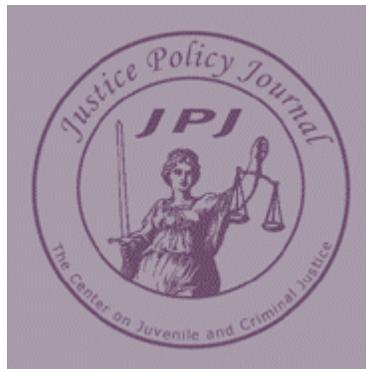


**The Imprisonment Insights of Female
Inmates:
Identity & Cognitive Shifts for
Exiting a Criminal Lifestyle**

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Abstract

In surveying 120 female inmates at the Topeka Correctional Facility (TCF) in 2001 to test criminological theories, and in conducting life-history interviews with 22 inmates at the prison during the summers of 2002 and 2003, I discovered these inmates were subjected to extensive and severe physical and sexual abuse. Thus, I was surprised these inmates frequently conveyed hopeful and optimistic insights about their futures. This study focuses on the positive identity and cognitive shifts that might help female inmates overcome deviant identities and criminal lifestyles. Some inmates stressed their need for increased spiritual growth to end their criminal activities. Other inmates discussed pursuing vocational aspirations after their release from prison. Some shared their intention to no longer accept mistreatment they believe leads to substance abuse. Finally, some inmates described their belief that extensive physical and sexual abuse can lead to imprisonment. These inmates want to ensure that other women will not follow in their footsteps. Their autobiographical insights provide glimpses of the types of identity shifts and strategies women can employ to move away from criminal lifestyles.

About the Author

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Introduction

Giordano, Longmore, Schroeder and Seffrin (2008) note that while factors related to moving into criminality have been frequently examined, the processes associated with desisting crime and moving away from a criminal lifestyle have not as often been investigated. However, this is not always the case, as some researchers are paying greater attention to the variables associated with desisting criminal behavior (Laub and Sampson 2003; Sampson and Laub 1993). In a follow-up study of a large sample of men with histories of juvenile delinquency, Sampson and Laub (1993) identified two factors, marital stability and stable employment, that were associated with predicting recidivism. Giordano, et al. (2008) in their study of previous juvenile offenders focus their research on the subjective processes or “hooks for change” that might make those with histories of criminal behavior become less prone to engaging in illegal activities. They assess whether one “hook for change,” the religiosity of criminal offenders, decreases the likelihood that former delinquents will re-offend. When Giordano, et al. (2008) tested multinomial logistic regression models estimating longer-term offending patterns, they determined that neither of the two indicators of religiosity-increased the odds of prior offenders desisting crime. An earlier study conducted by Hirschi and Stark (1969) found that religious participation and religious belief in an afterlife were not correlated with lower rates of delinquency. These researchers concluded that religious and non-religious youth had similar offending rates. There are other research studies that support Hirschi and Stark’s null hypothesis that religious and non-religious youth do not differ in their levels of criminal offending (e.g. Krohn et al. 1982; Evans et al. 1996; Benda and Corwyn 1997).

Some research findings contradict Hirschi and Stark's null hypothesis and, instead, support the premise that religiosity can insulate people from criminality, even those who have been engaged in previous delinquency. Burkett and White (1974) discovered that religion has a strong effect on adolescents in regard to victimless crimes, such as drug and alcohol abuse, that violate religious principles. Johnson et al. surmised, based on their research (1997), that prisoners with high levels of participation in Bible study had lower rates of recidivism. Benda, Toombs, and Peacock (2003) also reported that religiosity, combined with life course transitions such as marriage and employment was associated with less recidivism in a five-year follow-up of boot camp graduates.

While Giordano et al.'s (2008) longitudinal study results did not show a significant main effect for spirituality in predicting a pattern of sustained disassociation from crime, the in-depth life-history interviews reflected that religiosity held the promise of being a "hook for change" in the lives of former delinquents and was critical to their desistance efforts. The interviews with former delinquents indicated that "religion can provide a blue print for how to change, emotional benefits, and access to more prosocial others who can reinforce the new direction" (Giordano et al. 2008: 21).

In this paper, I focus on what Giordano et al. (2008) refers to as the "specific hooks" conceivably associated with desisting crime. The "hooks" I discuss in this paper, including spirituality, emanate from qualitative data derived from the second qualitative aspect of a multi-method research project conducted at the Topeka Correctional Facility (TCF) between 2001 and 2003. The qualitative phase involved analyzing 22 audio-taped life-history interviews conducted with TCF inmates during the summers of 2002 and 2003. Results from the first/quantitative phase of the project, which entailed surveying 120 inmates in 2001 at the TCF to test how well

criminological theories could account for serious offending, revealed: 1) Agnew's Extended Strain Theory, one of the theories I tested in 2001, may offer insights into serious female criminality; and 2) the strains associated with a particular form of negative social relations, sexual and physical abuse, may influence women to engage in serious criminality and ultimately establish their criminal careers. According to the Topeka Sample respondents, they were subjected to a considerable amount of sexual and physical abuse (56.7% of the inmates experienced sexual abuse before age fourteen and 79.2% reported being involved, as adults, in at least one physically violent relationship). In view of the significant amount of sexual and physical abuse reported by the inmates surveyed in 2001 and how extensive and severe this abuse was, I was surprised these inmates frequently conveyed hopeful and optimistic insights about their futures.

The transcribed interviews revealed that some women reach for spiritual redemption to end their criminal activities. This is not surprising, as many drug and alcohol programs and faith-based initiatives within prisons stress the need to obtain increased spiritual growth and understanding to turn away from crime. The women shared other positive autobiographical insights. Some inmates described their aspirations to move away from criminality to an improved non-deviant lifestyle. Other inmates noted they had obtained increased self-awareness in prison. Several inmates professed higher expectations in terms for intimate relationships. These women no longer intend to accept mistreatment they believe leads to substance abuse. Finally, some inmates focused their autobiographical insights on measures they believe could be instituted at a societal level to prevent the extensive physical and sexual abuse of women, which they believe leads to substance abuse and ultimately imprisonment. These inmates want to ensure that other women will not follow in their footsteps and end up imprisoned. The inmates'

autobiographical insights provide glimpses of the types of identity shifts and strategies, or specific “hooks,” associated with desisting crime. Reliance on these “hooks” might make it possible for the inmates to effectively transform their live, ultimately moving them from the role of career criminal into the role of an ex-deviant who no longer engages in a criminal lifestyle. In the next section of this paper, I will describe the methodology for this study. Then, I will provide a description of the specific “hooks” the female prisoners identified during their interviews that might enable them to move away from a criminal lifestyle. Finally, there will be a discussion of the study’s findings and its policy implications.

Methodology

Quantitative phase

Data for phase one of my multi-method project came from administering a questionnaire to a sample of 120 women incarcerated at the Topeka Correctional Facility (TCF). During eight group sessions at the prison, I explained the purpose of the study and what would be involved in participating in it. Inmates who refused to participate left the group session soon after they had been fully informed about the study. Inmates who agreed to participate in the study completed a paper-and-pencil questionnaire after signing a consent form for participation in the project that had been approved by the University of Kansas’ Advisory Committee on Human Experimentation. During the group sessions, researchers provided assistance reading the questionnaire, ensuring inmates did not mistakenly respond to or omit survey responses. Inmates who agreed to participate in the study typically completed the questionnaire in 25 minutes. During this phase, inmates were approached by the researchers about their interest in participating in audio-taped life history interviews. Inmates who were interested in sharing their

life histories indicated, in writing, their willingness to become participants in phase two of my research.

Qualitative phase

In phase two of my multi-method project investigating the etiology of female criminality, two female sociology graduate assistants and I conducted a total of 22 audio-taped life-history interviews with inmates at the TCF during the summers of 2002 and 2003. During the summer of 2002, I had two assistants, but in 2003, only one graduate assistant was available to conduct the interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to learn more about the inmates' pathways to criminality. I had hoped to interview a total of 30 inmates, since 77 out of the 120 inmates surveyed in 2001 had expressed an interest in participating in audio-taped life-history interviews. However, this was not possible due to inmates' refusals to participate in the study and because many of the inmates originally sampled during 2001 had been released from prison. Also, during the summer of 2003, prison officials overestimated the number of inmates from my 2001 sample who had agreed to participate in life-history interviews but had not been interviewed during the summer of 2002.

While inmates had provided written consent to participate in the life-history interviews when they completed surveys during the summer of 2001, their permission to participate was obtained again just prior to conducting the interviews. The researchers conducted interviews in a room partitioned by cubicles that had been provided by the prison. All inmates interviewed were incarcerated in the minimum and medium security levels of the prison. Prison officials made certain that inmates who required escorts within the confines of the prison were provided with them. Each researcher used the same outline of questions for each interview, and the aim of these open-ended questions was to follow the subjects' line of thought, supplementing questions

to clarify inmates' responses when necessary. Each interview covered the following topics: 1) family history; 2) developmental history; 3) childhood sexual abuse; 4) history of delinquency or adult criminality; 5) adult history; 6) health and access to health care; and 7) adjustment to prison life.

The model my research assistants and I used to analyze the health and health care data involved transcribing the interviews, which could last up to two hours but were typically one to one-and-a half hours long. Each transcribed interview is approximately 10-20 pages, single-spaced. All of the interviews have been identified by a number that can be cross-referenced with the quantitative survey data. A summary for each interview was constructed so the transcribed material was more organized, could be more readily analyzed, and so Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory approach could be applied to the qualitative data.

The female inmates were asked to provide a description of their developmental history, as well as a description of their history of criminality, to determine what strains they would identify as having contributed to their pathway to imprisonment. The inmates were also asked to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. For each inmate, a chart depicting themes throughout the 22 female inmates' life stages was constructed. The charts enabled me to identify recurring themes that were tied to the life stories of the women from their youth to the date they were interviewed. Thus, I was able to determine what strains played a role or contributed to the outcome of female criminality and led to imprisonment. The charts also clarified what types of identity shifts and strategies may help female inmates move out of the role of a career criminal.

The qualitative aspect of my research helped me further investigate the relationship between inmates' sexual and physical abuse and their levels of criminality, as well as the strains

that had led to the inmates' criminality and eventual imprisonment. I discovered the following from depicting the various stages of the inmates' lives:

- ❖ The environmental childhood strains the inmates reported included: instability in their home life, including being bounced from home to home, early life poverty that was sometimes severe, volatile and sometimes abusive relationships between parents, and difficulties with school systems;
- ❖ During childhood, many inmates had to deal with difficult and/or numerous step-parents and face rejection and abuse inflicted by their biological mothers;
- ❖ By the time the inmates reached adolescence, they had arrived, figuratively speaking, at the "Doorway to Female Criminality," as they had participated in illegal activities, including substance abuse, with deviant peers;
- ❖ That adolescent strains reported by inmates included: difficulties with school systems, which can lead to dropping out, engaging in early marriages/unions, being forced out of their home or running away, and becoming pregnant, often out of wedlock at a young age;
- ❖ In adulthood, the inmates' associations with "deviant" men led to them being subjected to further sexual/physical/emotional abuse and increased their involvement in illegal activities and substance abuse; and
- ❖ In adulthood, some other identifiable themes included: deeper immersion in substance abuse that often leads to imprisonment, and more serious involvement in criminality.

Resilience–Positive Identity & Cognitive Shifts

Despite the fact the victimization of female inmates at the TCF has taken a devastating toll on their self-esteem, these women are remarkably resilient. They still want to redeem themselves and try to modify their identities and make cognitive shifts to increase their self-esteem and turn their lives around. The narratives contained in the transcribed life-history interviews describe the specific "hooks" inmates at the TCF identified that might transform their lives so they can relinquish their criminal lifestyles.

Reaching for Religion and Spirituality in Prison

In exploring the diverse range of components of religious feeling and experiences, a large consortium of scholars associated with the Fetzer Institute (2003 [1999]:2) stressed that religious participation “involves a system of worship and doctrine that is shared within a group,” whereas spirituality is “concerned with the transcendent, addressing ultimate questions about life’s meaning, with the assumption that there is more to life than what we see or fully understand.” The interviews revealed that some women are becoming more religious and spiritual to move away from criminal activities. This religious and spiritual shift is not unexpected since many drug and alcohol programs and faith based initiatives within prisons stress the need for obtaining increased spiritual growth and understanding to abandon involvement in crime. Some of the inmates at the TCF reported that they reach for solace from religion to seek a way out of the bleakness of having experienced life-long victimization. These women gravitate toward “church folks” who proclaim that happiness can be found by following “the path of righteousness” and living a more spiritual life. The quotations below illustrate how some of the inmates planned to seek redemption by becoming more religious and/or living their lives in a more spiritual way. These quotations demonstrate how religious participation is viewed by some inmates as reinforcing pro-social actions that, in the future, could keep them from drifting back into criminality.

One inmate, imprisoned for killing someone (involuntary manslaughter while driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs), discussed how her involvement with a religious group within the prison, sponsored by the Methodist Church, has enabled her to do “good works” while she has been incarcerated. She is a member of a group inside prison called United Methodist Women Helping Women Inside that buys food for children in need and makes blankets for

people in nursing homes, as well as for children who have lost their families and are placed in foster homes. This inmate intends to help women at the TCF become involved in religious groups since she contends that participation in religious groups can play a role in preventing inmates from committing crimes once they are released from prison. Thus, this inmate hopes, following her release from prison, to help other women profit from participating in religious groups conducted at the TCF. She said “if someone has something strong they believe in [when] ...they get out they are not going to want to come back. They are going to want to do things for their life”. This inmate also wants to tell high school students her story.

I want to talk to kids. I want to tell them my story, because every one thinks- believes the myth “It won’t happen to me.” It happens to the people that drink all the time and things like that.... So I want kids to know - it can happen to them - it is not just the trouble-maker kids that get in trouble - it is the popular - it’s the cheerleader - the football players - the book people - it is just anyone that can get in trouble. And the kids really listen[ed] to my story and they were really amazed.

Another inmate’s prior participation in the Catholic Church has inspired her to want to help others by becoming a counselor for battered women. This inmate believes her prior knowledge of how Catholic nuns typically serve others reminds her she would like to be engaged in pro-social activities by being of service to others once she is released from prison.

And I have always wanted to be a nun. I mean I know it is too late, you know, but I want to live in a Catholic Church. You know how the nuns do and I want to do that. And to be a battered woman counselor. If I ever do, if I am not an old hag by then... I hope some kind of miracle will happen. Because I learned my lesson Lord.

Some inmates view their spirituality, and more specifically their connection or relationship with a transcendent (either God or Jesus), as their source for sustaining pro-social activities. One such inmate wants to bring other people closer to the God, whom she believes can help others avoid criminality, as well as assist with their needs. She has a dream of starting a

Hope Line that would help people and ultimately enable them to become acquainted with a merciful and kind Lord.

I want to help people. I actually [know] what I want to do. I want to have a ministry for God. And, I want to help people... stay away from drugs, stay away from all bad things, and turn their lives towards God. Whether it be through helping them find a home or clothes or food or whatever. I mean I have got a dream. It is called a Hope Line. And it is a 800 number that they call for spiritual inspiration about a problem. They call and I can talk to them and give them some Bible verses and maybe read the Bible with them, pray with them. While I am in prison if somebody wants to come pray, I am very open to that.... I praise God at all times... that is a better thing than anything else, really. [I believe I am]... able to show others how wonderful, merciful and kind our Lord is.

Another such inmate suggests remaining focused on a relationship with God is the key to staying out of trouble. This inmate cares about others and wishes the inmates around her could establish a trusting relationship with God, but she does not try to force her belief in God on other inmates. Her narrative reflects that she is willing to wait for intervention until an inmate is more open to attempt living on a more spiritual plane and trusting in God.

My strength today is God. My relationship with God is my strength...my weakness is being distracted from that relationship. Because it only takes a blink of an eye, you know to fall. So I have to stay focused.... I care about people today and sometime[s] and sometime[s] that ... affects me. Especially, because I see so much of me in people. You know the hurting and all that stuff. And I want so much to help. But everybody hasn't reached that point of wanting help yet. So I have to learn how to not force myself and just kind of wait and be there when they are ready.

Some inmates believe a close relationship with God can help people understand that bad experiences are blessings in disguise. One inmate believes that when awful things occur, God is leading people to learn lessons and grow spiritually stronger. From this inmate's perspective, God is teaching lessons when it appears he has let us down. This inmate is convinced her imprisonment is God helping her find purpose in life, and that it is her destiny to enlighten others about how God will provide for them.

Well, I have a lot of strength from God. I do a lot of praying. I still I still help people.... A lot of girls are sick in here and know that I will tell them the truth. They say, you know you are always right. They know that I do this, they tell me not to quit. They have some mentally ill people in here that all they need is love; they have nobody to care.... And I told them that God sent me here for a purpose. I didn't resent being here. I did of lot of thinking, he sends you where he wants you. And I feel myself working for the Lord....I go down a lot of times and when I got down I tell the Lord, I ask the Lord, I said show [me] ...where you want me in the bible and I open it up and there is always a message and answer.

The Inmates' Future Aspirations

Some inmates at the TCF described their aspirations for a non-deviant lifestyle after their imprisonment. Some women interviewed want to do what Brown suggests, which is create an ex-deviant counseling identity. In describing the processes for exiting deviant careers, Brown (1991) claims the process for exiting criminality may not always entail abandoning a deviant identity, but can be conceptualized as the "adoption of a legitimate career premised upon an identity that embraces one's deviant history." He believes the professionalization of a deviant career and identity can help create an ex-deviant counseling identity. The inmates interviewed who aspire to transform their identities by becoming professional helpers/counselors upon their return to the community want to capitalize on the experiences and vestiges of their deviant identity by creating what Brown calls an ex-deviant identity. These women have even begun pursuing their mission to improve other's lives during their imprisonment. They become mentors for women in prison by assuming a motherly role toward inmates who are younger and have not given up their commitment to a criminal lifestyle.

Brown's description of the process for ending a deviant career does not apply to all inmates who participated in the life-history interviews. What is apparent in the quotations concerning inmates' future aspirations is that many of inmates who participated in the life-history interviews believe they will embrace and incorporate their deviant histories in creating an

ex-deviant counseling identity. This is not surprising since Schmid and Jones (1991) note prisoners go through an identity transformation process as they move from a former inmate toward a new identity. The quotations below illustrate that there are a number of ways in which inmates want to transform their deviant identities and/or become involved in nurturing others to improve their lives. For example, they would like to prevent youth from becoming engaged in criminality and ending up in prison. Two of the inmates reflected a desire to transform their deviant identities after their release from prison by preventing youth from becoming engaged in criminality.

I would prefer to [be on my own when I leave prison and do] ...volunteer work with the youth. Because they are our new generation and if I could save one person from coming where I am at; then I would like to do so. I mean, I was a child that didn't have anybody. You know - to really... help me out through life. And I feel that... we can go through life telling kids, and I do speak to kids here, [that they] ... are going to bump their heads about one hundred times. Maybe if I can save one, that is going to make it all the better for me. And, I really would like to be able to do that.

If I can get out of here, I will prevent a lot of people from coming in here. I will talk to a lot of young children and stress what it is like here and how to avoid being in here--a place like this. What they can come to expect in a place like this.

Another inmate noted her wish to steer youth away from the pathway that leads to prison is a pervasive desire among inmates at the TCF.

A lot of people here want to do things with high-schoolers, young kids. You know they don't want those kids to go the same path that they did.

Numerous researchers (Chesney-Lind 1989; Chesney Lind and Sheldon 1998; Gilfus 1992; Widom 1995; Belknap 1996) have empirically validated the connection between girl's and women's prior victimization and their subsequent criminality. Thus, it is not surprising some of the inmates interviewed at the TCF want to create an ex-deviant counseling identity that deals with the ways female criminality stems from previous victimization. The following two

narratives illustrate how some of the inmates plan to embrace an ex-deviant counseling identity that will help women deal with the kinds of victimization they are subjected to:

I now speak for a program called, "Stop Violence" ...I am on the board of that program for the facility. One thing that we need to stress to women in situations like this is, "If you are doing something to cover up what is going on in your life and I know that you are going to say that is only a black eye or - you know - he doesn't beat the kids - it is just a problem with me or it is because I am an idiot." Stop it. Don't take that drink and don't smoke that joint. Stop it. It is an excuse. It is not a very good one and it is not very kind. Don't do it.

... my long term plans are to go back to school for psychology and open up a program as a deterrent for women going to prison. Because the majority of women in prison don't need to be in prison. Because this... system is set up for men. It is not set up for women. And there is no program in here that really helps us. And if you are not positive minded and you don't have a made up mind, and you don't have a firm foundation spiritually in this place, you will be in this place forever. I have seen people do thirteen years because of violations. Every ninety days here they come and that is not me. And it is not for them either. And then ... [it turns into] ... the breakdown of family. Because when the mother comes to prison. Nine times out of ten, the father is already in prison and then where are the kids at. They are either in SRS custody or JJA custody. And it is just a big gigantic rip. So, God put it on my heart and gave me a vision to keep families together and counsel families that are [victims]... from any type of abuse, sexual, drug, physical, whatever. In a Christian atmosphere. So that is what my long term plan is.

While some inmates want to develop an ex-deviant role to cope with the victimization that can lead to criminality, other women see themselves establishing an ex-deviant counseling identity that addresses substance abuse.

I see myself running a place [for pregnant women who are using drugs]. Being more of a friend to them. Because... when you are using, you don't care if you are pregnant or not. It is the last thing on your mind when you are on that end.... I want to be there and tell them that I have been there and gone through it....

The pro-social future identities some inmates would like to establish are not related to fulfilling a counseling role. One inmate has spent time in a program at the prison that has enabled her to discover a vocational aspiration she had previously not considered.

I think the one good thing that has happened to me in here besides finding out who I am and really trying to get in touch with myself, is... [having the opportunity to

become involved in the Dog Program]. And the only good thing that I feel that prison has [done for me is enabling me to participate in] ...the Dog Program that they have here. And, it has taught me to be a trainer and that is [a] goal for me when I get out. I do want to train dogs.

Another inmate described the pro-social vocational pursuits she would like to embrace following her release from prison.

My dream is to be a successful person. Um, maybe have my own business. A permanent business. A cleaning business—my own business. I don't want to work for nobody else in my life....I don't give up easy. And I feel that I can turn my life around and have something. I am going to—you know be happy and have life of my own....

Increased Self-Awareness Fosters a Less Destructive Lifestyle

Some of the inmates interviewed have increased their self-knowledge as a result of their participation in rehabilitation programs within the prison and through self-analysis. In examining themselves, some inmates have tried to more fully understand which choices have contributed to their deviant lifestyles and ultimate imprisonment. Some inmates' increased self-awareness has led them to reassess their priorities, as well as how they approach life. Increased self-knowledge seems to help some of the inmates raise their expectations for intimate relationships, as they become no longer willing to subject themselves to the mistreatment they believe leads to substance abuse. The following quotations illustrate the increased self-awareness some inmates developed, and how such awareness is a hook for change in their lives. In reflecting back on their lives, two inmates surmised the substance abuse that led to their criminality, and subsequent imprisonment, could be attributed to their interpersonal relationships. One inmate who dislikes her parents because of how she was raised believes she must acknowledge honestly, and without feelings of pain or self-incrimination, her negative feelings about her parents to avoid becoming a substance abuser again and returning to prison.

Being honest with yourself and getting real with yourself. And that is the one thing that I have never done, is be honest about how I feel...[about] the pain that I felt the way that I grew up, you know. And down there [in the prison's therapeutic community] I was honest. You know...[in the therapeutic program] it is ok for me to say, I hated my dad, the way I was brought up. It is ok to say I hate my mom for the way that I was brought up. But I don't have to stay stuck in that today. I don't have to feel that. You know, I grew from that.

Two other inmates believe the way they interact with others leads to problems, including substance abuse. One inmate, who wears a ring she bought for herself, stressed the importance of not being used or exploited by others but taking care of and respecting yourself. While pointing to the ring on her finger, she said:

This is something that I bought for myself.... I bought it to remind me that I owe myself more than I owe anybody else in this whole world. I owe myself love and respect. I need to cherish myself.... And there will probably never be another ring there. I lived the first half of my life for everybody else and so, I have pretty much decided that the last half is mine.

The other inmate, who believes interpersonal relationships have been her downfall and led to her substance abuse, suggested her drug abuse stemmed from trying to rescue other people and being an enabler.

I just wished if I [could] change anything I wouldn't have started using. That is the one thing. That is the one thing that ruined my whole life. My first using it—I should have just said no—I said no so many times....Yeah, if I could change anything, I would not do drugs, that ultimately led me down the road of destruction. Because I got into it deeper and deeper. That ruined everything. There is no doubt in my mind that I would have accomplished anything that I set for had I not done what I did.... I think that because of everything that has happened, I learned basically how to perceive people, how to say no, which for a long time I had problems being able to tell people no. You know. Because of everything that has happened, if nothing else, it has made me a stronger person. It has made me more independent.... [My] weakness would be enabling people. Enabling, always feeling like I have to be the savior. Always feeling like I have to come to someone's rescue. Always thinking that I can change people. If I am good enough with a person, I can make them a better person or I can change them, which is a total disillusion. I know better now...sure the bottom line is people don't change unless they want to. All the love and all the support in the world isn't going to make somebody into something they don't want to be.

For one inmate, increased self-awareness has caused her to socially reconstruct her past in a more favorable light, as a learning experience. She is convinced her hook for change is not letting her prior mistakes doom her future, and she stressed that what will get her through trying times is what she learned from her father. He admonished her to learn and grow from past errors in judgment and to not keep making the same mistakes over and over.

I'll tell anybody I'm no drug addict. I'm a recovering drug addict and I'm always going to be a recovering drug addict. And I know there's always going to be times that I'm going to make choices. And sometimes in my mind I like the choices that I make. But I have to make them if they better me and keep me out of here because I don't want to come back. I know a lot of my friends and stuff that I had when I was on the street I can't associate with them..... [When I think about my strengths and weaknesses] My strength, I think I get my strength from my daddy. Because he always [told] me when I was growing up, "If you fall in a hole, try and get back up. If you walk down the same side and fall again, you better get back." He said, "If you come down a third time, you better watch where you are going and not fall in the same hole."

Several inmates, who have increased their self-awareness during imprisonment and indicated they no longer intend to be subjected to mistreatment. The following narratives describe what they now seek in intimate relationships.

Someone to love. Somebody who is going to be there. Somebody you are secure with. Somebody who is not going to beat me. Somebody who is not going to abuse me.

I like a good man and he understand[s] me and I understand him. We work together... [he is not] mean to me...[does not]...hate me. [He does not]...hit. [He] love[s] me and [I] love him. No animal.

Another inmate reflected that she should not have tolerated the kind of physical abuse she endured from her male partner. Her words serve as an admonition to young women who continue to believe the abusive relationships they are in will discontinue because their partner has expressed regret about his behavior and pleaded for forgiveness.

I should have stopped him, you know, I should have said no. But I let him hit me and see me being an older woman now, I see I was dumb. But what I have learned now,

once a man hits you the first time, guess what and he gets away with it, he is going to keep on doing and doing it. Don't let him get away with it. That is what I have learned now that I am an old woman now. I should have known, but I was still young. So I was thinking, I forgive you honey. But once I forgive him, he is going to think, when I get in another argument, she will forgive me, she always forgives me.

Suggestions for Preventing the Mistreatment of Women

During the life-history interviews, inmates were asked what they thought would have made their lives turn out differently. In response to this question, two inmates revealed they exercised what Mills refers to as the sociological imagination. According to Mills (1959: 5), this quality of mind helps people think about “what is going on in the world and what may be happening within themselves.” These inmates want to make certain other women do not follow in their footsteps and end up in prison. One would expect that by exercising their “sociological imagination” and advocating for the welfare of other women, these inmates would be in a better position to exit a deviant career. Conceivably, these inmates could become professional “exes” who are either counseling women or advocating for them by raising public awareness to prevent the physical and sexual abuse of girls. In the following quotations, inmates who have exercised their sociological imagination by seeing the relationship between their individual experiences and larger society propose societal-level measures for preventing the extensive physical and sexual abuse of women that leads to substance abuse and, ultimately, imprisonment.

I am an abuse survivor now, thank God.... I have learned so many things from all of this. But one thing I do know, mostly that I have learned, is that we try to shelter little girls from this. We try to hide the fact that this type of thing happens, but it will never happen to you. We don't ever go and say, “Look, if this ever happens to you. If this situation ever happens to you, I want to know immediately. IMMEDIATELY. I might not always be able to protect you, but I WILL prevent it from happening.” We need to educate our children.... [I believe the extensive sexual abuse I experienced beginning at age 6.]...shames, tears people down. It kills a person's hope. It does, it just destroys it.

An inmate, who was sexually and physically, abused beginning at an early age and continuing

into early adulthood, explained how inmates begin life with typical aspirations. She said

Young kids dream about being firemen and they dream about being President and they dream about all of these things...older children dream of changing something or going to the moon or all of those things. No one says, "I am going to wake up today and I am going to be an alcoholic and a drug addict and I am going to live in a box." Or "I am going to kill my husband today." Nobody says that.... Nobody wakes up and wants that. NOBODY. [I recommend to children to keep trying to escape from harmful situations.] ...You know this is like I tell the kids that I talk to... keep telling somebody until somebody hears you, until somebody does something. You might get tired of saying it. You might be embarrassed...[but] you have to keep telling somebody until you make somebody listen. Nobody has the right to hurt you. Nobody has the right to use you. And nobody has the right to force you to do something that is going to make you feel awful forever. If I would have just known that it was OK to continue saying that.

Conclusions

This study examines what Giordano et al. (2008) refers to as the "specific hooks" conceivably associated with desisting crime. The "hooks" for exiting a criminal career identified in this paper emanate from qualitative data derived from analyzing 22 audio-taped life-history interviews conducted with female inmates at the Topeka Correctional Facility (TCF) during the summers of 2002 and 2003. In view of the extensive and severe sexual and physical abuse I found among the inmates surveyed in 2001, I was surprised inmates frequently conveyed positive insights about their futures. The transcribed interviews revealed there are three major "hooks for change," and conceivably a fourth "hook" inmates could make use of to move away from criminal lifestyles.

The first "hook" identified by inmates involves finding solace in religion and spirituality to cope with past victimization and to end their criminal lifestyles. Quotes from inmates revealed they want to help others, especially those whose lives have turned out as badly as their own. The inmates envision themselves doing God's work in a variety of ways, including: 1) becoming involved with religious groups in prison and setting up prison ministries after their

imprisonment ends; 2) becoming engaged in pro-social activities such as helping people in nursing homes and children in foster care; 3) establishing a toll-free, call-in ministry during imprisonment reminiscent of the call-in shows television evangelists use to bring people closer to God, and to help those in trouble; 4) strengthening their relationship with God and helping others to do the same; and 5) ministering to their fellow inmates to ease their pain and suffering. As noted earlier in this paper, it is not surprising that religious participation and spirituality were highlighted by inmates as a mechanism for moving away from criminality, as many drug and alcohol programs and faith-based initiatives within prisons place emphasis on spiritual growth to avoid criminal activities.

A second “hook” for change that emerged in reviewing the life-history transcripts is an aspiration to improve one’s vocation. In describing their current, as well as future pro-social aspirations for a non-deviant and improved lifestyle, the inmates who shared their life histories discussed what they expected to be doing after their release from prison. While some inmates want to pursue a vocation that does not embrace their history as an inmates, a surprising number of women elaborated on creating what Brown (1991) calls an ex-deviant counseling identity. Brown (1991) argues the process for exiting deviant careers can be envisioned as the “adoption of a legitimate career premised upon an identity that embraces one’s deviant history.” The life-history interviews revealed this is what some of the inmates want to do. They aspire to utilize their life experiences, including their imprisonment, to establish a counseling identity. The inmates would like to fulfill the following kinds of counseling roles: 1) after their release from prison, working with youth to prevent them from becoming engaged in criminality and ending up in prison; 2) creating an ex-deviant counseling identity that deals with the ways female criminality stems from previous victimization, including counseling women in prison who have

histories of being physically abused by male partners; 3) running programs for pregnant substance abusers; and 4) helping families in which substantial physical and sexual abuse is occurring. Women who want to create an ex-deviant counseling role expect making such an identity and cognitive shift will help them exit their criminal lifestyles. Some women who aspire to become professional “exes” have even begun pursuing their mission to improve other’s lives during their imprisonment. They become mentors for other inmates by assuming a motherly role toward women who are younger and still have not given up their criminal lifestyle.

A third “hook” inmates acknowledged for exiting a deviant career and identity was developing increased self-awareness. The inmates’ quotes demonstrate that participating in therapeutic programs within the prison, as well as reflecting on their pasts has helped them understand how they have historically undermined themselves. Inmates anticipate that, armed with the self-knowledge they have gained during imprisonment, they will eventually be able to veer away from crime. Increased self-knowledge also seems to help inmates raise their expectations for intimate relationships. They become unwilling to subject themselves to the mistreatment they believe leads to substance abuse. In reflecting back on their lives, some inmates surmised the substance abuse that led to their criminality and imprisonment could have been caused by destructive interpersonal relationships. Armed with increased self-knowledge about their interpersonal relationships, the inmates are no longer letting past destructive relationships trap them emotionally. They are re-examining how to treat themselves and trying to take care of themselves in a more loving and respectful way. The inmates are also trying to avoid rescuing and enabling those engaged in criminality since this kind of behavior can often lead to substance abuse. Overall, increased self-knowledge has had a positive impact on the

inmates' lives. They are no longer letting past errors in judgment prevent them from engaging in a more productive pro-social lifestyle.

A fourth "hook" for potentially leaving a criminal lifestyle involved thinking about and advocating for measures that could be instituted at a societal level to prevent the extensive physical and sexual abuse of girls, which the inmates believe leads to substance abuse and ultimately imprisonment. These inmates want to make certain other women will not follow in their footsteps and end up imprisoned.

The 22 inmates' autobiographical insights provide glimpses of the types of identity shifts and strategies, or specific "hooks," associated with desisting crime. Relying on these hooks might make it possible for inmates to effectively transform their lives and, ultimately, move from the role of a career criminal toward more pro-social lives.

All the identity and cognitive shifts described in this paper for moving away from a criminal lifestyle were shared in PowerPoint presentations I delivered to staff within the Kansas Department of Corrections in May 2006, and to personnel working at the TCF in June 2006. The workshop participants from both agencies reported they were pleased to learn that therapeutic programs within the facility, as well as the faith-based initiatives at the prison, have modified the inmates' thinking, resulted in positive behavior, led the inmates to increased spirituality and pro-social aspirations, and increased their self-awareness. However, personnel at the department of corrections and prison employees are very skeptical that increased spirituality, positive vocational aspirations, and shifts in thinking will prevent inmates from becoming engaged in criminal lifestyles after their release from prison. The correctional personnel's cynical attitude is reasonable given the high recidivism rate for inmates leaving the TCF and how frequently inmates return to prison after leaving the facility. Correctional staff speculated about the reasons

inmates cannot follow through with their high expectations for exiting a deviant lifestyle. Prison personnel suggested it is because the women are very needy and extremely dependent. They have been victimized so frequently during their lives they adopt a victim viewpoint, and because they have such a strong need for any kind of attention or relationship, they seek out men who will further victimize them and keep them in a criminal lifestyle. The inmates continue to remain attracted to the wrong kinds of men upon their release from prison. Instead of continuing to enhance their personal development, they return to the same types of co-dependent relationships they had prior to being imprisoned. As a result, their life-long victimization continues, and they medicate themselves with drugs to deal with the mistreatment inflicted upon them. The correctional staff noted that the women's abusers or predators are often men with histories of criminal behavior and imprisonment.

The correctional staff observed that about one-third of the inmates who come to the prison are less damaged and have adequate survival skills. These inmates are able to stay out of the prison system after their release. To obtain this information, the prison uses a 54 question service inventory that predicts the re-offending vulnerability of inmates. Future research to determine why female inmate's high expectations get derailed upon their release from prison should determine how effective this risk assessment tool is in predicting inmates who become stable crime desisters. Future research could also determine which of the "hooks for change" identified in this paper are critical to inmates' desistance efforts. It would be interesting to follow inmates who have employed some of the various strategies highlighted in this paper to uncover which circumstances derail the inmates' intentions to exit deviant lifestyles. Interviews with women who often return to prison might help correctional personnel understand how they can better prepare the inmates for returning to the community. If the women's involvement with

deviant men turns out to be a significant factor in reducing the likelihood they will avoid criminality, an effort should be made to help female inmates establish more pro-social relationships. This might be achieved with assistance from church groups and social service and advocacy groups that could help inmates move into the kinds of counseling roles they envision occupying. An intensive effort needs to be made to help inmates develop the interpersonal skills they need to prevent their future victimization, particularly at the hands of “deviant” men. Perhaps it would be possible to develop integrated therapeutic groups for male prisoners who commit violence against women, and for female prisoners who often play the role of victim in their intimate relationships with men.

There are surely other variables that contribute to derailing the hopes and aspirations of female inmates attempting to leave a criminal career. In their long-term study of former delinquents, Sampson and Laub (1993) found that environmental factors, including poverty and low-income, increased the probability male offenders would re-offend. Future research needs to consider the of role socio-economic strain in determining whether or not inmates will be able to avoid criminal activities upon their release from prison.

Policy Implications

The “hooks” for change highlighted in this study of female inmates at the TCF associated with desisting future criminality imply certain policy implications. The first hook for change involves becoming more religious and spiritual, and it implies instituting changes within state departments of corrections. Faith-based programs have been introduced into prisons for the benefit of inmates, and they have had a positive influence on prison inmates according to some of the inmates in this study. Yet, once inmates leave prison they often do not have the opportunity to utilize the confidence and skills obtained from these faith-based prison programs

within local churches and church groups. Former inmates, who played key roles in faith-based prison programs, have no leadership options upon their release from prison. While such inmates can join a community-based church, they are not sought out by church leaders to fulfill a unique role in either prison-based faith programs or in helping troubled youth in the community. According to Vevsey (2008), former inmates are not sought out for more pro-social roles because, while we want those who are released from prison to shift their identities to more pro-social roles within society, the roles they can assume in society after imprisonment are limited due to our society's level of tolerance. "We want people to stop being criminals, but we do not necessarily want them to teach in our schools or be our neighbors or bosses" (Vesey 2008:4). Thus, according to Vesey (2008:4), one of the three predicable challenges to reentry is possessing the stigma of being a criminal, as it is this stigma that "discredits the individual and reduces trust." The challenge of creating a new pro-social role for former inmates within the religious sphere (local churches and church groups) is that their behavior in a new pro-social religious role will be suspect and unduly scrutinized. A distinct ex-inmate religious role needs to be carved out or developed for such inmates, but this will require a thoughtful approach to assisting former inmates. This is because the assumption seems to be that former inmates are dependent, and their criminal backgrounds need to be ministered. There appears to be a notion that the stigma associated with being a former inmate makes someone incapable of ministering to the needs of law-abiding citizens. Correctional professionals and clergy need to determine the kinds of pro-social counseling roles former inmates can fulfill and the kind of support former inmates will require to reduce the stigma they encounter within religious communities. Pro-social religious affiliated roles for former inmates might include: 1) having former inmates share their autobiographies with troubled high school students who are becoming increasingly

involved in a criminal lifestyle, so these students gain insights from former inmates that will prevent them from becoming criminal offenders; 2) providing mentoring or counseling to youth who are trying to disengage from criminogenic influences such as poor neighborhoods, dysfunctional family members, and peers engaged in criminal activities; 3) providing assistance and support to girls and women experiencing sexual and physical abuse; and 4) assisting with the establishment and ongoing operation of faith-based initiatives within prisons.

If Maruna's (2001) study of the correlates of crime desistance is correct, the second hook for change, pursuing vocational aspirations by creating an ex-deviant counseling identity, as well as the fourth hook for change, advocating for abuse prevention, have policy implications for women's reentry programs operated by community corrections agencies. According to Maruna (2001), ex-convicts are more apt to refer to desisting crime upon their reentry into the community as "making good," "going legit," or "going straight" when they have internalized pro-social or redemptive self-narratives for the trajectory of their lives. Maruna (2001: 42, 87) believes developing "a self-story favorable to desisting crime could be seen as 'hardening' the individual's resolve to stay out of trouble" for it is the redemptive script that "allows the person to rewrite a shameful past into a necessary prelude to a productive and worthy life." When Maruna compared the self-narrative of ex-convicts desisting crime to the self-narratives of actively offending ex-convicts, he found the membership of his desisting group had formulated meaningful internal stories to redeem themselves (Maruna 2001:55). In stark contrast, when Maruna (2001) analyzed the narratives of a group of actively offending, or "persisting" ex-convicts, they did not foresee a change in their situation. The active offenders' narratives revealed that while they wanted to stop offending, they felt "powerless to change their behavior because of drug dependency, poverty, a lack of education or skills, or societal prejudice"

(Maruna 2001: 74). The life-script of the persistent offenders is a uniform one—they sense themselves a victim of society (77). The persistent offenders in Maruna’s study “view themselves as victims of circumstance. They claim to have a clear picture of the ‘good life’ but do not feel they have the ability to get there using their own volition. The only refuge they can imagine is found in a bottle or behind the wheel of a stolen sports car” (Maruna 2001: 83). Therefore, correction officials developing and operating community reentry programs need to find ways to support and sustain former female prisoners’ pro-social aspirations. What needs to be especially supported are the former inmates’ self-identified moral or higher purposes—their “desire to make a lasting contribution or leave a positive legacy (‘something to show’) with one’s life” (Maruna, 2001:104). Supporting an ex-convict’s “generative role model for the next generation may seem like an extreme shift ... [but] this sense of optimism and self-efficiency might be useful for sustaining desistance” (Muruna, 2001:105). Supporting the generative aspirations of women on parole could be accomplished by providing them with job coaches and mentors. These mentors would help formulate community re-integration plans that would be developed in conjunction with programs to help former female prisoners actualize their pro-social life trajectories. Such plans, for example, would identify skills a former prisoner requires to achieve the life script she has imagined. Plans for helping former female prisoners achieve the pro-social identities that they have imagined could involve obtaining expertise from a vocational counselor or ex-inmates who have “made good.” Input from female ex-convicts who have overcome physical and sexual victimization to achieve ex-deviant counseling identities could also assist in developing re-integration plans.

Policy implications for the third hook for change, developing increasing self-awareness, are self-evident. In spite of evidence to the contrary (Martinson 1974), some inmates profit from

the therapeutic interventions they utilized during their imprisonment. Therefore, correction officials developing and operating community reentry programs need to incorporate therapeutic community-based interventions for female ex-convicts to assist them in “making good,” or desisting crime. It appears correction officials managing reentry programs need to find a way to replicate these therapeutic programs outside prison walls. Perhaps, therapeutic communities for female ex-convicts could be established outside prison in the form of weekend retreats similar to those religious groups sponsor to enhance spiritual growth, help couples prepare for impending marriage, or help couples rejuvenate their marriages. Therapeutic communities for ex-convicts would be geared toward increasing self-awareness since the women who participated in this study stressed that self-knowledge brings about the kind of behavioral changes that precipitate the formation of pro-social identities and lifestyles, which, in turn support desisting crime.

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