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Authors
Bachman, Ronet
Kerrison, Erin
Paternoster, Raymond
et al.

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DESISTANCE FOR A LONG-TERM DRUG-INVOLVED SAMPLE OF ADULT OFFENDERS

The Importance of Identity Transformation

RONET BACHMAN
University of Delaware
ERIN KERRISON
University of Pennsylvania
RAYMOND PATERNOSTER
University of Maryland
DANIEL O'CONNELL
LIONEL SMITH
University of Delaware

Using a mixed-race sample of male and female drug-involved offenders who were released from prison in the early 1990s and re-interviewed in 2009 through 2011, this article represents perhaps the first attempt to determine the utility of the identity theory of desistance (ITD) in explaining desistance in a contemporary cohort of adult drug-involved offenders. Supporting the ITD, interview narratives revealed that the vast majority of offenders who successfully desisted from crime and substance misuse had first transformed their offender identity into a non-offender identity. Although partnership and employment did not appear to be significant turning points per se for the majority of our respondents, rekindling relationships with extended family and finding living-wage employment did serve to solidify new prosocial identities once the transformation had occurred.

Keywords: desistance; identity theory of desistance; drug-involved offenders

Among the profusion of research examining criminal desistance, recent findings have begun to show that popular theories of desistance, including Sampson and Laub's age-graded informal social control theory (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson & Laub, 1993), may be deficient when predicting desistance using contemporary offending samples

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(Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002; Giordano, Schroeder, & Cernkovich, 2007; Maruna, 2001; Maruna, Lebel, Mitchell & Naples, 2004; Maruna & Roy, 2007). The sample of men upon which much of Sampson and Laub's theory was based featured a cohort of young White males, sometimes referred to as the Glueck boys (Glueck & Glueck, 1950), who came of age in the 1950s when well-paying industrial jobs were available and who, as a result, appear to have been amenable to changing their criminal behavior via routes such as employment and good marriages. Recent theorizing about desistance has added to this structural background the psychological manifestations that appear to affect the success of the desistance process for active offenders today. For example, Maruna and colleagues (Farrall & Maruna, 2004; Maruna, 2001; Maruna, Lebel, Mitchell & Naples, 2004; Maruna & Roy, 2007) theorize that desistance involves individuals reinterpreting their past criminal selves with prosocial views of themselves to reconcile their current identities as good people. This work was expanded by research by Giordano and her colleagues (Giordano et al., 2002; Giordano et al., 2007) who collected data from a prospective cohort of adolescent offenders transitioning to early adulthood. They contended that "cognitive transformations" within individuals must first occur before they would be open to prosocial opportunities such as employment and good partnerships. This included offenders recrafting emotional dimensions of their identities as well as "emotional mellowing" (Giordano et al., 2007, p. 1611), which serves to replace an angry or depressive self with one that is both more prosocial and emotionally stable.

Paternoster and Bushway (2009; Bushway & Paternoster, 2011, 2013) offer one of the most recent theoretical formulations explaining desistance, called the identity theory of desistance (ITD). Offenders, Paternoster and Bushway (2009) contended, will retain an offender working identity as long as they perceive it will net more benefits than costs. The process of changing an offender identity is gradual, and occurs "when perceived failures and dissatisfactions within different domains of life become connected, and when current failures become linked with anticipated future failures" (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009, p. 1105). When offenders come to the realization that their criminal involvement is either currently more costly than beneficial and is projected to be more costly in the future, they make initial moves to change their identity (and ultimately their life) to one that is law-abiding. This newly emerging prosocial identity triggers a diminished preference for things like quick and easy money (via theft or drug dealing), and motivates a move to make one's social network more prosocial as well. It is this internal change in identity and the recognition of the kind of person that one wants to be that both motivates behavior consistent with a prosocial identity (change in preferences, desire for legitimate work, and conventional friends) and sends a signal to others (like potential prosocial intimates and employers) that the person is making positive changes in their life.

Although recent qualitative work has noted the importance of identity change for the desistance process (Aresti, Eatough, & Brooks-Gordon, 2010; Healy, 2013, 2014; King, 2013; Opsal, 2012; Stevens, 2012), few have attempted to connect the constructs articulated by ITD to desistance narratives. In this article, we offer a preliminary empirical examination of the ITD using qualitative data collected from a subset of serious, drug-involved offenders who were released from Delaware prisons in the early to mid-1990s and re-interviewed in 2009-2011. We next provide an overview of theorizing about desistance, followed by a discussion of the empirical findings regarding the relationship between identity and desistance.

THEORIES OF DESISTANCE FROM CRIME

Theoretical speculation about the factors related to desistance began to emerge with the research by the Gluecks (Glueck & Glueck, 1950), but remained virtually dormant until Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) and Sampson and Laub (1993) catalyzed interest in the topic in the early 1990s. Sampson and Laub's age-graded theory of informal social control, and its subsequent revision (Laub & Sampson, 2003), was based on the original Glueck Boys data, which they extended by conducting life-history narratives with a small group of the original sample. The backbone of their theory of desistance asserts that offenders quit crime when they establish strong conventional bonds through marriage, military service, and stable employment. The slightly revised theory developed in 2003 featured a broader set of contributing factors, including "the interplay of human agency and choice, situational influences, routine activities, local culture, and historical context" (Laub & Sampson, 2003, p. 9). Essentially, this life course perspective of desistance hypothesized that exogenously generated turning points such as finding the right partner, landing a stable and satisfying job, or serving a successful stint in the military could each produce a prosocial deflection in a previous offender's criminal offense trajectory because it strengthened a weak social bond and gave offenders what Toby (1957) long ago called a greater stake in conformity.

For Laub and Sampson (2003), adopting prosocial roles initiates and is both a necessary and sufficient part of the desistance process. Although turning points can have diverse effects that may include identity transformation, it is clear from their work that any cognitive changes that occur within an individual do so later in the desistance process, and as a result of participation in conventional social roles. As such, identity change or other cognitive changes are not needed for desistance to happen. In fact, they state, "[O]ur stance on the desistance process contrasts with emerging theories of desistance that emphasize cognitive transformations or identity shifts as necessary for desistance to occur . . . " (Laub & Sampson, 2003, p. 278).

Other much less social-structural theories of desistance have since emerged including works presented by Maruna and colleagues (Farrall & Maruna, 2004; Maruna, 2001; Maruna, Lebel, Mitchell & Naples, 2004; Maruna & Roy, 2007). Their explanations of desistance have focused squarely on the notion of an offender's identity, but not on the idea that an identity change either preceded or was an important causal mechanism of desistance. For Maruna and colleagues, offenders do not change their identity from an offending antisocial person embedded in a life of crime to one who now sees themselves in a different, conventional light. Rather, offenders who already have prosocial views of themselves in the present, deliberately reinterpret their past offender identities to make previous criminal actions both explicable and consistent with their current favorable views of who they are and what they are "really like." Maruna (2001) stated, "[D]esisting is framed as just another adventure consistent with their life-long personality, not as a change of heart. Again, this allows the individual to frame his or her desistance as *a case of personality continuity rather than change*" (p. 154, emphasis added). As such, Maruna's findings suggest that desisting offenders do not change who they are as much as they change the interpretation of their criminal past so that it is reconciled with their current view of themselves as "good" people. This does not involve change as much as it does a "willful cognitive distortion" of the past to align it with the present and it is the cognitive work described as "making good" (Maruna, 2001, p. 9).

Another theory that has underscored the psychological evolution that must accompany desistance from crime was developed by Giordano and her colleagues (Giordano et al., 2002; Giordano et al., 2007). In its original formulation, Giordano and colleagues (2002) argued that while turning points such as jobs and marriages were important for desistance to take place, two types of cognitive transformations in the offender must occur first: (a) there must be a greater openness to change, and (b) the individual must perceive the conventional role as being salient or important for them. Other types of cognitive changes, such as changes in how one views crime or deviant behavior and the fashioning of a new conventional "replacement self" occurs only after and as a result of involvement in conventional roles or hooks.

In their subsequent enhancement of the theory, Giordano et al. (2007) noted an important additional type of cognitive transformation not discussed in their earlier article that involves offenders recreating emotional dimensions of their identities—an emotional transformation. Because securing jobs and marriages did not affect desistance in their earlier results (Giordano et al., 2002), their revised theory placed much greater weight on emotional changes emergent as a result of role-taking in good relationships with romantic partners. They argued that in many if not most offenders' lives, there had been conflict with parents and intimate others, and that recurring instances of this conflict in the family or in intimate relationships eventually molded an angry or a depressive self. Left unaddressed, this angry/depressive self often led to persistence in crime.[1] In this version of the theory, participation in conventional roles and role-taking with a prosocial partner helps offenders break from crime through both emotional (changing the way anger is understood and managed) and cognitive (new definitions of a criminal lifestyle) transformations.

In contrast to these works, the ITD (Bushway & Paternoster, 2011, 2013; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009) contends that offenders will retain an offender working identity as long as they perceive they are netting more benefits than costs from criminal behavior. Although many offenders confront failure (e.g., they get apprehended, they go to prison and their loved one takes up with another and/or they lose custody of their children, the stolen goods net very little money), as long as they attribute these failures to bad luck and not to their own behavior (e.g., they exhibit a self-serving bias), they will most likely continue offending. The process of changing to a non-offender identity occurs when individuals begin to question that illusion, and "when perceived failures and dissatisfactions within different domains of life become connected and when current failures become linked with anticipated future failures" (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009, p. 1105). Baumeister (1991) referred to the linking of previously isolated dissatisfactions and senses of failure in life as the crystallization of discontent. The ITD proposes this discontent as part of a subjective process of self-interpretation or self-knowledge. Once offenders come to the realization that their criminal offending is more costly than beneficial, that the failures they are experiencing are due to their own insufficiencies, and that these failures will likely continue into the foreseeable future, only then will they make initial moves to change their identity (and ultimately their life) to one that is more prosocial.

ITD contends that initial moves toward desistance may come about as a result of a feared self—an image of what a person does not want to be or fears becoming. The feared self provides the first steps toward desistance, but to maintain these initial steps, the offender must craft a new, more positive image of what they want to become, the possible self. This newly emerging prosocial identity, or possible self, then triggers a change that diminishes

preferences for things like quick and easy money (via theft or drug dealing), or the party life (Shover, 1996), for prosocial things, even if the only conventional opportunities are part-time or temporary employment. This change in preferences motivates a move to make one's social network more prosocial as well. It is this cluster of internal changes in identity and preferences and the crafting of the kind of person that one wants to be that both motivates behavior consistent with a prosocial identity (desire for conventional work, conventional friends, a life free of crime and drugs) and sends a signal to others (like potential prosocial intimates and employers) that the person is serious about making a change in their life, and is a compatible fit for their network or workplace. According to IDT, it is this change in a former offender's identity that both explains the movement into conventional roles or hooks, and explains why those who had previously been involved in crime would be receptive to prosocial influences. Importantly, even without a good job or a prosocial partner, one who has effectively changed their identity can desist from offending. In sum, identity change is essential for desistance in a way that satisfying intimate relationships and stable employment are not.[2]

Although there is common ground between IDT and the other theories, there are several important differences. It is well beyond the scope of this article to delineate all theoretical similarities and differences; however, it is important to highlight a few. For example, each theory asserts that conventional roles are important in maintaining desistance, but the ITD maintains that identity change comes first in the causal sequence, and only then can it be followed by the ability to maintain other prosocial roles including conventional employment and prosocial relationships. This view was also expressed by others including Bushway and Reuter's (1997) observation that employment was unlikely to lead to desistance in the absence of a personal commitment and deliberate intention to quit crime. Similarly, Giordano, Cernkovich, and Holland (2003) asserted that unless a former offender had already committed to change, they would be unmoved by a spouse's effort at supervision and restricting their social interactions. The ITD places much greater weight on identity transformation than it does on participation in conventional social roles. The ITD recognizes that if there is a change in identity and a motivation to break from crime, ex-offenders can carve out a life generally free of crime without a full-time job and/or a supportive partner. An individual who has decided to quit crime can live with family or friends; work hourly jobs at a labor pool; receive financial help from family, relatives, and acquaintances; and develop a support structure that would not likely help or help for long without a recognized general commitment to positive change. This point is important and may provide the missing element in current quantitative models predicting desistance that find no or little support for employment and marriage as significantly predicting desistance (Giordano et al., 2002; Giordano et al., 2007) or find that both marriage and employment come *after* periods of desistance, rather than before (Lyngstad & Skardhamar, 2013; Skardhamar & Savolainen, 2014). In fact, many offenders re-entering the community from prison today must return to an environment of concentrated disadvantage, where there are low rates of both marriage and living-wage job opportunities for former convicts, particularly African Americans (Pager, 2007).

RECENT LITERATURE ON IDENTITY AND DESISTANCE

Motivated by recent theoretical formulations by Maruna and colleagues (Farrall & Maruna, 2004; Maruna, 2001; Maruna, Lebel, Mitchell & Naples, 2004; Maruna & Roy, 2007) as well as Giordano and others (Giordano et al., 2002; Giordano et al., 2007), several

scholars have attempted to unpack the black box of human agency and identity transformation thought to be inherent in the desistance process. Moreover, although not labeled as such, several constructs articulated by ITD have been illuminated by previous research examining the desistance process from offending or in research examining the recovery process from addiction. For example, Baskin and Sommers's (1998) interviews with drug-involved female offenders graphically illuminated the dimension of the feared self that is articulated by the ITD. One woman in their sample stated, "I thought that I would die out there [on the street] . . . I thought someone would kill me . . . I had a fear of being on the front page one day and being in the newspaper dying" (Baskin & Sommers, 1998, p. 131). Qualitative research like this that relies on intensive interviews is much more suited to capture the complex cognitive processes inherent in identity transformation compared with survey data (Bachman & Schutt, 2015).

One recent study that has the added strength of interviewing re-entering offenders at more than one point in time was conducted by Opsal (2012), who interviewed 43 women up to 3 times during a 1-year period after release from prison. Although this study focused primarily on the effects of employment, the role of identity change appeared to be crucial to the process of change. Opsal noted, "many women explained that employment would play a central role in creating and sustaining change as they set out to be different kinds of people" (Opsal, 2012, p. 389). Similarly, in an attempt to understand "agency as an important ingredient in the desistance process," Healy (2013, 2014) interviewed 73 men under probation supervision and later re-interviewed 14 of the original sample. Based on the evolution that Healy observed in the interview narratives, she developed three types of desisters. Two categories, labeled *imagined desistance* and *liminal desistance*, included those who imagined or had actually formulated a clear future prosocial self, but believed that this new identity was not completely attainable in their current circumstances. These men reduced the frequency and severity of their offending, but had still not completely desisted. The other category, which Healy labeled *authentic desistance*, was comprised of those who had transformed an imagined identity into a meaningful crime-free self. She concluded that, "the ability to imagine a meaningful and credible self is an important mechanism behind agentic action and may play a pivotal role in the transition from crime to desistance" (Healy, 2014, p. 887).

And finally, research by Aresti et al. (2010) found clear evidence of primary identity change for a sample of male reformed offenders who had been out of prison for 2 years or longer. Although not referring to the constructs of the ITD, the narratives nevertheless illuminated the "men's experience of self-change" that followed a "salient temporal path" (Aresti et al., 2010, p. 174). Like the crystallization of discontent that is often accompanied by perceptions of a feared self, as articulated in the ITD, Aresti and her colleagues noted that the majority of the men interviewed encountered defining moments as they moved toward self-change that were often accompanied by perceptions of the future they feared. For example, one respondent clearly articulated the perceptual process inherent in his transformation,

> I'd actually reached the point where I felt that life wasn't worth living . . . so I had to make a decision as to what I was gonna do . . . I was in a state of hopelessness, but that sort of gave me a light at the end of the tunnel. (Aresti et al., 2010, p. 176)

In sum, although identity has been implicated in the desistance process by various theorists, and placed at center stage in Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) theory of desistance,

the role of identity change has only recently been given serious empirical attention. Although the studies we have highlighted here have offered glimpses into the black box of agentic identity change, their results have not been formally placed within the broader theoretical discourse of desistance. Although we cannot empirically determine whether identity change is the causal mechanism that leads to desistance, in this article, we present compelling insight into the role of identity transformation in desistance from crime, using a relatively large mixed-race and gender sample of drug-involved offenders who were followed post-release from prison in the early 1990s and then re-interviewed in between 2009 and 2011.

METHOD

SAMPLE

The data for this study come from a longitudinal analysis of serious drug-involved offenders who were released from the state of Delaware correctional system between the years 1990 and 1996. The original study was designed to examine the effectiveness of a drug therapeutic community (TC), and the sample consisted of 1,250 male and female offenders who were randomly assigned to either a control or a treatment condition (Inciardi, Martin, & Butzin, 2004). Participants in the study were first interviewed while still incarcerated, approximately 9 months prior to release (referred to throughout this article as the baseline incarceration), and were re-interviewed after release at 6, 18, 42, and 60 months. In this article, we included only White and African American subjects for this analysis, which resulted in 1,044 subjects, of whom 79% were male and 73% African American.[3]

Arrest histories for each offender that covered the years 1990 to 2008 were obtained from the Delaware Statistical Analysis Center, which records all arrests and imprisonments in the state of Delaware. These data were augmented by arrest data from the National Criminal Information Center (NCIC) to capture arrests that occurred outside the state of Delaware. With these data, we amassed a count of the number of arrests for each person per year. Incarceration data were collected from each offender since 1990, and included the entrance and exit data from prison for each sentence. This information was used to compute the number of days free per year as a measure of exposure time. Our analysis strategy began with the estimation of a group-based trajectory model for our arrest history data (Nagin, 2005).[4] A graph of the offending trajectories for the five-group model (all quadratic) that best fit the data is shown in Figure 1. We present this model because it was used as the sampling frame for the qualitative part of our study.

The names provided for each group are purely subjective based on the average number of arrests each group accumulated per year after release. For example, the Low-Level Desisters started at about 1.75 arrests per year after release, but by 5 years after release, they consistently had the lowest annual arrest numbers over time. In contrast, the High-Level Persisters had a fairly flat trajectory moving between two and three annual arrests over the 1990 to 2008 time period. To ensure that a representative sample of both persisters and desisters were included in our interview sample, respondents from the original cohort were randomly selected from within each of the five trajectory groups,[5] which resulted in 304 intensive face-to-face interviews. The purpose of these qualitative interviews was to illuminate the mechanisms for change in offending over time and allow the offenders to speak directly for themselves about what changes they felt they had undergone over the years since their baseline incarceration. These qualitative data serve as the focus of this article. Our goal was to descriptively examine the role of identity change and the causal sequencing

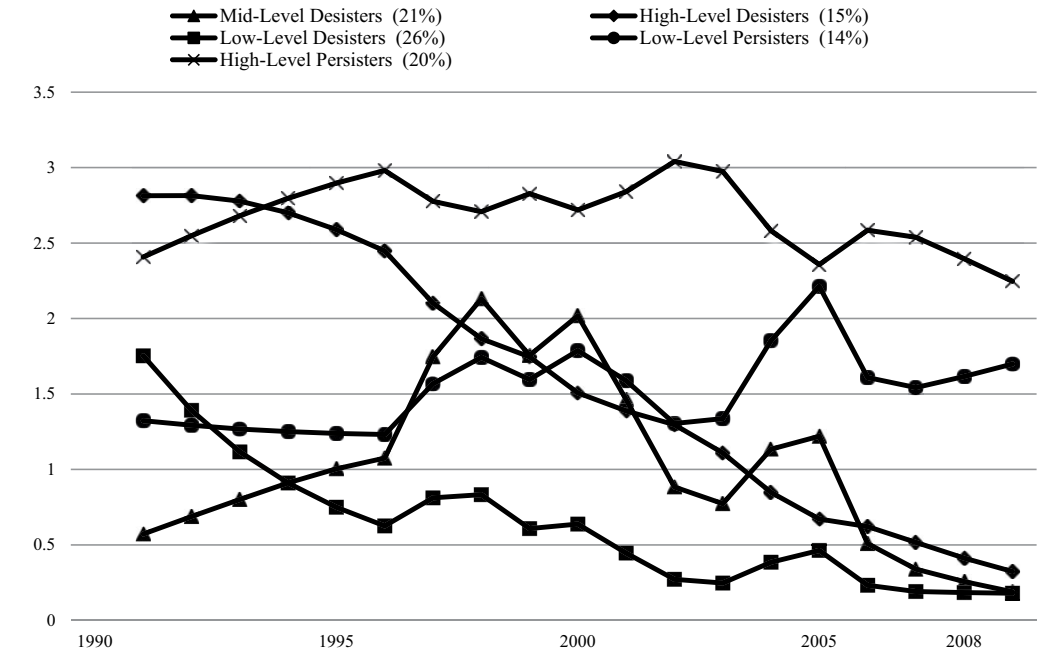

Figure 1: Trajectories of Arrests 1990-2008 Used to Select Respondents for Interviews

of events throughout the lives of these respondents, as they relate to both criminal offending and substance abuse.

PROCEDURE

Respondents selected for interviews were first contacted by mail requesting that they call a research office phone number at a local university if they were willing to participate in the interview. Follow-up was needed in many cases, and was done first by another letter, then by phone, and finally by personal visits in a few cases. All interviews lasted from 1 to 3 hr and were tape-recorded. Respondents were compensated US$100 for their time and travel expenses. Not surprisingly, sample attrition was a significant problem when attempting to contact these drug-involved former offenders years later. Approximately 11% of the original sample was deceased, 13% were still incarcerated, 3% were found to be living out of state, and 7% were unreachable by any means. Although we originally did not want to conduct interviews with those still in prison because the Department of Corrections did not allow tape recorders, three women and four men who were in the persisting categories were interviewed while in custody in the effort to increase the sample size of those trajectory groups. Notes were used to analyze the seven interviews conducted in correctional settings, and for two audio-taped interviews that were corrupted. Of the 304 people interviewed, the majority was male (n = 186, 61%), African American (n = 185, 61%), and had a mean age of 45 years. The response rate for those who were successfully contacted and living in Delaware was approximately 96%.

The interview guide resembled an Event History Calendar (EHC), which has proven to be an extremely useful tool for collecting retrospective data on life events within different domains such as subjects' relationship changes, medical history, and offending (Belli, Stafford, & Alwin, 2009). Another important tool we used in our EHC to facilitate respondents' recall was the placement of arrest and incarceration dates obtained from official data within the calendars, as well as key life events such as birthdays. These cues proved extremely useful for helping respondents recall both their offending histories as well as other life events. However, the interviews were primarily open-ended and resembled conversations rather than an exchange of formal survey questions and answers. The goal was to uncover what Agnew (2006) referred to as "storylines" in understanding criminal offending. A storyline is a "temporally limited, interrelated set of events and conditions that increase the likelihood that individuals will engage in crime" (Agnew, 2006, p. 121). For each criminal and drug relapse event self-reported or obtained from official records, respondents were asked to recreate the event both perceptually and structurally, and interviewers probed for respondents' cognitive decision-making processes surrounding those events.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and imported into NVivo for coding. The analytical process of coding involved a number of sequential stages that identified ideas and themes, as opposed to counts of explicit words or phrases (Namey, Guest, Thairu, & Johnson, 2007). The coding team included the first and second authors and two graduate students. The coding process began with a list of initial categories developed from the existing desistance literature including such key indicators as turning points, indicators of agency, and readiness for change, and the psychological indicators of discontent and fear. Before coding began, training sessions ensured that definitions of each category were understood and that consensus was reached for a standardized practice of coding procedures. Next, all researchers coded the same transcripts and discussed their coding strategies in group meetings. In these team meetings, decisions to add new categories through a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) were adjudicated and coding discrepancies were discussed and resolved. This team dynamic, we believe, allowed the emotional expression of the researchers to enhance the conceptual decision-making process (Sanders & Cuneo, 2010).

The coding process continued with eight weekly reliability meetings in which a new interview was coded by all four researchers. To facilitate future analyses, all emergent themes were coded, which resulted in over 20 main categories (e.g. Discontent, Turning Points, Incarceration), and over 100 subcategories used in the coding scheme. This coding strategy allowed a breadth of coding domains to be created that were not mutually exclusive, but would be invaluable to future research using these data, even though fewer codes may have allowed us to more easily provide global tallies of emergent themes. Discrepancies in coding did not come from a lack of correspondence with key domains, but by the fact that some coders may have simultaneously placed a narrative into several domains while another coder may have placed it within only one domain. For example, one coder may have placed the mention of childhood abuse by a mother in several domains such as "relationship with mother," "childhood abuse," and/or "blame for drug use," while another coder may have placed this mention within the "childhood abuse" domain only. Still, inter-coder reliability ratings were acceptable (kappa coefficients were generally .70 or higher). The tree node domains helped us to organize the transcripts into meaningful segments, but ultimately, our conclusions are based on a holistic reading of the interviews in their entirety, looking for

trends in those interviews that involved true desistance compared with those that did not (Namey et al., 2007). Moreover, this analysis strategy is consistent with the philosophy of qualitative and constructivist/interpretivist research (Bachman & Schutt, 2015), compared with a more quantitative approach.

Self-Reported Desistance

The problems inherent in operationalizing desistance have been acknowledged by others who have noted that official arrest records many not be valid indicators of desistance (Bottoms, Shapland, Costello, Holmes, & Muir, 2004; Maruna, 2001; Maruna, Lebel, Mitchell, & Naples, 2004). The qualitative component of our research not only allowed us to examine the cognitive mechanisms of desistance in the respondent's own words, but also provided self-reported involvement in crime and substance misuse. Most offending data indicate that many offenders intermittently engage in offending (Carlsson, 2012; Piquero, 2004), so making a time cutoff point to operationalize desistance is a fairly precarious enterprise. We recognize these issues and have adopted what we believe to be a relatively conservative definition of desistance. Like Maruna (2001) who noted that "12 months of drug-free, crime-free, and arrest-free behavior is a significant life change worthy of examination," (p. 48), we operationalized crime desistance as those who were not under correctional supervision and who had *not* engaged in any criminal activity during the past 12 months. Substance use desistance was defined as those who were not under correctional supervision and who had *not* used illegal drugs, including misuse of prescribed medications, or had not used alcohol if they were addicted to alcohol, during the past 12 months. Table 1 presents descriptive information on self-reported desistance for the 293 cases in which self-reported desistance could be validly coded in the interviews. As can be seen, a large percentage (54% or more across gender and race groups) of all respondents reported using illegal substances during the past 12 months, regardless of having no official arrests in the previous year, but fewer were still engaging in other illegal activity (22% of men and 25% of women). The qualitative analysis that follows provides comparisons between those who self-reported desisting and those who were still persisting in drug use and/or crime.

RESULTS

We organize our results around the cognitive mechanisms for change necessary for identity transformation as outlined by the ITD. This includes perceptions of the disutility of crime that included perceptions of the feared self, the perceptual process of connecting past failures (the crystallization of discontent), and the process of changing preferences on the road to a prosocial identity and desistance. We also highlight the roles of marriage and employment in the interview narratives as well as their temporal order in the desistance process. Finally, we offer a narrative counterfactual by examining narratives from those who self-reported persisting in drug use and/or crime. All names of people, locations, and places of employment have been replaced with pseudonyms.

THE GROWING DISUTILITY OF CRIME

I'm done man! Man I'm done! I'm done right now, this is where my life is heading.

TABLE 1: Percent Distribution of Self-Reported Crime, Drug Use, and Immediate Desistance by Gender, Race, and Trajectory Group Membership for Interviewed Sample (*N* = 293)

	Percent Still Using[a]	Percent Still Engaging in Crime[a]	Percent Immediately Desisted After First Incarceration	*N*
White	58	20	3	118
African American	56	25	2	175
Male	58	22	3	182
Female	54	25	3	111
Mid-level desisters	65	15	0	77
High-level desisters	37	8	6	85
Low-level desisters	46	12	0	54
Low-level persisters	68	44	0	38
High-level persisters	75	42	0	39

a. Self-reported crime desistance was defined as those who were *not* under correctional supervision and who had *not* engaged in any criminal activity during the past 12 months. Substance use desistance was defined as those who were not under correctional supervision and who had not used illegal drugs, including illegally using prescribed medications or using alcohol if alcohol was their drug of choice, during the past 12 months.

Regardless of race or gender, more than 80% of those who had desisted from crime and substance abuse appear to have made the cognitive identity transformation articulated by the ITD (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Moreover, this transformation was most often coupled with a concurrent perception of someone they did not want to become, a feared self. For many respondents, the self they feared was simply a generalized fear of being stuck where they were, or as many of our respondents stated, "I was tired of being sick and tired." This was a common refrain, but when pressed to explain what they meant by "sick and tired," most offered more specific fears. For example, Jeremiah was selling drugs, but his addiction led him to use more than he was selling, which eventually led him to commit robberies and several incarcerations. When he finally decided to make a change, he said, "I was like, Man, I'm going to end up losing everything."

Other "feared selves" were manifested in different ways, but were most often articulated in several forms including "dying alone an addict," "getting killed in the hustling game," or "spending the rest of my life in prison." For example, Jake was succinct when he contemplated what life on the streets had in store for him, "There's nothing out in these streets. I realize it now. I tell my wife that there's only two things outside for me, death and jail time, and I don't want either one so there's no reason to go outside."

The majority of respondents in this sample had multiple prison and institutionalized treatment exposures. Consistent with other research (Uggen, 2000), many were also aware that in their younger days, they had no desire to change, regardless of the consequences their behavior incurred. John described this cognitive change when asked why he did not quit drinking after the first two "Driving Under the Influence" (DUI) convictions, and how the connection between past failures and future failures was finally made:

Interviewer: You had been in prison before for DUIs, why was this time different?
John: I wasn't ready to grow up yet. I didn't grow up until actually I was around 31 years old.
Interviewer: Why did you grow up at 31?
John: I just started taking responsibility for my actions . . . and realized the party's gotta end or I'll be waking up in a fucking jail cell the rest of my life. Even though I'm flying by the seat

> of my pants by stupid shit but what's gonna happen is something serious is gonna happen. I'm gonna either wrap a car around a telephone pole, or I'm gonna kill somebody.

Of course, being addicted is nothing if not exhausting and frightening. At times, the fear was a general trepidation about their future self, one respondent explains:

> Interviewer: You used the word "crushed." What does that mean?
> Respondent: I'll be honest with you, more than tired, I got scared. The last time I went back [to prison] I said I can't do this anymore. I told myself over and over again I can't do this anymore. I'm hurting myself, my loved ones, I was afraid that I'd be alone in life. And I didn't know whether I liked myself so I had to work hard to make myself better. It scared the hell out of me. I finally realized I was my own worst enemy.

As we will see below, many respondents had fears that did not result in identity transformation or desistance. The importance of a "feared self" did not appear to manifest until they were linked with the "chain of failures," which served to solidify an individual's intentional self-change. We highlight this cognitive process of connecting failures next.

CONNECTING FAILURES: THE CRYSTALLIZATION OF DISCONTENT

> Like I said I made it a point to make that change, it just didn't come.

As Table 1 indicates, only a very small percentage (3%) of this sample desisted immediately after their first prison exposure. Many offenders had left jail or work release on several occasions with good intentions, only to relapse again. However, when real identity transformation occurred, respondents appear to have been crystal clear that an "addict" or "offender" was no longer who they were going to be. This process appears to have been the same for all individuals across both race and gender groups. Lauren put this decision plainly, "Did I want to keep using or remain clean, because that was a decision that I really had to make, no one else could make it for me, and I chose to not get high." Beth also described these perceptual connections very well when she explained, "I just got tired, I just gave up. I said, 'Well something's not working cause every time I used [drugs] I went back and forth to jail.'"

And, finally, Jamal graphically illustrated the thought process of linking the same behavior with the same consequences, "You just get tired of it, you just don't want that life no more . . . you get the same results, you keep doing the same thing, you're gonna get the same results . . . and it's just not good . . . that's not worth it." Each of these narratives reveals the connection of past failures with perceived future failures that is the catalyst for identity transformation as articulated by the ITD. After this connection, or crystallization of discontent, respondent's preferences then changed, as we see in the next section.

AFTER THE TRANSFORMATION: THE ROAD TO DESISTANCE

> I'm case solo, you know what I mean?

After an individual decides that their deviant lifestyle is no longer paying off and they no longer wish to be an "offender" and/or "drug addict," they must next begin to behave in accordance with their new non-offender identity. This, of course, is often a difficult road to walk, particularly in today's economic climate. The majority of our respondents found jobs to be scarce, and many family and friends who had once been there for financial support

were also feeling the crunch of the times and/or were hardened by our respondent's previous failures to change (Pager, Western, & Bonikowski, 2009).

Paternoster and Bushway (2009) contended that "[o]ffenders seeking to break from crime . . . slowly begin to 'play at' a new identity and make initial and safe forays into a more pro-social life" (p. 1132). One factor they posit as inextricably linked to staying clean in this process is a change in one's "preferences" or tastes, especially a taste for crime or the "life as party" (Shover, 1996, p. 93). Because preferences are linked to motivation, a change in one's identity is also related to a change in one's preferences (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010). These preferences include such things as replacing deviant social networks with prosocial peer groups. In our sample, these changes did not simply happen; they occurred because individuals *deliberately and intentionally* sought out non-criminal associates as part of their identity change. In short, an initial and foundational positive identity transformation brought about a change in preferences for the kind of people more likely to foster and support that new identity.

Many narratives reveal that this change in preferences and social networks was required to maintain their new "drug-" or "crime-free" selves. In fact, one of the mantras of Twelve-Step programs is to "change people, places, and things" to become drug and alcohol free (Kirk, 2012). Although it was virtually impossible for many of our respondents to simply pick up and move to a new neighborhood, at the very least, the vast majority who successfully desisted made conscious choices to change their social networks and daily routines. Many, like Gerald, completely eliminated the friends with whom they previously used drugs. Gerald described:

> [S]ince I've been out of jail I haven't associated with one person I knew and it's been 20 years. I never saw anybody I knew before I was clean so that was helpful. But yeah, that's what caused my relapses was people and places.

Many moved back in with family to get their feet back on the ground. Both Rick and his wife were addicted to crack when he came to his end. He shared:

> [F]inally I was at the point where I was frickin' tired of the shit and I looked at my wife and said look we're gonna move in with your parents. . . . if we didn't go through the removing the people, places, and things back then I don't think I'd had the knowledge to get out. . . . and I said, "this is it," if this don't work I gotta go. I can't spend the next however many years bein' a crackhead.

Unfortunately, Rick's wife was not ready to quit, and moved back on the streets where she remained addicted at the time of Rick's interview.

Several respondents specifically delayed parole because they did not feel ready to leave the protected world inside of prison. For example, after 10 years of selling drugs and using cocaine, Monica was eligible for parole release but she chose to stay in prison because "I didn't feel that I was ready to go out . . . I didn't want to use again. I didn't want to be back around the people, places, or things." When she was eventually released from prison, Monica packed her bags and moved to a different city with a friend who was not a drug user.

Many of the respondents we interviewed who had desisted from crime and substance abuse articulated their new selves in prosocial terms, not simply by reinterpreting their past identities, but as new beings:

Interviewer: You said I deserve it now, what do you see about yourself as different?
Respondent: I did it on my own. I didn't want to get high anymore . . . I'm sick of what I had to give up because of this drug. I'm no longer looking at myself as an addict anymore. I see myself as a mother, as a daughter, a friend. And I can only be those things if I leave that shit alone. I'm putting that stuff first. If I can put something else ahead of that drug, I'm doing something.

THE TEMPORAL ROLE OF EMPLOYMENT AND PARTNERSHIP

Our interview narratives reveal that employment and prosocial partners often facilitated or assisted in an offender's road to recovery, but we found very few instances in which they actually represented turning points in that they *instigated* the positive change. When respondents were ready to quit, they appeared to be willing to do whatever it took to stay clean, either by working two or three jobs at a time to make ends meet, moving to a new neighborhood, or living with friends or family if employment was not available.

Employment

Although securing stable employment was typically much easier when respondents were clean, even those who had good jobs waiting for them after release ended up returning to prison if they were not truly finished with their offender identities. For example, Jerrod's family owned a lucrative business, and when he left prison he always had a job waiting for him. Despite this good job, he had, been in and out of jail on drug charges since 1991 and still used drugs, including illegal prescription drugs. Like Jerrod, other respondents had worked while they were using, and when they were released from prison, a lucky few had those jobs waiting for them. The majority, however, had to establish new employment networks and establish their credibility as an employee. Having a criminal record made finding a job in tough economic times extremely difficult for most, but when they were ready to get clean, the majority got by on low-level employment or working multiple jobs.

When Carl decided to get clean, he secured work as cashier, but because that salary could not cover his bills, he got a second job as a janitor for a cleaning service. He worked very hard and eventually started making connections and getting cleaning accounts on his own. He explained, "[My] second job, which was janitorial, started to give me a little bit more independence. I had a couple accounts for myself and I was learning how I could make some money for myself on the side." Many used menial jobs as stepping stones to get into better paying positions. Like them, Frank was hired by a snow removal company after he left prison and eventually worked up to a high paying construction job. Of course, in a constrained economy, for workers with minimal education, few job skills, a criminal record, and a history of drug and alcohol abuse, these men were the lucky ones (Kurlychek, Brame, & Bushway, 2006; Rakis, 2005).

The majority of the women we interviewed did not have access to high paying construction work as their male counterparts did when they were released from prison. However, several who were employed in clerical roles did work their way up various employment ladders. For example, Brittany started out as a cashier and eventually advanced to an office manager position. It should be noted that many we interviewed perceived a great deal of stigma in the workplace because of their criminal records. To prove themselves worthy of advancement, some talked about their passion for doing well on the job. This hyperconformity and attempts by former offenders of proving themselves has been noted elsewhere in the desistance literature (Maruna et al., 2004). For example, after starting off

in an entry-level position in a chicken processing plant, Lenora worked hard for her advancement and shared:

> I mean I started off like everybody else doing the breast plant, the wing machine, you know what I mean? But I just worked my way over to the table. Trying to be the best that I could be, real fast, because I was a drug addict, you know what I mean? I was full force trying to be all I could be type—you know what I mean?

Many started out at fast food franchises and some secured work as servers in dine-in restaurants. It is not glorious, but as Michelle says, "It puts some food on the table."

Despite employment, many of the respondents we interviewed who had desisted were barely getting by, making minimum wage if they could find work at all. This often involved going from job to job and still working in low-level service sector jobs or for temp agencies, barely earning enough to pay their rent. Despite these economic hardships, many remained drug free and crime free. For example, Dwayne started painting and carpentry after he was released from his third stint in prison, but the economy had taken a downturn and jobs were hard to come by. He states, "I do what I have to do . . . I'm not working right now . . . But every now and then I pick up a job, somebody will call me and need something done. It's really tight." Despite this employment lull, he still attends 12-step meetings and has remained crime and drug free. Others we interviewed had found their criminal records to hinder their employment opportunities. For example, when Tom made the decision to stay "straight," his criminal background frequently got in the way of his keeping a job. He lamented:

> When I first got out, I was working at [retail establishment] and [when the backgroup check came back] they found out my background, and got rid of me. Then I was working at [retail establishment], and they got rid of me for my background so then I was working at [retail establishment], then they got rid of me. So I said, it seems like I get a job, you know, my past comes back and haunts me and makes me unemployed.

Fortunately, Tom's uncle eventually helped him get a job where he was still employed at the time of the interview. Despite being fired at three places because of his record, Tom was resolute that he would not go back to substance abuse and crime.

Our finding that desistance precedes employment is consistent with recent research following men embedded in the criminal justice system in Norway. Skardhamar and Savolainen (2014) tracked a sample of men who had a minimum of five felonies and who had employment periods along with a comparison group of offenders who did not experience employment, which allowed the research to control for the timing of change in desistance. Results indicated that for the majority of offenders, desistance preceded employment, not the other way around (Skardhamar & Savolainen, 2014). Similarly, respondents in our sample reported that while employment significantly improved their situations, having a job was typically not the precursor for desistance. Rather, the decision to make a conscious change in their environment and practices is what bolstered their crime- and drug-free lifestyles, and their ability to keep a job once it was secured.

Partnership

As with employment, very few narratives indicated that prosocial partnerships actually initiated identity change. However, intimates who remained committed to the fractured

relationship while their partners were still using and/or in and out of prison were frequently acknowledged by respondents as important constants in the desistance process. In addition, several respondents met prosocial partners after they had already desisted and made the decision that they "were done." Importantly, even for those who acknowledged that their partners were significant in their desistance journey, the narratives do not reflect true turning points since their partners had been with them through years of addiction. For example, Aaron's wife stuck with him through multiple prison sentences and medical complications arising from years of alcohol abuse, and he gratefully acknowledged her support. However, when asked about his ability to stay sober, his own personal resolve appeared paramount in the statement, "Just made my mind up."

Many offenders' partners living alongside them through years of addiction eventually gave their troubled partners an ultimatum, which some respondents associated with their decision to get clean. However, within these ultimatum narratives, respondents' agenic change is clear.

For example, Anthony was in and out of prison for over 20 years and was married with children. He met another woman and fell in love, but he still continued to sell and use drugs. During his last incarceration, he made a decision to get clean. In his story, he attributes a great deal to his new girlfriend, but she had been there before, and it is clear that the more significant precursor for desistance was the intentional identity change that had occurred:

Anthony:	I just started feeling like I was too good for that shit. You know? Like looking at crackheads and stuff and I didn't want people to think of me like that you know?
Interviewer:	So, you think that this last bit was the first time that you really looked? I mean, what made you tired? Cause I know you had a lot of . . . positive things said to you. I mean, what made you listen this time, you think?
Anthony:	Just tired man, that pain outweighed the pleasure. I just got tired of fucking being in jail and doing everything. I mean, the first 10 years, this shit didn't bother me, I'd go to jail and the other folks would be like what's wrong? You act like you're happy to be here or so it didn't bother me at all. I don't know why, I can't swing it, but, this last bit just hurt me bad.
Interviewer:	I'm trying to figure out why you listened this time?
Respondent:	Well, I mean that was the first time I actually tried to change, you know, I never tried to change before. But I picked that book up myself, and ain't nobody made me do it. I picked it up trying to help myself.

Within narratives like this, it is clear that the change and mechanisms for getting clean were internally made. In fact, many of our desisting respondents had experienced many horrible events, including victimization, homelessness, health problems, loss of family and friends, and long prison terms, but had gone back to drugs and crime at least once. However, when they came to the cognitive crossroads of making a change and they "were done," the human agency that fostered identity change was the key. Chris had tried many times to get clean. She warned her interviewer, "Unless an addict tells you they're done, they're not done." She elaborated,

> I really thought it was gonna be hard but I made up my mind that that's not how I wanted to live anymore. If I think back to all the times, I've had guns put to my head, the lifestyle I was living, I've been put in the worst situations that anyone could be in . . . and that still didn't make me change . . . only when I was ready did I change.

Clearly, for these respondents, the cognitive transformation was required before structural opportunities like employment and prosocial partnerships could be sustained. This is consistent with contemporary data from the United States that has found no effect for marriage or partnership on desistance (Giordano et al., 2002), and research in Norway, which has isolated the time order between the variables finding decreases in offending mainly occurred before marriage (Lyngstad & Skardhamar, 2013). In sum, the social roles of employment and marriage may be more appropriately used to help us understand the "processes that support desistance" (Carlsson, 2012, p. 13), rather than as triggering events. In the next section, we offer a narrative counterfactual that illuminates the absence of identity change for those in the cohort who were still engaged in criminal activity and/or substance abuse.

PERSISTERS: THOSE STILL IN THE GAME

I'm not ready. When I feel like I'm ready . . . I'll do it.

As Table 1 indicates, more than half of the cohort were still abusing substances, and at least 20% or more were still engaged in criminal enterprises. Parole violations or crimes motivated by financial gain to support drug habits were the offenses for which the persisters were most often arrested. Importantly, the majority of the respondents we interviewed had been clean at various times in their lives. That is, they had not simply been clean while serving a prison sentence, but had willfully abstained from drugs and crime for an extended period while not under criminal justice supervision. Unfortunately, for the persisters in our sample, this could not be sustained.

As noted above, the majority of these individuals had been exposed to treatment at various times in their lives, but they were simply not ready to stop using. Jesse articulated this well:

Jesse:	I've been to drug programs already and ain't nothing that they really could tell me to make me wanna quit.
Interviewer:	Right. That's a matter of you doing it on your own. All they do is give you the tools.
Jesse:	That's what I was telling you—the whole time in the program, I was trying to explain this to them, I said, "Listen, everything you're trying to teach me, it's not really pouring light where I wanted; it's up to me when I wanna quit." When you get tired, you get tired.

Many of the persisters in our sample were far more cautious about their behavior and criminal visibility, either because another felony charge would be too costly, because they had aged out of the demands of a street-based hustling game, or simply because their health and functional abilities were so compromised. Several lived with family members or boyfriends or girlfriends and earned money either through conventional jobs, through charity or disability income, or working in the undocumented economy (see Note 5). For example, Kyle reported that he had been drug and crime free for two years. When he lost his job, however, he got "back into the game" selling drugs to pay the bills. Unfortnately, he was soon using more than he was selling and at the time of our interview, he was still struggling to get back on his feet. He stated, "[I]t wasn't my time. I wasn't ready."

Many maintained functional lives even while still addicted. Pam, who was in and out of prison in her younger days, now lived with a functional alcoholic, had adult children, had consistent employment, but still could not beat her crack addiction. She had worked numerous jobs as a restaurant server, a cashier, and now worked in the undocumented economy.

She had decreased her drug use and no longer went out on the street to get high, but still used daily just to stay "balanced." She stated,

> Every day I get high and if I didn't have it I don't know what I would do. I'm serious, I watch people who can't even walk and talk while they're smoking but I'm just like normal. It just gets me through the day . . . I can't function without it, I really can't, even with the medicine my psychiatrist got me on.

The decision to persist, but slow down (or deescalate their offending and substance abuse patterns) also was revealed in the narratives. Several persisters described their move from more risky drugs like heroin and cocaine to recreational marijuana smoking. Cameron explained that he did not "run so hard" in the game any longer, and when the cops came around, he did not run at all. He was just not ready to give up the drugs yet. He explained his rationale:

> It's not like I walk around here and act like I'm the dumbest person in the room. No. I know what to do and how to do it I just don't want to do the work. I know it would require me to give some things up that I truly do not want to give up . . . but I'm coming around, it's getting there.

In sum, a majority of the respondents who were still using were not ready to make a change, and still appeared to accept an offender identity. The decision to keep using and offending had cost them many things including resources, freedom, and severed family ties. Despite these costs, most appear to have accepted this identity, at least for now.

DISCUSSION

Theoretical work in desistance from crime has been greatly advanced by the important work of Sampson and Laub (1993; Laub & Sampson, 2003) and their idea that prosocial "turning points" like jobs and marriages are critical in the desistance process. Others, including Maruna (2001) and Giordano and colleagues (Giordano et al., 2002; Giordano et al., 2007), made equally important contributions by highlighting the importance of agency and the importance of the upfront work that offenders must first engage in for turning points (or hooks as they refer to them) to be effective in bringing about desistance. Giordano et al.'s (2002) work suggested that the mechanisms that bring about desistance are social (participation in prosocial roles) and "not . . . simply the result of individualistic mental processes" (p. 1001). Paternoster and Bushway's (2009) ITD hypothesized that identity change is necessary for desistance to occur, that identity change must come before prosocial opportunities can arrive and be successfully used, and that desistance can occur even in the absence of conventional turning points such as good jobs or partnerships.

Narratives from over 300 formerly drug-involved offenders interviewed in our study provided preliminary support for the ITD. Our analyses revealed that the vast majority of offenders who had self-reported desistance from both crime and substance misuse had transformed their offender identity into a non-offender identity. This cognitive process was typically motivated by realizing that if change did not occur, they would likely become what they feared, such as dying an addict or dying alone in prison. To sustain their new non-offender identities, respondents used various tools including changing their "people, places, and things" by seeking out non-criminal associates and staying away from previous locations that triggered their drug use and/or criminal behavior.

Consistent with contemporary research that has found that both stable marriage and employment became possible only after periods of desistance (Lyngstad & Skardhamar, 2013; Skardhamar & Savolainen, 2014), conventional social roles like employment and marriage did not appear to activate desistance for the majority of our respondents. Many of our respondents left prison with jobs only to reoffend and others left prison with little hope of employment but remained crime and drug free. However, when respondents were ready to stay crime and drug free, rekindling relationships with family members was an extremely important factor in their lives.

Our work is consistent with previous work in the United States (Giordano et al., 2002; Giordano et al., 2007), findings from the Liverpool Desistance Study (Maruna, 2001), and recent work in Norway (Lyngstad & Skardhamar, 2013; Skardhamar & Savolainen, 2014), which have all failed to find support for the idea that prosocial turning points play a crucial role in leading former offenders away from crime. The historical context between offending samples today and those upon which the life course theory was based may be one reason for these differential findings. We remarked earlier that Sampson and Laub's results were derived from the Glueck data (Glueck & Glueck, 1950), which was comprised entirely of White boys who, though delinquents during adolescence, were transitioning to adulthood during a historical period (1950s) where well-paying manufacturing jobs and other educational opportunities were available. Armed with these prosocial opportunities, these young men were able to secure good jobs and appear as suitable mates for conventional partners. In addition, although they spent time in juvenile reform schools, we are not aware of many who spent substantial periods of time incarcerated in adult penitentiaries. Furthermore, while several of the Glueck adults were heavy drinkers, and in some cases alcohol abuse led to other difficulties, they were not users of heroin, powder or crack cocaine, or poly-substance abusers.

Giordano et al.'s theorizing (Giordano et al., 2002; Giordano et al., 2007) was also derived from juvenile offenders who, though committed to juvenile institutions, were not already serious adult offenders, inmates in adult penitentiaries, nor heavy substance abusers. In contrast, our sample is more representative of today's adult correctional populations, who have long arrest histories, incarcerations, long-term unemployment, and extensive involvement in substance abuse. Furthermore, they were released from adult prisons during a time of economic downturn where securing gainful employment and affordable housing proved worrisome at best and non-existent at worst. Few in our sample were married when first released from prison, fewer still got married subsequent to release, they averaged less than a high school education, the majority were unemployed, and had few skills that would make them employable in a contemporary labor market. Perhaps most importantly, more than 70% of our respondents were African Americans who left prison only to return to neighborhoods marked by high crime, joblessness, and other structural disadvantages.

Importantly, in spite of these deficits, about two thirds of this sample had desisted from crime. Without good jobs and prosocial partners, how were they able to do this? Although certainly not definitive, our qualitative data point to the fact that despite the absence of many conventional turning points, or hooks for change, many of these men and women were dissatisfied with their past, which included a great deal of crime and substance use. They feared such things as dying alone on the streets or in prison and knew that their continued involvement would eventually lead to this reality. As a result, they engaged in intentional self-change and many patched together a prosocial existence from whatever

opportunities they could develop. In fact, intentional self-change of identity was perhaps even more important for these opportunity-disadvantaged offenders.

In addition to advancing the theoretical debate on desistance, the findings of this research also offer clear implications for policy. First, a recurring theme throughout the interview narratives is that a critical component of the desistance process is identity change or "being ready" to change. Those who successfully desisted from drugs and crime frequently mentioned that they were ready to stop offending and, only then did they take advantage of available opportunities to change. Paternoster and Bushway (2009) argued that several things must occur before an offender is ready to leave their life of crime behind. First, they must make connections between the hardships and harms they are experiencing in their lives with their current identity, and the kind of person they want to become. Part of this process also involves connecting previous hardships and failures they have experienced in the past to anticipated future failures that will occur if change is not made. Offenders are typically left to their own devices to come to this point of realization. It is a painful discovery and one that does not come easily because in addition to their other liabilities, many previous offenders we spoke to had a pronounced self-attribution bias whereby they took credit for their successes ("it's due to my skill") but often did not assume responsibility for their failures ("I was just unlucky"). One therapeutic intervention that may accelerate this self-discovery process is cognitive-behavioral therapy.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy, which has been shown to be one of the more effective prison-based therapy programs in terms of reducing recidivism (Lipsey, Landenberger, & Wilson, 2007), is premised upon providing clients with better cognitive skills. These skills include, but are not limited to the following: skills necessary to identify problems and the consideration of alternative courses of action to solve those problems, the evaluation of possible solutions before adopting a course of action, provision of critical reasoning and rational deliberation skills, the importance of long-term planning, and the importance of taking the position of other people within one's social environment. Although the cognitive therapy model is not theoretically based on the ITD, the practices of cognitive behavioral therapy appear to provide offenders with exactly those cognitive and rational skills that would enable them to more easily link their dissatisfactions and realize that the life of a criminal offender and drug abuser will likely result in them becoming their feared self. Such self-awareness would be instrumental in getting offenders ready to change, ready to adopt a new identity, and begin the cognitive process toward a non-offender identity.

Although the narratives provided by this sample help illuminate the process of desistance in a cohort of serious adult offenders, the sample does not represent a random sample of all adult offenders. As such, generalizations from this research are limited. Moreover, we have not fashioned this article to serve as a quantitative test of the ITD, but rather have used qualitative data to highlight the importance of concepts derived from the theory to explain the desistance process. Findings underscore the important role of identity change that precedes the adoption of prosocial roles, and the importance of human agency in the desistance process. However, key questions still remain. One question is whether desistance from crime precedes, follows, or occurs simultaneously with recovery from drug use. Of course, it is extremely hard to disentangle the two because such a large percentage of today's prison populations are also drug involved, but the process of recovering from substance abuse has been described as very similar to that of desistance from crime (Colman & Vander Laenen, 2012; Maruna et al., 2004). For example, the Betty Ford Institute Consensus Panel (2007,

p. 222) has defined recovery from substance abuse as "a voluntarily maintained lifestyle characterized by sobriety, personal health and citizenship." Similarly, Deegan (1998, p. 11) has described mental health recovery as "the lived experience of people as they accept and overcome the challenge of disability . . . they experience themselves as recovering a new sense of self and of purpose with and beyond the limits of the disability." For both desistance and recovery, the process of breaking from self-harmful behavior involves a change in how one views one's self, as well as maintaining productive activities and supportive social networks that lead to and then sustain that new lifestyle. Future research must also examine how serious adult offenders with multiple disadvantages are able to stitch together the modicum of a prosocial life and stay out of serious crime, particularly in today's service-based economy that offers only marginal employment options to those with a criminal record. We hope that our findings encourage further theorizing and empirical analyses regarding the connection between identity change and criminal desistance.

NOTES

1. These predictions are clear from their text: "Thus, we expect that while criminal involvement generally decreases with age, those within an adult sample who continue to evidence a stronger anger identity will be more likely to persist in crime and violent behavior—even after traditional predictors, including marital attachment, employment circumstances, and their own early behavioral profiles have been taken into account" (Giordano, Schroeder, & Cernkovich, 2007, p. 1612). "We expect that higher levels of adult depression in a follow-up sample of juvenile offenders will be associated with criminal persistence, net of traditional predictors such as marital attachment and prior delinquent history" (Giordano et al., 2007, p. 1612).

2. Like Giordano and colleagues (Giordano et al., 2007), other work has used symbolic interactionism to explain the role of identity in the onset of criminal behavior and substance abuse (Anderson & Mott, 1998; Scarpitti, 1964). To be clear, the identity change that Paternoster and Bushway (2009) contended is personal not social. Personal identity refers to how and what one perceives about the self, the kind of person one is, and the characteristics one has. A social identity, on the other hand, is an identity about oneself that is derived from group membership (Reid & Deaux, 1996).

3. Because of their small number, Hispanic offenders were excluded from our quantitative analysis and qualitative interviews as were the few subjects from "Other" race/ethnicities.

4. For details about the estimation procedure and sampling methods, see Bachman, Kerrison, O'Connell, and Paternoster (2013).

5. The undocumented economy for these respondents generally meant working under the table for the service sector, or for individuals willing to pay for services such as cleaning, home health care, or other services with cash.

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Ronet Bachman, PhD, is a professor in the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice at the University of Delaware. In addition to methodologies and statistics, her research interests have focused on the epidemiology and etiology of victimization, with a focus on underserved populations, and offender re-entry and decision making.

Erin Kerrison, PhD, is a vice provost's postdoctoral research fellow in the Department of Criminology at the University of Pennsylvania. Her mixed-method research agenda is informed by life course, intersectional, and critical race theoretical paradigms, and explores law's impact on disparities in health, education, and employment outcomes for individuals and communities marked by criminal justice intervention.

Raymond Paternoster, PhD, is a professor in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Maryland. He pursues questions related to offender decision making and rational choice theory, desistance from crime, and capital punishment.

Daniel O'Connell, PhD, is a scientist with the Center for Drug and Health Studies and assistant professor in the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Delaware. His research specialties are research design and methodologies, intervention development, and project management. He teaches Criminology as part of the Inside-Out program, and his pedagogy focuses on bringing traditional university students seeking careers in law enforcement together with incarcerated individuals to foster dialogue on issues related to crime, criminal justice, and community.

Lionel Smith is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice at the University of Delaware. His primary research interest is qualitative criminology, particularly related to active offender behavior and the drugs–crime nexus.