members had been rearrested or had become involved in activities that were contrary to their goals. However, a distinguishing factor between the three groups was that the Typology 1 participants continued working towards their desistance goals in spite of the challenges they met.

These findings about how the participants' perceptions of desistance shaped their criminal trajectories also supported literature which suggests that there is a direct link between offender perceptions and outcomes. For example, Sampson & Laub (2005) argued that adult offenders' perceptions influence how they respond to events and situations in their larger environments. This study expands the literature on this subject by illustrating how this dynamic also plays out in the lives of younger offenders and thus highlights the importance of including offender perceptions as a key variable in future desistance research.

What this study also contributes to the knowledge base is the role that identity changes may play in shaping desistance perceptions and outcomes. The Typology 1 offenders were clearly committed to their perception of desistance meaning complete abstinence from crime. What helped them to maintain their commitment were the identity changes they made in the early stages of their desistance journeys. These identity changes were both internal and external in that they encompassed ways that the participants thought about themselves, as well as the efforts they made to change how they presented themselves to others. In a way, these identity changes served as the underlying mechanisms that supported them in establishing lifestyles that did not involve crime.

Other scholars have touched on this relationship between identity and desistance among incarcerated individuals. Maruna (2001) and Abrams (2005) both highlighted how there are particular types of identity changes that can help offenders transition away from a criminal

lifestyle. Building on this knowledge, this study highlights the process that is involved with making these identity shifts. It was not simply the case that the young men in Typology 1 automatically changed their identities after making the decision to desist. Instead, they gradually became cognizant of the fact that they would not be able to completely end their involvement in crime if they did not alter specific aspects of their personalities, such as their speech or self-perceptions. Accordingly, they made intentional decisions to alter these specific areas so that they could change how they interacted with the world around them. It was these types of micro-level decisions that helped the Typology 1 offenders to commit to stronger perceptions of desistance and make greater strides in their desistance journeys.

The young men in Typologies 2 and 3 did not undergo the same type of identity changes as the Typology 1 offenders, and thus they lacked a certain amount of internal drive to support them in their decision-making around crime. However, the smaller efforts they were making to desist did reflect some degree of internal thought and self-reflection which tied directly to their overall understanding of what it meant to desist from crime. Both groups felt that they were making conscious attempts to lessen their involvement in crime as evidenced by avoiding participation in certain crimes, making efforts to stay away from their gang neighborhoods, and refusing to refrain in violent activities with their gangs. Each of these decisions represented their intentional efforts to change their criminal trajectories. Jerry from Typology 3 was the only outlier with regards to this finding in that he openly admitted that he did not ever intend to leave his gang or change his lifestyle.

Although ultimately their loose interpretations of desistance contributed to recidivism among both groups, their experiences still have important implications for desistance research. As scholars continue to explore how to best understand desistance outcomes and patterns, this

study suggests that there are smaller milestones that offenders can reach as they strive towards complete abstinence from crime in the future. Much more research and particularly longitudinal research is needed to fully explore to what extent these smaller steps do really lead to larger changes over time.

Navigating desistance: the special case of gangs. In some ways, one could argue that young men who had been involved in gangs had a clearer desistance path carved out for them than those who were not gang members. They certainly encountered a more dangerous and for some, life-threatening set of barriers as a result of their gang-involved pasts. Yet it appeared that there was a distinct set of steps that they could take to circumvent these barriers and move forward in their desistance journeys. For example, gang members in the sample primarily fell into Typologies 1 and 3 and members of both of these groups felt extremely threatened and vulnerable because of their appearance and their experiences of being marked in their environments. The Typology 1 participants made a series of calculated, conscious decisions to avoid these barriers. Because they wanted to fully cut ties with their gangs, they were each willing to change the aspects of their appearance they felt brought about unwanted or negative attention from other gang members, the police, and the public at large; they grew their hair out, and they altered their style of dress by not wearing certain colors or styles of clothing that reflected a gang member lifestyle. Additionally, they took extreme precautions to avoid people who were negative influences, and areas where they felt they would be targeted by old friends and/or enemies. Each of these very calculated decisions helped to minimize the risk of them being in dangerous situations, and also helped them to distance themselves from their pasts.

The Typology 3 offenders took a much different approach to dealing with these challenges, and they experienced more challenges in their desistance process as a result. They

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were unwilling to permanently alter aspects of their appearance that were central to their gang member identities. Further, because they were still actively involved in their gangs, they could not consistently remove themselves from dangerous or criminally-involved situations. Instead, they devised strategies for minimizing the risks associated with their gang activity, using a similar type of calculated decision-making as the Typology 1 offenders. This included changing the way they dressed when they wanted to be less visible to others, and making shrewd decisions about how and when they spent time with their friends, making it more difficult for the police and enemies to find them. Although these strategies reflected a great deal of thought and effort, they only provided a temporary solution for their problems. As a result, these young men had to deal with these barriers on a very frequent basis.

The experiences that both typologies faced with regards to these barriers clearly illustrated the point that offenders' desistance experiences are situated within particular contexts. It was not simply that they encountered situations in their external environments that made it hard for them desist from crime. The internal challenges they grappled with as far as their perceptions and thought processes about crime equally impacted their desistance course. It was the combination of these internal and external factors that steered their journeys in a particular direction.   This finding rests upon a large body of life-course research that also asserts that a person's ability to desist from crime hinges on internal factors such as individual motivation to change and personal agency, as well as external factors related to people, opportunities, and stressors that are present in the environment around them (Sampson & Laub, 1990; Laub & Boonstoppel, 2012). The challenges that the participants in this study encountered in the course of their desistance journeys clearly supported this premise.

Their experiences also make an important commentary about the specific role that neighborhood context plays in shaping offender outcomes. A high percentage of formerly incarcerated young people return to live in their old neighborhoods upon their release from jail (Todis et al., 2001). Extant literature highlights how these neighborhoods pose specific risks to individuals with criminal histories because they contain high concentrations of gang activity, crime, recidivism, and unemployment (Abrams & Freisthler, 2010; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997; Wilson, 1987). These collective risks can tempt individuals to reengage in crime and make it extremely difficult for them to take concrete steps towards desistance. The experiences that the participants shared about dangers that were present in their neighborhoods clearly supported this line of research. What this study drew attention to was the fact that there are strategies that individuals can use to navigate the potential risks in their environment. Avoiding certain streets, being cautious about their surroundings, and being vigilant about people who might represent potential harm all highlighted the serious efforts that the participants were making to avoid trouble in their daily living environments.

This finding about the extreme lengths that some of the participants had to go to just to survive within their neighborhoods definitely expanded my understanding of the risks that are involved with survival even after a person has made the decision to change their lives. As an outsider to this population, I was not cognizant of the actual dangers involved with desistance, and how even though a person can take positive steps towards bettering themselves such as going to school or working, these steps do not remove them from harm's way. The participants both normalized these experiences (i.e., you do what you have to do), but also seemed to be frustrated by them (i.e., I wish I could move out of state). An ethnographic study that examined

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the intricacies of navigating neighborhood risks could provide further insight into this complex process.

Navigating Desistance in the Transition to Adulthood

There were two primary findings that stood out with regards to desistance and the transition to adulthood. First, the participants across typologies held very firm and somewhat traditional ideas about the markers they thought they should attain in early adulthood. This included having a certain amount of financial security, having a career, being married and/or having children. These findings were very compatible with extant literature on the transition to adulthood among vulnerable populations. Scholars who have explored this topic have suggested that youth with incarceration histories often experience an accelerated adolescence and entry into adulthood compared to their same-age peers (Sandefur, Eggerling-Boeck, & Park, 2005; Schoeni & Ross, 2005; Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004). This was definitely the case for the participants in this study. Most were thrust into adult roles at very young ages and by late adolescence, many had already lived away from home, earned substantial incomes, and developed critical skills for survival without family support. It was not surprising then that they felt the need to continue carrying these responsibilities in early adulthood.

The second finding in this area pertained to the relationship that emerged between criminal desistance perceptions, outcomes and transition to adulthood experiences. Participants who were taking concrete steps towards independent adulthood were also progressing in their desistance journeys. The experiences of the Typology 1 offenders clearly illustrated this point. Most of the members in this group were working steady jobs or enrolled in school, and all but two were involved in long-term, committed relationships with their partners. Further, although none were living completely independently, they were for the most part making enough money

to pay their bills. Their success in being able to desist was clearly related to the accomplishments they had achieved in early adulthood.

In some ways, these findings are not surprising. Several scholars have established that there is a positive relationship between desistance and the transition to adulthood. For example, "aging out" and "maturation" theories both suggest that the process of becoming an adult automatically results in young people being more focused, mature, and accordingly, less desiring of a lifestyle that is entrenched in crime. For these reasons, it is believed that the majority of juvenile offenders are "adolescence-limited," and only a small percentage will actually continue to commit crime throughout their life course (Moffit, 1993). Similarly, Giordano and Cernkovich's (2002) work on desistance emphasizes how new life roles related to marriage or employment operate as "hooks" that formerly incarcerated individuals can latch onto in early adulthood. These hooks provide offer new life opportunities that enable them to move them away from their criminal pasts. In this study, it was clear that the Typology 1 offenders had latched onto hooks and new life roles that positively impacted their transition to adulthood and criminal desistance experiences.

However, this study diverged from this research in that not all of the participants who had opportunities to latch onto hooks experienced positive desistance outcomes. For example, many of the Typology 2 and 3 offenders had been involved in serious relationships, had worked for long periods of time, or had attended college at some point in early adulthood. However, they struggled to sustain the benefits that accompanied these new life roles. Further, all of these young men ended up reoffending despite having these opportunities. What may have differentiated Typology 1 from the other two groups were the offenders' perceptions of desistance combined with the micro-level decisions they made with regards to the hooks they

had available to them. It was not simply that having a job or going to school automatically resulted in behavioral change. Rather, the participants who had these opportunities held concrete perceptions of desistance and made conscious decisions to succeed while in these roles that ultimately enabled them to take positive steps towards desistance.

For example, most of the Typology 1 offenders who were working made great efforts to find stable employment after they were incarcerated; this was in part due to the fact that they wanted a legal source of income, but it was also because they equated adulthood with having a steady and legal source of income. Their ability to obtain employment impacted their desistance outcomes in two ways. First, it provided them with a legal source of income so that they did not have to turn to illegal activity for money. Additionally, as they continued to work and acclimate themselves to the work force, they began changing other aspects of their lives that influenced their employment prospects and desistance outcomes. For example, when they realized that there were aspects of their appearance that made them look less employable, they readily changed these features (i.e. concealing or removing their tattoos). It was this active decision-making and internal commitment to changing which allowed for employment to serve as a positive hook and desistance trigger in their lives. Their strong perception of desistance further supported them in this process. Even when they experienced setbacks such as losing a job or going back to jail while they were working, their perceptions helped them to remain committed to building lives that could keep them out of trouble.

Participants from Typologies 2 and 3 experienced less success with the micro-decisions they made in regards to these hooks. Typology 2 had slightly better outcomes with regards to this issue. Three of the young men in this group were able to find and maintain jobs for long periods of time, and one of the participants achieved stability for a couple of years after getting

married and having children.   Typology 3 on the other hand, had very limited exposure to these opportunities for change. None had ever been able to maintain employment for a substantial period of time. The one exception to this point was Peter, who had always managed to find work during the periods of time when he was not incarcerated. Further, the decisions they made in regards to their relationships with their significant others or their children did not lead to substantive change. The problem is that because the participants in both typologies had inconsistent views on desistance, they never fully adopted new identities or role changes that could support their efforts. Thus, when they encountered these transition to adulthood hooks, they were unable to sustain the positive changes that these hooks brought into their lives.

These differences between typologies may help to shed light on why formerly incarcerated youth are known to struggle to achieve positive outcomes in the areas of work or school in early adulthood. As noted, scholars have consistently found that incarcerated youth are apt to have high rates of unemployment and low rates of educational attainment (Bullis et al., 2002; Bullis & Yovanoff, 2006). The situations experienced by all three typologies clarify why these outcomes may occur, and conversely, the types of decisions that offenders can make in order to circumvent the likelihood of unemployment and/or low educational attainment.

Social Support, Criminal Desistance and the Transition to Adulthood

As assumed going into this study based on extant literature, social supports played an important role in the young men's transition to adulthood journeys. All of the participants had access to some type of ongoing support network. Having this support did not directly catalyze criminal desistance, but it did appear to help the participants meet their daily living needs and mediate some of the risks that they encountered while trying to desist from crime. Thus, without this support, it is likely that many of the participants would have been struggling even more

significantly in early adulthood without it. These findings were on par with current research which highlights how social support networks can positively impact young people's transition to adulthood, community reintegration, and daily life experiences (Collins, 2001; Harper et al., 2008; Inderbitzen, 2009).

However, other findings suggested that participants' social networks actually served to increase their reliance on crime. For example, family members comprised the largest portion of the participants' social support systems. Yet, for the participants who were struggling most in their desistance journeys, the support that they received from their families also enabled them to continue their participation in illegal activities. The familial support provided by the Typology 1 versus 3 offenders greatly illustrated this point. In Typology 1, their families were not willing to offer substantial help until the participants demonstrated that they had made efforts to change their lives. In contrast, the Typology 3 participants were all receiving help from their families but were all still participating in crime despite this help. Thus the help their families provided them did not dissuade them in any way from their negative behaviors.

This particular finding around family support was somewhat inconsistent with what the literature says about the roles that family and significant others play in the lives of ex-offenders. Many scholars have suggested that families are often the primary people that support youth after they exit from correctional institutions with important resources such as housing, money, and other forms of material support. However they also suggest that returning home and receiving help from their families may jeopardize youths' desistance goals, especially if these youth are returning to family situations that are unstable (Altschuler & Brash, 2004; Harper et al., 2008). Sullivan, 2004). For the most part, the participants in this study who were living at home had fairly stable home lives. The largest barrier that was present in these living situations seemed to

be that some families were willing to support their children without requiring them to change

their lifestyles in any way. This finding suggests that there may be additional aspects of family

support outside of what scholars have already identified (such as violence or poverty in the

home) that can hinder participants from making progress towards desistance.

The friends that were included in the participants' social support networks played an

equally inconsistent role in their desistance outcomes. With the exception of a small group of

participants from Typology 1, all of the participants had friends or associates in their networks

that were involved in criminal behaviors (i.e. gang activity, smoking weed). "Selective

involvement" served as the primary strategy for dealing with the potentially negative influences

of these friendships. Abrams discovered the strategy of selective involvement in her 2007 study

on the reentry experiences of juvenile offenders. She found that youth utilized this strategy to

help them negotiate the decisions they made about being involved in crime.

In this study, selective involvement was associated with both good and bad outcomes. It

did not pose much of a problem for those individuals in Typology 1 and some in Typology 2

who were further along in their desistance journeys and who did not feel compelled to participate

in antisocial activities with their friends. However, this strategy was much riskier for

participants from Typologies 2 and 3 who were still active in their gangs and still felt an

allegiance to their gang associates. These friendships represented a constant temptation for them

to be involved in activities that were contrary to their desistance goals. The two exceptions to

this point were Eduardo and Cesar who had been able to avoid participating in criminal activities

while still maintaining ties to their gangs. What seemed to be helping them was the fact that they

had other sources of positive support and resources in their lives from their jobs, school, families

and formal programs in which they were involved.   Outside of these two however, it was

extremely difficult for the gang-involved youth to make progress in their desistance journeys while still fraternizing with friends who did not share similar goals.

There were a few gang-involved youth in Typology 1 who completely cut ties with everyone from their gang. This approach did have drawbacks; it left them feeling lonely at times and unable to trust people outside of their families and significant others. It also caused them to feel isolated in their desistance journeys. They felt they lacked a large network of people who could support them in staying out of trouble, and thus they believed that the struggle to remain crime-free largely hinged on their own individual efforts. Further, at least one of them admitted that he had actually gone into hiding because he feared that running into his old associates could bring him physical harm. Others were not necessarily living in hiding but they placed clear restrictions on themselves as far as who they could be around and where they could go. These findings highlight a rather harsh and unpleasant reality about the sacrifices that formerly incarcerated youth may need to make in order to have successful desistance outcomes. Future desistance research should explore these dynamics in terms of how young offenders process the social losses they may experience in the desistance process.

Thus, while it was clear that informal systems provided the participants with help that was necessary to their survival, these relationships did not automatically or consistently result in positive lifestyle changes. What this study may contribute to this discussion is the idea that offenders may need access to other types of resources (both internal and external) in order for social support to trigger positive desistance outcomes. The participants who seemed to benefit the most from the informal relationships around them had other factors at work in their lives such as a stable relationship or job, a high level of motivation to change, and positive identity

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changes. It appeared to be the combination of all of these factors alongside the positive support they received from loved ones around them that ultimately shaped their desistance outcomes.

The participants overall had negative or neutral feelings about the usefulness of formal support systems in their desistance journeys. This finding was interesting given that scholars tend to advocate for young people to participate in reentry programs to help them meet their post-incarceration needs (Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004; Todis et al., 2001). All of the participants had participated in the Fresh Start program, and most had good things to say about the program, particularly in terms of the resources it provided with job training, school placement, financial assistance, and general encouragement to stay out of trouble. Many of the participants felt that they could have benefitted from ongoing participation in similar programs, yet few sought out services beyond Fresh Start that could help them with desistance or with their general survival.

There are very mixed findings in the literature regarding the role of formal support programs in helping young offenders achieve positive life markers (Bullis, Yovanoff, & Havel, 2004; Cusick, Goerge, & Bell, 2008; Wiebush et al., 2005). This study helped to explain these mixed outcomes by highlighting the fact that these youth do not necessarily believe that formal services can significantly improve their situations. The young men seemed most open to using forms of public assistance (i.e. food stamps), however this service alone was not enough to meet their complex array of needs. Further, it is worth noting that many of the participants were turned off from using formal services as a result of their extensive involvement with various systems throughout their adolescence. The Probation Department in particular stood out as a formal program which the participants resented and generally wanted to avoid contact with, even though many were required to interact with them as a result of their probation conditions.

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Overall, it was clear that the participants did not perceive formal programs as particularly important to their desistance journeys. With the exception of a few individuals, most were content to rely on their informal networks to provide them with the help they needed. Others may have been in denial about the extent to which they could have benefitted from more formal services. This was particularly true for those individuals who were struggling with serious substance problems but were reluctant to seek treatment. A large number of participants in the study (n = 9) struggled with a drug or alcohol addiction in adolescence and/or early adolescence but only a few had really tried to overcome their addictions. These findings were very consistent with other literature that has indicated a high prevalence of substance abuse among incarcerated youth (Barnes et al., 2005; Robertson et al., 2004; Wasserman, Ko, & McReynolds, 2004) and the disproportionate percentage that actually receive treatment upon their release.

Practical Implications

The findings from this study have several implications for the services that practitioners offer to young people who have had involvement with the juvenile or criminal justice system. One of the main findings that resonated throughout the study is that people may exit a correctional institution with the goal of desisting from crime but they may have different understandings about how they should go about reaching these goals. The three offender typologies demonstrated this point. It was clear that each had a different mindset about desistance when they exited camp, and they would not all benefit from programs that offer generalized, "one-size-fits-all" reentry services. The findings from this study suggest that offender perceptions about crime may represent an important variable for practitioners to consider as they identify and develop case plans for young offenders to work towards.

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Along these lines, practitioners that work with this population may also need to consider setting goals for the participants that reflect the phases of change that can occur along the desistance spectrum of change. For example, it might be helpful to set less restrictive goals for young people in the early stages of their desistance journeys when they may be less committed to completely changing their lives. This may mean having greater patience for youth if they do reoffend after leaving a correctional institution. There were young men across typologies that were rearrested or re-incarcerated, even though they had good intentions to stay out of trouble. Practitioners may need to find ways to take into account the mistakes that youth offenders may make in their journeys and find ways to identify and celebrate the incremental steps they are taking towards desistance.

This study also had implications for services for specifically for gang-involved youth. The young men with histories of gang involvement had a unique set of desistance needs. Their primary issues seemed to stem from their internal struggles with deciding whether or not to leave their gangs, how to navigate their friendship networks, and finding ways to "lay low" from the gang without jeopardizing their safety. Thus, in addition to some of the more traditional services that reentry programs offer such as educational and employment support, these young men also needed help devising strategies that would allow them to navigate these challenges and still meet their desistance goals. Further, in this study there were at least three individuals who had achieved some level of desistance success and made positive life changes without formally leaving their gangs. This finding suggests that it may also be important for practitioners to consider other ways of noting or marking desistance success for gang-involved ex-offenders outside of whether or not they remain involved with their gangs.

For individuals who do need to leave their gangs but who are not ready to take this step, practitioners may need to identify smaller steps these young people can take that can gradually lead towards the ultimate goal of leaving the gang. The experiences of some of the gang-involved youth from Typology 3 provide some insight into understanding what these steps may look like. Carlos and Peter from this group were both conflicted about whether or not they wanted to leave their gangs and desist from crime. Yet both were willing to stop participating in certain aspects of the gang life such as tagging and hanging around the neighborhood on a daily basis. Even though they may have still been involved in crime, they both perceived these steps as progress towards desistance. These decisions serve as examples of how practitioners can initially engage youth who are in this position, with the goal of moving them towards more substantive lifestyle changes with time.

Practitioners could also use this approach when engaging non-gang involved youth who continued to commit crime when they felt it was necessary. For example, the Typology 2 participants were mostly involved in crime because they could not conceive of any other way to financially support themselves. The strategies they needed to help them overcome this challenge were very different from what the gang-involved youth needed. Rather than finding ways to navigate their environments or avoiding risky situations, they could have benefitted most from job training or educational assistance that could provide them with tangible alternatives to illicit activities. Along these lines, in the same way that leaving the gang does not have to be the starting point for servicing gang-involved youth, practitioners could consider setting alternative goals for these youth. Rather than simply viewing recidivism as the sole marker of desistance success, it may be more effective to set staggered goals that include gradually reducing their levels of involvement in crime over time.

Further, the experiences of the three typology groups suggests that a person's thought processes and actions towards desistance may change over time. Although this study did not track all of the participants from the time they left camp, their narratives revealed that many did not start off having the same ideas about desistance that they have now. This finding raises important points about when services are offered and what type of services may be more effective at different stages of the desistance process. Certain youth may benefit from more intensive services at points in their journey when they are less motivated to desist. All of these implications are particularly relevant for the field of social work in particular, which adheres to the belief that all people are capable of change despite having troubled pasts.

It is also imperative that programs, researchers and practitioners think more critically about how to engage young people in the programs that are designed to help them. Interestingly, most of the participants reported that the services they received from the Fresh Start program were very helpful to them in the initial period when they reentered home. However, they did not consider Fresh Start to be a resource for them since they had been out of the program for so long. This perhaps underscores the need for programs to have longer service periods, or even drop-in options for alumni who are no longer formally enrolled in the program but who could use support on an occasional basis. Additionally, they might consider offering services in places where the youth feel most comfortable. More than one participant raised the concern that youth and gang reentry programs do not necessarily provide a safe environment, especially as not all of the program attendees are truly committed to changing their lives. To address this concern, programs may need to consider offering one-on-one and confidential services to youth in areas where they feel safer congregating, such as in their homes. Further, there may be difficulties with youth having to navigate dangerous neighborhood conditions to even travel to some of these

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sites. One participant in this study mentioned this point as he explained that he had had to cross

several enemy territories to even get to the site where we conducted his interview; subsequently,

he asked the researchers to travel to his home for the second interview. For this reason, it may

be important for reentry programs to have satellite sites in areas of the city that do not pose such

imminent dangers.

On the other hand, given the mixed perceptions that the participants had about formal

support programs, scholars and practitioners alike should explore more ways of supporting the

informal entities at work in the participants' lives. Some literature suggests that formerly

incarcerated young people would benefit from exposure to new people who could represent

positive influences in their lives. However, one point that this study made clear was that the

youth who were most isolated because they had cut off all their friends were also very reluctant

to meet new people and develop new friendships. Additional research in this area can help

practitioners to be more effective in helping these young people to identify and build

relationships with people who positively influence their desistance journeys, and provide them

with friendship that is essential to their emotional health.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

This study had several limitations that influenced the overall findings. First, because this

was not a longitudinal study, I was unable to observe the participants' desistance journeys as

they unfolded. Examining their experiences in this way would have given me greater insight into

their actual change processes and may have allowed me to pinpoint with greater accuracy how

various factors worked together to trigger their overall desistance patterns.

Along these lines, a longitudinal study might better illuminate the transitions that formerly incarcerated individuals undergo as they move along the desistance spectrum. One of this study's major findings was the idea that individuals can go through different phases of non-linear change in the course of their desistance journey. Many of the participants underwent different phases of change since the time they exited probation camp. At the start of their desistance journeys, the participants were not necessarily situated in the typologies that this particular study captured. There were Typology 3 members who initially shared similar desistance goals as Typology 1; there were also Typology 1 offenders whose early experiences more closely matched the Typology 2 offenders. However, each of these individuals underwent changes over time that influenced where they eventually ended up in terms of desistance. I was not able to fully examine these changes and instead had to rely on the participants' memories of the specific factors that led them to change. A longitudinal study might provide better insight into how and why these changes occurred.

This idea of there being phases of change ties into another important factor that this study did not fully address, which was the relationship between time and desistance. It is likely that there may have been a strong relationship between the length of time a person had been out of jail or camp and how he was currently faring in the dual journeys towards adulthood and desistance. I interviewed participants who had been released from jail and rearrested at different points in time, which made it difficult to ascertain the full scope of their desistance experiences. For example, three of the young men in Typology 1 were younger than the rest of the sample, and they had only been out of juvenile probation camp for two and a half years or less. It is possible then, that these individuals have simply not had time to reoffend or had less time to

relapse compared to other young men in the sample who had been out of confinement for a longer stretch of time.

On a related note, this study provided only a snapshot view into the desistance experiences of this group of young men, and while I was able to draw some conclusions about the patterns they had exhibited up to this point of their lives, I was not able to make any final conclusive statements about their overall desistance outcomes. In other words, it is unclear where any of these young men might land in the future in terms of recidivism. A longitudinal study that followed these young men over the life course would allow me to draw more firm conclusions about the participants' overall trajectories. For example, I would be able to see which individuals did seem to age out of crime as they became more settled into adulthood. Conversely, it would provide insight into which individuals continued to make poor decisions around crime (despite having positive social supports or "hooks" available to them), and remained entrenched in a criminal lifestyle as a result.

This study was also limited in the sense that it relied solely on the respondents' narratives of events in their lives. Field observations would provide depth and richness to the interview narrative data. In particular, it would have been interesting to observe the participants in their homes and neighborhoods and actually watch them navigate some of the situations they discussed in their interviews. Watching the young men interact with the various constituents within their social support systems would have also enriched the study. To complement this data, interviews could be conducted with the people and places that provided the participants with support. This could highlight the barriers and successes that the social supports experienced in trying to support formerly incarcerated youth, and the perceptions they thought youth had about their help.

Last, this study was very limited by the fact that it only examined the desistance experiences of males. There is an emerging literature base that highlights the unique experiences that young women have who are in contact with the juvenile and/or adult justice systems (Bloom, Owen, Deschenes & Rosenbaum, 2007; Cauffman et al., 2007; Fields & Abrams, 2010), and it would be very insightful to examine similarities and differences in terms of the challenges and barriers both groups encountered while trying to transition out of a life of crime.

It would also be helpful for additional research to explore the concept of desistance, "hooks," and the transition to adulthood. This study presented very mixed findings about the relationship between these constructs, in that some participants were able to latch onto "hooks" such as work and family in ways that helped them to desist, while others remained involved in crime despite having these attachments. Much more research is needed to fully flesh out whether or not having access to these "hooks" is truly associated with desistance among transition-age youth, or perhaps if there are other characteristics (i.e. motivation to change) that play a more important role in helping these young men to transition out of a criminal lifestyle.

Summary and Conclusion

This study attempted to shed light on the struggles that formerly incarcerated young men endure while trying to navigate young adulthood, make better decisions about their lives, and ultimately, remain free from incarceration. A smaller goal of the study was to give voice to a group that is often marginalized and stigmatized after they exit the system. To some extent, even with many reported successes all of these young men were living somewhat on the margins of normative social roles for the 19-24 year old range. Although some had sustained longer periods of time in their lives without any criminal activity, each of the young men were in some way

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struggling as young adults who were trying to move away from their criminal pasts and establish financial and life stability as young adults.

The process of crafting their life histories and presenting them in narrative form proved to be useful for the participants in causing them to reflect on the experiences that have most shaped their desistance journeys. A qualitative approach was also helpful in that it allowed the young men to share the context surrounding their decisions around crime and why they recidivated. Further, it allowed them to highlight their resourcefulness and creativity in developing solutions and strategies for dealing with the problems they faced.

Appendix A. Recruitment Letter

Date: <<   >>

Dear _____ (name of participant):

My name is Diane Terry and I am a graduate student at UCLA. A few months ago, you participated in a telephone survey about the New Roads Camp Community Partners program. At that time, you let one of the researchers know that you would be open to participating in future studies. I am now conducting a study concerning the transition to adulthood among young men who were formerly incarcerated as juveniles. The purpose of the study is to find out more about how life events, social supports, and community-based programs can help to keep young men out of trouble with the law.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study, which entails two face-to face interviews with UCLA researchers. However, if you do not wish to be contacted by phone or e-mail for this study, you may let me know by calling my office at 310-794-4105. If you are selected for the study and you agree to participate, you will receive up to $55 for your participation in two interviews ($25 for the first and $30 for the second interview).

Your participation in this new study is completely voluntary, and if you do not want to participate in the survey, it will not affect your relationship with UCLA. Any information you provide will be kept confidential, so that no one other than members of the UCLA research team will be able to link your responses with your name.

Your opinion is very valuable. By participating in this study, we will gather a better understanding of how formerly incarcerated youth can achieve success during their transition to adulthood

If you have any questions, or if you are not interested and do not want to be contacted, please feel free to contact me at 310-794-4105.

Thank you very much.

Regards,

Diane Terry, M.S.W.
UCLA Doctoral Student

Appendix B. Interview Guides

Prior to interview will be explanation and discussion of informed consent. After informed consent is obtained, digital recorder(s) will be turned on and the interview will begin. Interviewer(s) will have paper to sketch out a timeline of events with the interviewee to try to understand how different types of events are ordered in the life course of the interviewee.

<u>Interview 1: Life history and timeline</u>

Topics to be covered in this interview include:

<u>Life History</u>

- Family History (starting from birth)

- Residential history/neighborhoods

- Educational background and experiences

- Substance use (alcohol and drugs)

- Criminal history

- Gang involvement

- Important friendships, intimate relationships, children

- Experiences with abuse/neglect, foster care/DCFS involvement

- Mental and emotional health

- Any other major life events?

<u>Transition to Adulthood</u>

- Work history since camp

Appendix B. Interview Guides (con't)

- Housing history since camp

- Employment history since camp

- Family history since camp

    o Relationships

    o Children

- Major challenges in this age period (18-24)

    o How did they overcome them?

- How did incarceration as a juvenile change your life?

- What were your friend and family relationships like before and after being incarcerated?

- How would you describe who you were when you were a teenager?

    o During your period of incarceration?

    o How would you describe yourself now?

- Looking ahead: what do you see?

    o How will you get there?

    o Self-identified goals and barriers

Appendix B. Interview Guides (con't)

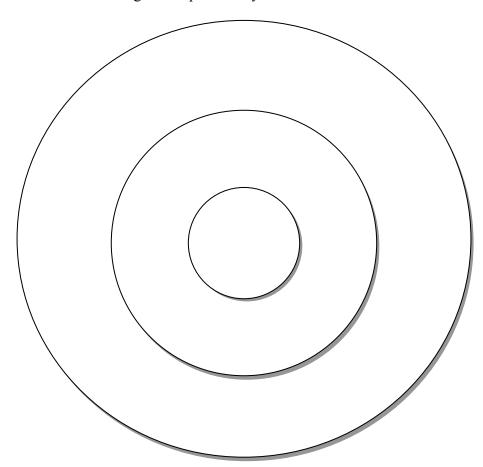Interview 2: Social Support and Desistance From Crime

Topics to be covered in this interview include:

- Criminal History Since Camp Placement

- Sources of Social Support (Formal)

  o Involvement in Services

  o When used?

  o Perceptions of Usefulness

- Sources of Social Support (Informal)

  o How used?

  o When used

  o Informal Social Support Visual Aid

- Perceptions of Community

  o Strengths

  o Risks

  o Informal and Formal Social Support Mapping Aid

- Desistance from crime

  o Perception of Self

  o Supports

  o Risks and Avoiding Risks

- Peers

  o Friendship Processes (before and after camp)

  o Lists of Friends- and Where they Live (map them)

  o How to Avoid or Manage the Influence of Gangs

Appendix C. Social Networking Tools

A. Informal Social Support Exercise: Convoy Model of Social Relations (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980)

Identify persons in your life who are close and important to you. In the inner circle, write the initials of persons so close and important to you that it is hard to imagine life without them. In the middle circle, write the initials of people who are not quite that close but still very important to you. In the outer circle, write the initials of people whom you haven't already mentioned who are close enough to be placed in your network.

Appendix C. Social Networking Tools (con't)

<u>Questions to Guide this Exercise:</u>

1. Imagine that you are in the center of this picture *(POINT TO THE RINGS)*. You can see that there are three rings surrounding you. After you've had time to think about each person, I'd like you to place the people that you feel the closest to in the inner ring. These are people you could not imagine living your life without. In the outer ring, place the people that are important to you, but to whom you feel the furthest. In the middle ring, place people that fall somewhere in between the closest and the furthest rings. Please take your time and place each person on the ring that fits best.

    Now I'd like you to take a moment and think about your relationship with each person. People may offer different kinds of help to others. Of the people here, who can you count on to:

    - Provide you with emotional support such as giving you advice or comforting you?
    - Share good times and bad times with?
    - Talk about your problems with?
    - Give you practical support such as giving you a ride, helping you with school or work, or helping you financially?
    - Understand your problems?
    - Care about your feelings?
    - Help you stay out of trouble?

2. *(For friends and other non-family members)* How long have you known Persons, A, B, C, etc?

3. *(Starting with the inner circle.)* So it looks like [Persons A, B, C, etc.] are the people who support you the most. Is that right?

4. What kinds of support do they give you? How often do you go to them for this kind of support?

5. *(Make an observation about the amount of support they have in their lives.)* Can you tell me whose support is most important to you? Why? [*continue to invite the participant to rank the advice and their explain reasons for the ranking]*

6. *(Make an observation about the people who the participants think help them stay out of trouble).* How do (Persons A, B, C, etc.) help you stay out of trouble?

Appendix C. Social Networking Tools (con't)

B. Informal and Formal Supports and Neighborhood Resources

I have a piece of paper here that represents Los Angeles, where we are meeting right now, and also your home address. First, I would like you to draw on the paper the area that you consider to be your neighborhood. *(If the participant needs clarification, ask him to provide a definition of neighborhood, "Neighborhoods mean different things to different people. Can you tell me what it means to you?")*

1. *(Refer back to the people they listed in their social support circles).* Ask the participant to draw on the map where each of these people live.

2. Ask the participants to draw on the maps where their immediate family members live.

3. How long have you been living in this neighborhood? (*If less than one year, where were you living before?)*

4. Is the neighborhood you live in now different from the one that you grew up in? In what ways?

5. How much time would you say you spend in your neighborhood on a daily basis?

6. What kinds of resources are available in your neighborhood (i.e. social, medical, recreational, educational, legal, etc)? Please draw on the map where they are located. How often do you use each of these resources?

7. Are there other places that you go to in your neighborhood to get resources or help? If so, please draw these places on the map.

8. What kinds of activities do you do in your neighborhood on a day to day basis? When you leave the neighborhood, what are the main reasons for going someplace else? How do you go about getting to places outside of your neighborhood?

9. Finally, is there anything you would change about your neighborhood?

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