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Transcending the Residual Self: A Grounded Theory of Going Straight

by

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**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department of Sociology

**We accept this dissertation as conforming
to the required standard**

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ABSTRACT

The grounded theory method is used to generate a theory of leaving crime (“going straight”) from 24 women and men who were interviewed for this study. The main concern for ex-offenders is the degree to which residuals of a stigmatized, past self can be transcended. This residual self is comprised of three interrelated phenomena: i) the visible evidence pointing to a disreputable past, ii) the remnants of disreputable character traits, thinking patterns and emotional states which persist into the present, and iii) the social interactions which stigmatize ex-offenders.

Ten of the research respondents are “hardcore” ex-offenders because their former immersion in criminal identities left residuals that are more apparent or knowable to others. The other 14 have criminal identities that were transient, or limited in time and the extent to which they subscribed to criminal values. For both types of offenders, a self-crisis preceded the decision to go straight. Ex-offenders import an exculpatory conversation from helping others that interprets their past harms as the result of the disease of addiction, early childhood trauma, or as lives unfolding within some greater plan by God or fortune. Hardcore offenders seek enveloping forms of help which occupy their ongoing daily consciousness and routines, whereas transient criminal offenders use help for transitory and pragmatic ends. The more that a past, residual self is knowable to others and subjectively problematic, the greater the difficulty that ex-offenders will have negotiating their stigmatized identity. An ongoing process of interpreting and negotiating one’s identity with self and others lies at the core of going straight.

The outcome of going straight is credentials which consist of clean time, official pardons for criminal records, amends made with others or society in general, the performance of good works, and most importantly, making distinctions between *who I was* and *who I am*. The self presented today is an authentic one, unlike the criminal identity which they now see in retrospect as inauthentic. The degree to which a residual self remains with ex-offenders varies, with hardcore ex-offenders more likely to show or report signs and traits which can be stigmatized by evaluative audiences. However, it is also apparent that the residual self can be used for pragmatic and credentializing purposes, especially when one’s current identity is linked to who one was in the past. The problem of the residual self is differentially negotiated through culturally endorsed

narratives of reform. To the degree that ex-offenders discriminate *who I was* from *who I am* in familiar stories of change, the greater will be their success in resolving the problems of the residual self.

The theory of the residual self fits with recent findings in developmental theories in criminology, and offers optimism about the possibilities for change in adulthood criminal pathways suggested by life-course theories. This study, and others like it, can help promote a wider discourse to counter the “once a con, always a con” thinking which stigmatizes ex-offenders.

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Dedication

To Amanda

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Employment Wanted: Former Marijuana Smuggler

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Business Experience: *Owned and operated a successful fishing business- multi-vessel, on airplane, one island and processing facility. Simultaneously owned and operated a fleet of tractor-trailer trucks conducting business in the United States. During this time, I also co-owned and participated in the executive level management of 120 people worldwide in a successful pot smuggling venture with revenues in excess of US\$100,000 million annually. I took responsibility for own actions, and received a ten year sentence in the United States while others walked free for their cooperation.*

Attributes: *I am an expert in all levels of security; I have extensive computer skills, am personable, outgoing, well-educated, reliable, clean and sober. I have spoken in schools to thousands of kids and parent groups over the last ten years on "the consequences of choice", and received public recognition from the RCMP for community service. I am well travelled and speak English, French and Spanish. References available from friends, family, the U.S. District Attorney, etc.*

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1. Introduction

The idea that bad people can become good is a theme in Western culture that can be traced to the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15: 11-32). Sinners who are converted through an act of will or by Providence bear witness to the malleability of the human condition, proclaim hope and urge us to take stock of our own lives (“there but for the grace of God, go I”). Leaving a disreputable past is a social process which requires not only a declaration, but a social audience to hear, judge and certify the claims of redemption before accepting those who have previously fallen. The transition from evil to good obliges the newly converted - whether disciples of Jesus or Narcotics Anonymous - to declare their moral worthiness. As it is in the Bible, the contemporary medium for the transformative claim is the parable or narrative. Narratives in this genre have a structure which entails a chronological ordering of three phases: the person *I was*, what happened to make me change and *who I am* today - irrespective of the order in which the story is told. The narrative form in which these stories are told is the “account”.

Accounts are linguistic devices used when speakers are subjected to inquiry from others in a position to evaluate what they have to say against a backdrop of cultural expectations (Scott and Lyman, 1968: 46; Young, 1997). When asked, “Why did you decide to leave crime?”, the answer is rarely, “Because I made the decision to do so”, even though cessation from crime involves an act of will. The accounts that form the basis of this study resonate with Judeo-Christian themes of sin, confession, forgiveness and making amends for harms committed in the past. Cast in this form, their stories make sense both to the speaker and others, and provide a medium for conveying *what happened* in the process of becoming an ex-offender. Scott and Lyman (1968) argue that

every account is “a manifestation of the underlying negotiation of identities” (p. 50).

Accounts are necessary for ex-offenders to counter a public perception that the propensity to commit crime suggests an enduring flawed character trait, or a discreditable self¹.

When self-changes are told in a culturally familiar vocabulary, it is more likely that others will welcome the new identities declared within these accounts.

The problem examined here concerns a basic social process of “becoming” which emerged through a systematic examination of the data using the grounded theory method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser 1992; 1998). While the process of *becoming* deviant has been well documented in the interactionist tradition, far less is known about the subjective experience of *leaving* a stigmatized identity. The mode of inquiry, qualitative interviewing, asks those with a discreditable self to describe the process of leaving crime in their own terms. The narratives of 24 offenders interviewed for this study show a process of change through experiencing crises, making distinctions between a past and present self through help from others, and making reference to credentials which verify their reform.

The public confession by former deviants provides social benefit for the wider social audience. Those who were formerly deviant can warn youth and impressionable populations about the vicissitudes of crime and affirm consensus to legal norms. In return, society offers some measure of conditional mercy such as a modern version of the ancient “benefit of clergy” which exists to pardon ex-offenders for their past sins - but only if they meet conditions specified under the *Criminal Records Act*. The law certifies redemption to ensure an even-handed treatment from state agents who may have access to the criminal records of others. In some instances, the stigma of having been an ‘ex-

con' is lifted, at least officially. However, the exercise of an official pardon is unlikely to fully atone for the past, discreditable self, which remains vulnerable to public disapprobation. Stigma, like pinesap, has an adhesive quality that resists removal.

The importance of life narratives should not be underestimated. Stories reveal the deepest parts of ourselves to others, promote orderliness in their telling, and test our perceptions of self through this telling. In our listening, we convey a range of reactions from incredulity to intimate agreement. The self is sustained through an intersubjectively shared repertoire of symbols - mainly language, but also utterances, gestures, body language and the manipulation of cultural symbols to ascribe value and meaning to things. The moving sum of the interactions which constitute our lives, provides us with the internal conversation, the voice in our heads, the self, or *who I am*. When talking about significant personal changes, we engage a declaration of *who we are* - in speaking, we become that which others reflect back to us. Who we say we are is verified, consolidated and affirmed through the reciprocation of others in a process of symbolic interaction (Prus, 1994).

Women and men who make the decision to desist from crime represent a group whose stories are seldom told. Many of my research participants expressed hope that their experiences would find ways to encourage other offenders to recover from addiction, crime and living with what they recall now as a "phoney self". During my twelve years of teaching criminology, many students confided in me about their experiences with deviance, whether or not they were caught, and eventually decided that crime was not worth the personal and social costs associated with it. For many, the involvement in crime eventually produced the necessary conditions to abandon its seductions (Katz,

1988). Their narratives intrigued me and begged closer examination. I am also motivated by a humanist tradition in sociology to make the world a better place, specifically to help alter the discourse about ‘corrections’ and what makes people decide to change their lives for the better. I hope to articulate new concepts, give voice to a stigmatized group in society, and ultimately, provide a substantive theory for leaving a discreditable self.

A first premise in this thesis is that those with a deviant history are stigmatized by the wider society. The notion that criminals possess some permanent character flaw is evident in the cultural representations of criminals, criminal justice policy, correctional practice and academic research (Maruna, 2001: 3-6). In the United States, prisoners may face *civiler mortus* (“civil death”), including the right to vote through felony disenfranchisement laws (Human Rights Watch, 1998; for an analysis of the situation in the United Kingdom, see Maxwell and Mallon, 1997). Ex-offenders are represented in the media as constituting a dangerous group, as reflected in former US President Clinton’s announcement of a \$57 million public safety initiative in the United States because “an unprecedented number of individuals will be released from prison in the coming years” (Cable Network News, September 19, 2000). Recent research suggests that the “get tough on crime” incarceration policies of the United States have spawned a new problem: the return of about 600,000 ex-prisoners to their communities in 2001. Fourteen states in the US permanently bar ex-felons from voting, leaving an estimated 3.9 million citizens without a voice in state and federal elections, over a third of whom are African Americans (Human Rights Watch, 1998). Experts predict that two-thirds of released prisoners will be rearrested for a felony or serious misdemeanor within three years after their release (Travis, Solomon and Waul, 2001).

Ex-offenders constitute a relatively invisible group who are rarely studied or enter public consciousness unless brought to our attention by high-profile crimes they commit, such as the armed robbery by the noted author, Stephen Reid². The notion that “once a con, always a con” dominates the popular thinking about crime and criminality especially for those deemed incurable, such as sex offenders. The exclusionary treatment shown towards them is demonstrated when they seek employment (Albright and Denq, 1996; Boshier and Johnson, 1974; Finn and Fontaine, 1985; Glaser, 1969) and their ineligibility for commercial blanket bonds or occupational licenses (Dale, 1976). Apparently, the stigma of incarceration also extends to prisoners’ wives (Fishman, 1988). Ex-offenders find themselves in a dilemma because if they do not admit to their previous criminality, they risk being seen as a fraud; but to confess to a felonious past taints the moral judgements others will make of them (Ebaugh, 1988: 156; MacLean, 1991). It follows that the awareness that one is deviant evokes predictable (or pragmatic) behaviour in that people will take steps to avoid mistreatment by concealing their deviancy (Freedman and Doob, 1968: 60-61), or may engage in stigma management (Goffman, 1963: 130).

The degree to which exclusionary laws and policies differentially operate across national boundaries is occasionally mentioned (e.g., Maxwell and Mallon, 1997: 364) but is not specifically addressed in the literature on ex-offenders. It is conceivable that Canadian ex-offenders do not face the same legal treatment as their counterparts in the United States. For example, the *British Columbia Human Rights Act* forbids discrimination “regarding employment or any term or condition of employment because... that person has been convicted of a criminal or summary conviction offence that is unrelated to the employment or to the intended employment of that person”

(Section 13.1 [b]). Even so, ex-offenders cannot deny they have a criminal record even if pardoned under the *Criminal Records Act* (Davis, 1980; National Parole Board, 2002³). Furthermore, the province of British Columbia has recently passed the *Health Planning Statutes Amendment Act* whereby those with a criminal record cannot change their names without concurrent police notification (Dickson, 2002), foreclosing an opportunity for some offenders to avoid stigma. Those who have left crime occupy a tenuous moral status because they can be read as either *ex*-offenders or *ex-offenders*.

In the city where most of my research participants live, the John Howard Society and Correctional Service of Canada have failed, after several attempts, to secure zoning permission for a halfway house to be used by federal offenders - despite efforts since 1995. Public opposition has convinced the local municipal council not to allow zoning amendments to house federal offenders on conditional releases such as parole and statutory release. Aside from restricting opportunities that support desistance from crime, these conditions send a message to people leaving prison that they are widely held to be untrustworthy or dangerous. From my conversations within and outside the interview context, it is clear that ex-offenders have a general sense that they are devalued people. This condition is exacerbated if they carry the dual stigma of being former addicts who supported themselves with the proceeds of crime. Indeed, the irrevocability of addiction finds support among medical and social science professionals, the police, the lay public, and the addicts themselves (Biernacki, 1986: 192).

In Canada, the federal government has recently passed legislation (Bill C-7) which prevents some offenders from enjoying the full benefits of a pardon normally afforded under the *Criminal Records Act*. The Solicitor General announced in a press release in

March, 2000 that the criminal records of pardoned sex-offenders would be “flagged” on the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) database to “ensure the safety of our children and other vulnerable groups” (Solicitor General, 2000b). However, the government’s own research shows that for the period between 1970 and 1998, pardoned sex offenders who re-offended made up only .004% of the total number of pardoned persons (Solicitor General, 2000b). Bill C-7 symbolizes the current exclusionary status of ex-offenders, implying that if they have done it before, they will do it again. Curiously, the presence of 2.5 million people with criminal records in Canada or about 10% of the adult population (Solicitor General, 1995), suggests that abandoning crime may be far more common an experience than might be estimated from its position in the criminological literature.

Perhaps the most important aspect for understanding stigma and its resolution concerns how ex-offenders believe they are perceived by the wider society. All research participants believed that others would interact with them differently if the discrediting information were known. Those who have left crime experience devaluing treatment from others, that is, unless stigma can somehow be attenuated. Going straight is the process of re-establishing one as reputable, and the narrative or account in which it is given constitutes the claim to moral redemption.

The topic chosen for this thesis has its origins in my life experiences. My own background as former criminal, inmate, and prison guard affects how I understand my research participants and the process of going straight. I am able to discern meanings which others may overlook because of my time spent on both sides of the prison cell, and there were many opportunities where it was easy to “put myself in the place of the other”.

My past permits me to hear ex-offenders from more than one standpoint: as an empathetic researcher, an inmate, a correctional officer, and a teaching criminologist.

A. Deviance as a Social Construction

This study is informed by social constructionist or interactionist theories of deviance (e.g., Adler and Adler, 2000; Goode, 2001; Pfohl, 1994). I should first note that the boundaries between criminology and the sociology of deviance are frequently blurred, given the subject matter and interdisciplinary nature of criminology. However, criminologists have generally used positivist research to develop theories to explain the etiological conditions that give rise to criminal or antisocial behaviour (Einstadter and Henry, 1995; Vold, Bernard and Snipes, 1998; Williams and McShane, 1999). “Mainstream”, “liberal” or positivist criminology understands law as an expression of social consensus about the harmfulness of certain behaviours and develops theories to isolate the causal forces behind criminality and by implication, its control. Most criminologists understand crime to be the violation of societal rules as expressed and interpreted in a legal code created by groups holding social and political power⁴. Those who break the rules are subject to sanctions by state authorities, social stigma and loss of status (Siegel and McCormick, 1999: 20).

Alternatively, deviancy theorists see deviance as broader than mere behaviour, applying to devalued *beliefs* or *conditions* held by people (Adler and Adler, 2000; Goode, 2001). For deviancy theorists, crime is a social construction which involves a process of designation by agents with legal authority. Sociologists of deviance are often critical of positivist theorizing in criminology because the latter ignores the socially constructed nature of criminal law, and the imputational work behind criminal designations by agents

of social control or moral entrepreneurs (Gibbons, 1979:7; Taylor, Walton and Young, 1973). Deviance has been conceptualized as i) a violation of widely held or context-specific norms independent of the valuations of an audience (i.e., the normative definition preferred by Clinard and Meier, 2001), or ii) something which cannot exist outside the knowledge and reactions of others about the deviant or deviant act (the reactivist position preferred by Adler and Adler, 2000) or iii) an act, belief or condition which is deviant if it is *likely* to draw informal or formal negative sanctions from the immediate or wider social audience (a “qualified” reactivist position preferred by Goode, 2001). Within these definitions, almost all crime can be seen as a subset of deviance⁵.

Those who use these three perspectives are constructivist in the sense that they explore the socially created categories which give rise to informal or formal sanctions, and variations in law enforcement. The reaction to behaviour that is consequently characterized as deviant thus varies by social context. People or groups, such as moral entrepreneurs (Becker, 1963: 147-163) ‘construct’ deviance through interaction by creating categories of deviance and negotiating who or what behaviour fits into the category. My thinking here is similarly informed by the reactivist position: ex-offenders hold a deviant status which, if known, leads others to interact (or avoid interacting with them) on the basis of the assumed, negative attributes associated with those with a disreputable self. Their marginal location in society is created through the imputational work of others who possess knowledge of their disreputable self (or symbols representing it) and is evidenced by the structural constraints in which ex-offenders find themselves, such as not being able to cross international borders or secure some forms of employment

because they possess a criminal record. This stigmatic condition forms the main concern of ex-offenders and is discussed in Chapter 4.

B. Grounded Theory and Criminology

How might grounded theory research fit within the boundaries of Criminology, the bulk of which is informed by positivist inquiry? In a special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, several authors attempted to locate the discipline at the close of the millennium. Some claimed that research in Canadian criminology has i) abandoned its ability to generate knowledge (as opposed to ‘research exercises’ which legitimate existing practices), ii) lost the means by which to influence public policy by addressing the structural correlates of crime in a meaningful way or, iii) not received adequate levels of funding from government (Brodeur, 1999). Criminology has become far from unitary since critics began to challenge its foundational claims and program of research (e.g., MacLean, 1986; Ratner, 1989; Ratner and McMullan, 1987; Snider, 1991). These factions – many under the mantle of “critical criminology” – represent numerous opposing or overlapping camps which challenge assumptions about legalistic conceptions of crime, and deconstruct the “average criminal” by drawing attention to corporate and state harms (Casey, 1985; Clinard and Yeager, 1980; Snider, 1992), and male violence against women (DeKeserdey and Kelly, 1994). They also criticize the ‘correctionalist’ response to problems engendered by the capitalist mode of production (Taylor, Walton and Young, 1973: 281), with some demanding a “realist agenda” in its place (Lea and Young, 1986). Furthermore, critical criminologists expose the racist, sexist and classist biases in the criminal justice system which perpetuate the very conditions which positivist criminology either ignores or alleges to relieve (Lynch and Groves, 1989;

Maclean and Milovanovic, 1997 in Rigakos, 1999: 143). In this context, 'mainstream' criminology has suffered challenges and according to one observer, may be on the brink of extinction and practical relevancy (Clairmont, 1999: 157) or more optimistically, "on the verge of a paradigm revolution as energetic and far-reaching as that which precipitated the labelling movement of the early 1960s" (Williams and McShane, 1999: 287). In defence of mainstream criminology, several criminologists have recently chronicled the progressive research agenda of offender rehabilitation, risk assessment instruments, and applauded the federal government for supporting correctional rehabilitation policies (Bonta and Cormier, 1999). Others decry the lack of action by the federal government on issues of aboriginal justice (LaPraire, 1999) and drug policy reform (Erickson, 1999).

In an effort to respond to the malaise within the discipline, Menzies and Chunn (1999) described the contemporary moment for the discipline as the "best and worst of times for criminologists labouring in academic sites from coast to coast in this country" (p. 285). Despite their reservations, they endorsed the discipline's "emancipatory and transformative potential", but not from what they describe as criminology's "sacrosanct mission to chart, theorize and rectify the problem of 'criminality'", but rather by the infiltration of criminology's consciousness by Marxist criminologies, feminism, left realism, postmodernism, prison abolitionists, peace-making, constitutive criminology and post-critical criminology, to name a few (p. 289-290).

Criminology has been deconstructed on all fronts, including the predominantly quantitative methods on which the discipline has been traditionally based⁶. This postmodernist critique of essentialism, truth and theory endorses non-positivist research

methods for representing social phenomena such as fieldwork (Prus, 1996), narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993), interpretive biographies (Denzin, 1989), the value of emotions experienced by the researcher in generating meaningful understandings of those studied (Kleinman and Copp, 1993), critical ethnography (Thomas, 1993) and feminism (Fraser and Nicholson, 1988; Reinhartz, 1992). Qualitative methods would also include case studies, political and ethical issues, participatory inquiry, interviewing, participant observation, visual methods and interpretive analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). To this partial list I add the grounded theory method which uses data to generate hypotheses from the relationships between categories and their properties, as opposed to collecting data to test hypotheses derived from existing theory. Grounded theory was a key part of the “qualitative revolution” when Glaser and Strauss (1967) wrote *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* and challenged the contemporary view that only quantitative research provided the platform for scientific inquiry (Charmaz, 2000). Although the grounded theory method, especially the version advanced by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Glaser (1992; 1998) retains an affinity with positivist assumptions about an objective, external reality, and the dispassionate observer who “discovers” data and theory, there is nothing preventing the analytical tools of grounded theory from being informed by postpositivist or “constructivist” sensitivities. The principles of grounded theory will be further elaborated in Chapter 3.

I prefer to maintain an intimate familiarity with the women and men engaged in becoming ex-offenders, instead of a scientific neutrality normally called for in positivist research protocols which gauge knowledge by its ability to address concerns around reliability, validity and generalizability. Criminology appears open to the methodological

directions implied in studying a rarely considered group using a method that is conspicuously absent in criminological research, despite the discipline's general receptiveness to qualitative inquiry.

As for the topic itself, I searched in vain for Canadian literature on ex-offenders published in the past decade. Given the methodological preferences of most criminologists, and the lack of attention to the desistance experience, it is not surprising that few works can be found on the topic⁷. The literature available for consideration is difficult to locate and conducted in relative isolation from each other in the disciplines of sociology and psychology (Maruna, 1997: 60). There is only one published Canadian study that explores the decision to give up crime by using qualitative methods (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986; see MacLean's (1991) personal account of living in a "Catch-22" situation as an ex-offender turned academic).

C. Organization of the Thesis

The thesis is organized in the following way. In Chapter 2, I examine "desistance" as it has been conceptualized in studies using longitudinal research methods. Several problems are identified with this largely binary definition consisting of offenders and ex-offenders. The second part identifies the motivation for leaving crime as it is developed within the qualitative literature. Using interview data, researchers in this methodological tradition tend to conceptualize the choice to leave crime as the outcome of an existential crisis or simply a rational choice.

In Chapter 3, I describe the grounded theory method, including the assumptions which inform its basis in symbolic interaction. I raise some unresolved issues regarding this inductive method, and discuss how I have tried to address them. The method of

analysis is described (open coding, writing memos, theoretical sampling, coding and sorting), and the criteria for evaluating the grounded theory. Finally, the chapter closes with a discussion of some of ethical issues involved with qualitative interviewing on a sensitive topic.

Chapters 4 to 8 develop the theoretical model outlined in Chapter 2 in a conceptual vocabulary which reflects the foreground of leaving crime from the people interviewed for this study. The key concept is identified in Chapter 4 which constitutes the main concern of ex-offenders - the residual self. All other concepts which represent the processes that ex-offenders talk about are related to their main concern: to attenuate the stigmatic properties of a past self which has left traces or residuals into the present. Visible markers (e.g., tattoos, speech and mannerisms, collateral physical stigma and shaming information) are pointers to a past, as are the human interactions which variously convey stigma towards this group. A graphical model of the theory identifies the main concepts which are developed in (Figure 4.1).

Chapter 5 details the process of becoming an ex-offender which varies depending on the degree to which they held a “transient” or “deep” identity which they recount as a former, deviant self. All ex-offenders report crises in their criminal lifestyles before making the decision to leave crime. Crises tend to be described as cumulative over time, but there is often a noteworthy existential crisis which makes it meaningful for offenders to abandon crime and go straight. Once the decision is made to leave crime, the move itself is rarely a clean one, but is better described as a process of “going straight”.

The data considered in Chapter 6 suggests that leaving crime is a social event which requires help from others. Although the properties of help vary considerably, the critical

and effective property of help is how it provides an “imported conversation” or self-talk learned from others in vocabularies about the “disease of addiction”, the effects of traumatic, early childhood experiences on adult behaviour, or divine assistance from God or fortune. A second emergent feature of help concerns an ex-offender’s relationship to helping others and imported conversations: they can be transitory, enveloping, or comparatively autonomous.

Chapter 7 discusses the “proof” or credentials provided by ex-offenders to show others how distant they are from their former self. They have partially resolved the problems created by the residual self, residuals which linger on through their interactions with sceptical others, stigmatic physical markers, and in the “lived reality” of having been a thief, prostitute, violent offender and/or drug addict. Credentials include the amount of “clean time” since the last criminal offence or drug use, having obtained a criminal pardon, or how amends have been made for past wrongs. The most significant claim for having transcended the residual self concerns the acquisition of new distinctions or insights between a past and present self, and the good works done for others. An authentic self or *who I am* is claimed over a past, misguided self, and evidence for internal changes are evident by how they see and relate to others, including society in general.

Chapter 8 revisits the concept of the residual self, introduced in Chapter 4, but this time focuses on how these residuals show up in the presentation of self. A perplexing issue for making sense of leaving crime concerns a subset of ex-offenders who report a continuing involvement in crime: behaviour which appears inconsistent with their claims of “going straight”. Other manifestations of this lingering, deviant self include reports

about the “availability” of violence under conditions which ex-offenders can specify. It is also clear from the interviews that ex-offenders say things or present themselves in ways which appear to violate “residual rules” (Scheff, 1966), which others may interpret along with discrediting information to doubt their claims of reform (e.g., a criminal record or the physical markers identified in Chapter 3). Many ex-offenders are aware of “the old me” and use those associated characteristics as a resource for going straight. The residual self can be a liability to claims of reform, or an asset to show credentials of change, depending upon the sense made of it by ex-offenders.

Finally, Chapter 9 summarizes the process and concepts which have emerged to develop a substantive theory to explain the process and meaning of going straight from the interviews analyzed in this thesis. The limitations of the grounded theory method, and the theory itself, are specified. My first task is to provide some understanding into the phenomena of leaving crime as understood by criminologists studying “desistance” – the concept used to capture an empirical observation that most criminals - at some point in their lives - abandon crime.

A. Desistance: The Study of Background Variables

Most theorizing in criminology has focused on single factor theories which tend to divide the world into criminals and non-criminals, inferring that the propensity for criminality is stable over the course of lives. Criminologists have a theoretical “embarrassment of riches” to account for the onset of criminality, but little to explain the processes by which the majority of those who become officially labelled as criminals turn from crime, sooner or later in life. Within criminology, desistance has been given little consideration (Piquero and Mazerolle, 2001: 269). This knowledge deficit is even more remarkable, given that most offenders will abandon crime in their early adult years according to aggregate data collected from police reports of crime (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 2001: 72-73); Hartnagel, 1996: 96-99; Sacco and Kennedy, 1998: 55; Siegel and McCormick, 1999: 70-72).

A number of researchers have studied the causal pathways into and out of crime using longitudinal research methods. For the most part, these methods make observations over time to identify individual, background differences in criminal behaviour and their relationship to socio-economic status, prenatal care, medical and mental health records, family structure, the disciplinary practices of parents, early childhood behaviour, experiences in school, and contact with social service agencies and the criminal justice system (for example, see Farrington, 1992; 1995; Loeber et al., 1998; Moffit, 2001; Nagin et al, 1995; Sampson and Laub, 1993). The research subjects themselves, their parents, teachers and social-service agency personnel are interviewed at different intervals over many years to help determine factors which account for variations in criminal activity. These data show a “profile” which describes those who are most likely

to desist or persist in crime and suggest causal explanations in light of the variation between the groups. The literature focusing on the etiological correlates of crime (and desistance) became a parallel conversation for me as I learned from ex-offenders about what it means to become an ex-offender. In the language of my research participants, “going straight”, “getting my act together” or referring to themselves as “in recovery” speaks to an ongoing process of *becoming* an ex-offender. Nonetheless, the central concept of this thesis, the *residual self* has some affinity with the behavioural propensities identified by developmental and life-course criminologists using longitudinal methods. It was also clear from reading about desistance from this type of quantitative research that the life-worlds of ex-offenders remain unexplored and mysterious.

Leaving crime is a topic which cries out for attention, given the findings of longitudinal research (Farrington, 1992, 1995; Loeber, Southamer-Loeber, Van Kammen and Farrington, 1991), integrated theories (Elliot, Huizinga and Cantor, 1979), developmental criminology⁹ (Le Blanc and Loeber, 1998; Thornberry, 1987), and life course theories (Sampson and Laub, 1993), all of which emphasize the transient and temporal features of most criminal careers. The attention recently given to desistance in criminology acknowledges that criminal pathways are not unidirectional, and that except for a minority of offenders, cessation from crime is the norm. In an important work on criminal pathways and life course transitions, Sampson and Laub (1993) used archival data from structured interviews conducted by researchers working for Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck to validate linear regression models developed from quantitative data. Reflecting on their work, they encourage researchers to analyze more qualitative data “derived from systematic open-ended questions or narrative life histories” to uncover the

social processes underlying stability and change in criminal and deviant behaviour (Sampson and Laub, 1993: 251-252).

Research in criminal careers and developmental criminology has identified the relationships offenders have to crime in terms of timing and duration: the *onset* of criminal behaviour (usually occurring in adolescence), the *maintenance* period of a criminally active phase, and *desistance* where offenders cease their involvement in crime (Warr, 1998: 183). Other categorizations in the literature where desistance is mentioned identify “innocents” who stop after one or two criminal events, “desisters” with low probabilities of lengthy criminal careers, and “persisters” with high probabilities of extensive criminal careers and frequent criminal activity (Fagan, 1989: 378).

Uggen and Piliavin (1998) conceptualize desistance as one of three outcomes: i) a behavioural state of indeterminate duration characterized by the absence of criminal events; ii) as non-crime conditional on prior commission of crime (e.g., one must first offend in order to desist) and iii) as non-crime forever, a more-or-less permanent behavioural state characterized by the absence of criminal events (p. 1415-1416). In another study, Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998) are sensitive to the discrepancy between the absence of crime as indicated by police records, and the findings from self-reports when they make two definitions of desistance: one is “behavioural desistance, or the transition from criminal to non-criminal conduct” while the other consists of “official desistance, or desistance in the eyes of the law” (1998: 339). Kruttschnitt, Uggen and Shelton (2000) see desistance as “the absence of official reoffense” in their study of sex offenders (p. 84). For Shover (1983) desistance may be understood as comprising part of a deviant career, or “common experiences among individuals who have encountered,

grappled with, and resolved similar problems” (p. 208). In a later article, Shover and Thompson (1992) refer to behavioural change when they identify “crime desistance” as “the termination of criminal careers’ (p. 89). Fagan (1989) refers to desistance as the “termination of criminal behaviour for any reason except incapacitation” (p. 396), while other studies use the term but leave it undefined (e.g., Loeber et al., 1991, Van Kammen and Farrington, 1991).

David Farrington’s longitudinal research in the United Kingdom identifies youth whose background puts them at risk to offend, but they either remain non-offenders or later “desist”, meaning that there are no longer official records or self-reports of being involved in crime (Farrington, 1992; 1995). Le Blanc and Loeber’s (1998) typology of desistance includes “a slowing down of the frequency of offending (*deceleration*), a reduction in its variety (*specialization*), or a reduction in its seriousness (*de-escalation*)”, comprising a sequential system through which individuals can progress or regress (p. 123). Most of the few studies which explore the phenomenon of leaving crime conceptualize desistance as the termination of criminal activity, or “the complete or absolute stopping of criminal behaviour, and alternatively, as the gradual cessation of criminal activity” (Piquero and Mazerolle, 2001: xv).

The studies reviewed here are representative but not exhaustive. They have the following common features: i) leaving crime is conceptualized as a behavioural change or desistance from criminal behaviour, ii) quantitative, linear models are used to identify the timing and duration of desistance and iii) official records (or occasionally, self-administered self-reports) are the primary means of identifying those who desist from crime. Research exploring the reasons behind the decision to leave crime have typically

focused on variables associated with “aging out” or “maturational reform”. “Aging out” means that declining participation in crime accompanies the normal process of biological aging when both physical agility and opportunities for crime become compromised.

Criminals

slow down eventually, perhaps as the drives cool off, or the prohibitions or community ties finally sink in, or the time horizons finally stretch out, or the increasingly severe penalties of the criminal justice system for recidivists finally make crime insufficiently rewarding. Or, failing that, simply the diminishing capacities of later life make crime too dangerous or unlikely to succeed, especially where there are younger or stronger criminal competitors, or victims who will not be cowed (Wilson and Herrnstein, 1985: 147).

In light of these considerations, the decision to stop criminal behaviour is rational since one no longer has the same opportunities, nor the physical stamina to remain involved in high-risk activities. This process of aging out is similar to the concept of “maturational reform” which accounts for patterns of crime which show declining involvement or a cessation in criminal behaviour (Greenberg, 1985; Hartnagel, 2000: 99). Desistance is seen as the outcome of a natural process, that is, without outside interventions which are intended to reduce the opportunity or motivation to commit crime. Age brings increasing levels of rewards and responsibilities which makes crime unattractive when the same instrumental outcomes can be achieved through legitimate means, such as acquiring income and status. However, Jolin (1985) and Maruna (1997) are sceptical of the ability of a concept such as “maturation” to capture the desistance process, and Maruna finds it unlikely that age is the independent variable behind the immense changes of abandoning crime among persistent offenders (p. 66; see also Ouimet and Le Blanc, 1996: 75-76).

The question remains as to why and how offenders leave crime, and the meanings which they attribute to their decisions. The answers come from listening to their accounts, their reasoning and their description of conditions which proceed the changes they report. Popular conceptions of criminality suggest that crime is “the easy way out”, or as Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) describe it, crime constitutes acts of self-interest using force or fraud to achieve money without work, sex without courtship and revenge without court delays. If crime is a rational and hedonistic pursuit of pleasure, then the decision to it requires an accounting.

Since World War II, and aside from the Glueck’s research beginning in the 1940s (Glueck and Glueck, 1950), almost no attention has been paid to the lived experiences of those who leave crime. Although there are quantitative models which account for “onset and desistance” throughout the life-course of offenders, the subjective worlds of those who exit criminal pathways have been left relatively unexplored in the criminological literature (for exceptions, see Maruna, 1997; 2001; Sampson and Laub, 1993: 204-242; Shover, 1983; Sommers, Baskin and Fagan, 1994), despite a long-recognized correlation between age and diminishing involvement in crime which dates back to Quetelet in 1835 (Jolin, 1985). The experiences of ex-offenders needs to be explored with qualitative research designs, given that there is evidence that for many “adolescent-limited” offenders (those whose criminal activities were limited to teenage years), cessation from crime may be indicated by official records, but face-to-face interviewing reveals a different story. One study employing self-reported data from interviews discovered that purported adolescent-limited ex-offenders were still, at age 32, involved in heavy drinking, drug use, fighting and theft - all of which went undetected by authorities

(Nagin, Farrington and Moffit, 1995; see also Loeber and Hay, 1997:379-381). Official statistics would classify people in this group as “ex-offenders”, but anyone with more intimate knowledge of them would have a different understanding.

The literature reviewed in this section suggests that desistance from crime or having the status of “ex-offender” are similar terms which suggest a change in behaviour - to stop breaking the law over some period of time, ranging from a brief duration to permanent cessation. However, the labels “offender”, “ex-offender” and the concept of desistance itself suffer from conceptual slippage.

When or under what conditions does someone become an offender? Is it at the moment of a legal violation, or perhaps when a transgression is officially recognized through a warning, arrest, charge, conviction or prison sentence? If a person commits a single crime, or many crimes over a long period of time, is he/she an offender if never detected? Is someone an offender if she/he is arrested for committing a crime in full view of reliable witnesses, but is later found not guilty because of the entreaties of a talented lawyer? Similar conceptual problems are noted by theorists who try to measure crime – a phenomenon which depends upon the discretionary decisions of police, Crown prosecutors and judges to interpret and apply written law to the messy affairs of human relations. These questions and the answers they are likely to elicit point to the socially constructed nature of “crime” (Hackler, 2000: 46-48). The label “ex-offender” is no less a social construction, and normally only applied to people who have been processed through the criminal justice system and spent time in jail or some other disposition.

To further muddy the waters, could it be that most of us are ex-offenders, given that delinquency is thought to be ubiquitous throughout society (Brantingham, 1991: 377;

Gabor, 1994; Wilson and Herrnstein, 1985: 21)? Just when does someone “desist” from crime? The purist might argue that desistance means a total cessation from a continuing pattern of illegal behaviour. This concise classification would not recognize substantial qualitative changes such as moving from heroin addiction supported by violent crime, to smoking marijuana occasionally but otherwise living a law-abiding lifestyle – much like the tens of thousands of Canadians who use cannabis and do not consider themselves to be criminal.

While quantitative studies are valuable for providing many insights into background variables of those who make the decision to leave crime, the phenomenology of going straight provides another dimension from which to understand this process. Qualitative research makes sense of leaving crime within the meanings of those who have done so. By focusing on the foreground of their realities, it is possible to make theoretical generalizations about the phenomenology of “going straight”.

B. The Foreground of Going Straight

The lived experience of leaving crime cannot be captured in quantitative studies where desistance is measured by the presence or absence of an arrest or conviction (Fagan, 1989; Uggen and Piliavin, 1998), or having experienced a life course transition such as marriage, military service, or finding stable employment (Sampson and Laub, 1993). Despite the recurring evidence that most criminals eventually abandon crime, there are very few studies which try to understand criminal exits from the standpoint of those living it. This paucity of research concerning the process of leaving a deviant identity is underscored by its absence in books on the sociology of deviance. Although studies may be found in some texts (e.g., Kelly, 1993; Rubington and Weinberg, 1996;

Adler and Adler, 2000), it is overlooked in many others (e.g., Beaman, 2000; Best and Luckenbill, 1994; Clinard and Meier, 2001; Deutschmann, 2002; Ellis and DeKeseredy, 1996; Goode, 2001; Silverman et al., 2000; Terrell and Meier, 2001; Pontell, 1999). Students and the wider public may be left with the impression that the door *out* of a deviant identity is closed, and very difficult to unlock.

The two main themes addressed researchers using qualitative methods revolve around the motives for leaving crime. For the most part, the decision to leave crime is cast as either an epiphany-like experience involving an existential crises of self, or a rational decision informed by a calculation of personal and social costs and benefits. The other recurring theme concerns the role of others in facilitating the exit from crime. Before exploring these twin themes, it is useful to briefly note the type of ex-offenders which inform other qualitative studies. I will argue that the nature of the sample chosen for studying exits from crime will shape generalizations made about the process itself.

Almost all of the qualitative research conducted with ex-offenders use samples of former hardcore offenders who were involved in high level drug trafficking (Adler, 1983 [1994]; 1992), heroin or cocaine addiction (Anderson and Bondi, 1998; Ray, 1979; Sommers et al., 1994), violent crime (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986; Hughes, 1998), property offences over prolonged periods of their lives (Shover, 1983; 1996), or some combination of these (Devlin and Turney, 1999, Maruna, 1997, 2001; Shover, 1992). Maruna's (2001) research participants were specifically chosen by him because "they fit the profile for what has been called the 'career criminal' or 'persistent offender'... each has at some point in their life been engaged in a sustained period of very high frequency offending" (p. 13). While the exits of hardcore offenders are useful for understanding the

phenomena, a comprehensive theory should try to account for the variation in criminal identities by including the experiences of those who more typically become involved in crime. The experiences of formerly prolific criminals, as well as those who “dabbled” in crime, constitute the data informing the theory developed here. All of the qualitative studies reviewed here used interview data, with the exception of Maruna’s (1997) analysis of ex-offenders’ biographies.

I now turn the qualitative literature on ex-offenders which addresses the motives for leaving crime. The first door out of crime is typically described as the outcome of an epiphany, “bottoming out” or some existential crisis.

1. Door Number One: Epiphanies, Bottoming Out and Existential Crises

The notion that crises precedes the decision to abandon crime is a recurring feature in much of qualitative literature on exits from criminal pasts (e.g., Biernacki, 1986; Copeland, 1998; Hughes, 1998; Maruna, 1997, 2001; Sommers, Baskin and Fagan, 1994; Ray, 1979). These crises are typically conceived as “hitting rock bottom” experiences which may or may not involve some deeper conversionary quality, and are often cast as the motivation for leaving deviant worlds.

It should first be noted that wider cultural meanings informing the narratives of personal change may lead some ex-offenders to recall their stories without referring to a crisis. Whether leaving crime is the outcome of self-crises or rational choices may shaped by whether the researcher’s approach to discovery is deductive or inductive. For example, Anderson and Bondi’s (1998) study of 45 ex-drug addicts used in-depth interviewing to explore the extent to which Ebaugh’s (1988) notion of “role exit” sequences would vary by race and gender, therefore making it a deductive approach to discover hypotheses. The

absence of epiphany-like experiences among many of the black females led the authors to surmise that “the turning points we found varied so greatly that it is difficult to offer general patterns that describe each group” (p. 165). They did not detect an existential crisis on the part of all ex-addicts who were simultaneously engaged in street crime. This finding could be the result of two possibilities, one of which the authors suggest: the epiphanic moment is a part of a wider narrative of personal change which is characteristic of Twelve Step groups. For black women, alternative narratives of change are available so they are less likely to relate their experiences to an epiphany. A second reason why Anderson and Bondi did not find a discernable pattern in the role exits of addicts may have been an outcome of their deductive reasoning in exploring ex-offenders’ realities. Their analysis was “structured to reflect our respondents’ role exit stories as well and their similarities and differences with Ebaugh’s [1988] model” (p. 157). Testing an existing model of role exit as opposed to developing new concepts through an inductive method, such as the grounded theory, are different approaches, and are likely to account for different findings¹⁰.

Copeland (1998) interviewed 32 women in the United States who recovered from alcohol or drug problems for more than a year without the intervention of special treatment or self-help groups. Almost half the sample (n=15) had been involved in illegal activity as a consequence of their substance abuse. She writes that an existential crisis was one of the most commonly cited motivational factors for resolving to stop.

Many of the women reported that the experiences of loss of control of their alcohol and other drug use was an insidious process. Only when they caught a glimpse of themselves in a mirror or had a sudden image in their mind of a relative or friend with a severe substance dependence did they reflect on their own situation and their possible future [...] A dissonance developed between the impoverished state of their current circumstances

and the view they had of themselves as intelligent, middle-class women. This was often as the result of catching their reflection in a mirror and *seeing someone with whom they no longer identified* (Copeland, 1998: 5, 8; my emphasis).

Her ex-offenders come very close to the transformative crises described by my research participants. Moreover, in their interviews with ex-offenders, Devlin and Turney (1999) also found that one of the common factors associated with going straight included some life event or awakening – “ a powerful, single and distinct occurrence which the individual can identify as a turning point and without which he or she would have continued to offend” (p. 10).

A phenomenon akin to a transformative crisis for addicts and criminals (who share membership in both groups) appears fairly common. Ray (1979) locates the inception of cure from addiction within the internal deliberations about change. This internal conversation about reform occurs within a context of social stress and alienation from the addict’s present identity, calling it into question and examining it in all of its implications and ramifications (p. 667). Similarly, Biernacki (1986) identifies the “rock bottom” experience of heroin addicts which provides the context for making the exit out of addiction. These crises often followed being robbed or jailed, or perhaps feeling socially rejected when they learned that significant others are aware of their addiction. At this critical juncture, they are ripe candidates for a radical “conversion” in their lives, and may succeed in overcoming their addiction by becoming members of religious or political groups in which they find social supports and acceptance (Biernacki, 1986: 183).

Neal Shover’s (1983) study examined the lifeworlds of men who abandoned crime in their lifetimes, distinguishing “subjective” and “objective” careers (p. 208). Focusing on the former, he interviewed 36 property offenders and used the grounded theory method to

make generalizations. The “identity shift” to which Shover speaks consists of “a critical, detached perspective toward an earlier portion of their lives and the personal identity which they believe it exemplified” (p. 210). Although he generally argues that exits from crime are rational constructions brought on by advancing years, he also specifies a “reflective moment” in the context of change which may be consistent with the existential crisis reported by ex-offenders in this and other studies. In a later book, Shover (1996) writes that persistent thieves and hustlers develop a separate, evaluative judgemental perspective. He cites one of his respondents:

I saw myself for what I really was. I saw what I was. I saw it. With my own eyes I saw myself. I could see it just as plain as I’m looking at you now. And I know that what I looked at was a sorry human being... I was a self-made bastard, really (p. 131).

Ebaugh (1988) uses the concept of a “turning point” to describe events which motivate people to abandon roles which become unsatisfying (p. 123). Turning points consist of specific events which make change a priority: i) a “last straw” experience where a seemingly minor event becomes the catalyst for change, ii) time-related factors as people age (e.g., a “mid-life crisis”), iii) key incidents which provide excuses or justifications for the necessity of change, and iv) facing “either-or” alternatives where self-change is required or the consequences will threaten one’s mental or physical health (pp. 125-134). Although hers is a general theory to explain role-exits, many of Ebaugh’s turning point categories sound much like the crises reported by ex-offenders in the qualitative literature on leaving crime.

If the decision to leave crime is a rational one, we might expect that the prospect of punishment for ongoing criminal behaviour would be a decisive factor in leaving crime. However, the reality or threat of criminal sanctions as an explanation for criminal exits is

not a prominent feature in this and other studies. In their interviews with 23 ex-offenders, Devlin and Turney (1999) found few who believed that imprisonment, or the threat of it, figured prominently in their decision go straight. The authors reason that those who might be deterred from crime are those who are not from what might be called a “criminal background” (p. 20-21; see also Blumstein, 1998: 134). And despite the apparent pain-from-incarceration explanation for the motive behind desistence in Meisenhelder’s (1977) study, he notes that

the conditions for successful exiting are largely outside the control of correctional agencies and their programs. It well may be that the things that are conducive to change within criminal careers are primarily interpersonal, and thus are beyond the reach of the criminal corrections system. In short what is done to or with those whom society has determined to be criminal may have little real effect on their future behaviour (p. 332).

There is a real sense that the decision to leave crime is impervious to the formal institutions of social control: going straight occurs when offenders decide they are ready¹¹. However, other qualitative researchers claim the process is not so mysterious, and that leaving crime is the result of rational calculus.

2. Door Number Two: Rational Choice

The discovery of a bottoming experience leading to self-crisis is not a significant feature of all studies of ex-offenders. An alternative theme found for making sense of the decision to leave crime is cast within rational choices. The deleterious effects of criminal behaviour leads to a decision where the offender determines that crime doesn’t pay, especially within the context of advancing years and diminishing returns from crime (Shover, 1983; 1996)

Cusson and Pinsonneault (1986) interviewed 17 Canadian ex-offenders who had been convicted of armed robbery – a far more homogeneous group than the 24 offenders comprising the present study. The authors made generalizations about the decision to get out of crime, after having identified what they see as “familiar concepts”: aging, deterrence, the social bond and differential association. While speculative, they make the observation that “the aging offender takes the threat of punishment seriously, re-establishes his links with society, and severs his association with the underworld” (p. 80). The aging process intensifies the costs of punishment, often in an historical awareness that crime does not pay very well. Could it be that leaving crime is the wolf of rational choice dressed in the sheep’s clothing of crises, epiphanies and claims to inner change with metaphysical qualities? The answer is not entirely clear. Some studies suggest that the gradual realization about the costs and consequences of criminal behaviour is what leads offenders out of crime, coupled with the awareness that hard work and the love of a good woman are rewards for conformity (Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986: 79-80; Shover, 1983: 213-214; Trasler, 1979; cf., Warr, 1998).

In a similar rational-choice argument, Meisenhelder (1977) interviewed 20 property offenders who had, “in their own minds, experienced a significant, although temporary, exit from crime”. His respondents gave information “relevant to the process of exiting with reference to attempted exits, failures at exiting, and subjectively defined successful exits” (p. 322). Meisenhelder sees the threat of punishment as one of two main reasons for getting out of crime. Criminal sanctions affected offenders’ social identities, and how they envisioned their futures.

The findings of this study indicate that the intention to abandon crime is most strongly influenced, or motivated, by *the deterrent force of*

imprisonment and the offender's emerging desire to settle down (Meisenhelder, 1977: 325; my emphasis).

Meisenhelder's offenders talk about the fear of incarceration as one of the "because" explanations for abstinence from crime. The threat of punishment was made real in the context of prison for two reasons: they saw older inmates as a symbol of their own deteriorating situation, and they had time for "reverie and reflection" (p. 323). The second category of motives identified by Meisenhelder had to do with "a subjective wish to lead a more normal life" because offenders reported getting tired of the pace and problems associated with criminal lives. They give into the "the pull of normality". For the time periods during which Meisenhelder's offenders were crime free, they attributed success to well paying, meaningful jobs which held the possibility of a career. Marriages and families were also reported to provide the social resources for constructing a non-criminal identity and constitute part of a bond to society (Hirschi, 1969).

Cusson and Pinsonneault (1986) describe leaving crime in a deterrence rationality which they argue is still valid. Quoting Conwell in Sutherland's (1937) *The Professional Thief*, the authors maintain that it "is generally necessary for the thief to suffer some shock or jolt before he will face the future seriously" (p. 73), and that "there comes a time when the recidivist's will to continue in crime is weakened by the corrosive action of delayed deterrence or by a shock of some sort" (p. 77). The "time" they refer to are the advancing years of age, but my study shows that exits from crime occur in late teen or early adult lives, even for those who have engaged in crimes as serious as their sample of Canadian robbers (e.g., Dayna at age 19; Cheryl at age 23). What Cusson and Pinsonneault describe as the "shock of some sort" may be similar to the existential crisis accompanied by distinctions between a false self and a nascent, authentic one.

Ultimately, they argue that the decision to get out of crime is an inherently rational one, where giving up crime is a part of a rational choice which accompanies the natural processes of age and maturation. In a study using an ordinary least squares regression model, Shover and Thompson (1992) also note the effects of advancing years where age and “differential expectations” combine to cause offenders to reduce their anticipated benefits from crime. The probability of desistance increases with age and as the expectations for achieving friends, money, autonomy, and happiness via crime decrease (p. 97). However, the perceived risk of getting caught could not significantly predict desistance.

Using “snowball sampling” or a chain referral method, Sommers, Baskin and Fagin (1994) interviewed 30 female street offenders who were “deeply enmeshed in deviant identities that centered on criminal activity and getting high... locked into a deviant social world, with little stake in conventional life or conventional identity” (pp. 128-129). All study participants had been clean for at least two years. The first of three stages they identify in their model of desistance includes “catalysts for change” which refer to socially disjunctive experiences such as “hitting rock bottom”, fearing death, becoming tired of crime, or facing health complications. The second stage is “discontinuance” which is made apparent by publicly announcing the decision to end their participation in crime and claim a new social identity. The last stage consists of maintaining the decision to stop (or what I have referred to here as *going straight*) which means renegotiating their identities, finding support from significant others and becoming integrated into new social networks. Sommers et al (1994) argue that “desistance is a pragmatically constructed project of action created by the individual within a given social context” (p.

146). Here again, there is evidence of a certain rationality informing the decision to get out of a life of crime, especially when a criminal lifestyle produces anxiety and becomes physically or mentally debilitating and aging offenders “take the threat of punishment seriously” (p. 145). Their general finding that turning from crime occurs as a “part of a process over time and not as a dramatic lasting change that takes place at any one time” (Sommers and Baskin, p. 146; citing Pickles and Rutter, 1991). Their conclusion is consistent with the explanatory framework of *going straight* developed here.

There are threads of rational decision-making throughout the exits in the narratives in the present study, but they are framed within personal histories littered with irrational behaviour, or moments when they “should” have learned their lesson about crime but failed to do so. Shover and Thompson (1992) note that for the overwhelming number of street offenders, crime brings only penury, interspersed with modest, quickly depleted criminal gains and repeated imprisonment (p. 90-91; Shover, 1996: 162-170). Most criminals would enjoy greater financial benefits from minimum-wage paying jobs than the gains possible from a life of crime. Furthermore, the rational choice explanation would suggest that once criminals learn their lessons from the miseries of crime, they would immediately cease their errant behaviours. But the absence of a “clean break” from crime and addiction suggests that the process is complex, and requires more than the triumph of the will expressed in a single decision.

Sociologists often identify deviant careers with beginnings, often with all the features of ascendancy, peak, decline and exit (Becker, 1963; Goffman, 1961; Luckenbill and Best, 1981). Examples include studies of prostitutes (Weisberg, 1985), the mentally ill (Goffman: 1961: 125-169), the paranoid (Lemert, 1989) and drug users (Goode, 2001:

204-207). Using the deviant career model, Patricia Adler (1992) followed up on 10 former upper level drug dealers whom she had studied in the 1970s (Adler, 1983). All were out of the drug business and involved in other ventures, with some using the resources of Narcotics Anonymous. Most quit on their own after experiencing physical burnout, diminished excitement, “outright paranoia” and because the rewards of trafficking became less gratifying (p. 113). Notably, the exits were not “clean” but tended to be “fragile and temporary followed by periods of relapse into dealing” and their “reattachment to conventional society was problematic because of their many years out of the mainstream economy” (p. 114). Former drug traffickers oscillated between criminal activities and legitimate and deviant identities. This pattern of oscillation is comparable to my ex-offenders reporting criminal behaviour and residuals of a past identity in crime (discussed in Chapter 8), while making incremental gains towards conformity associated with going straight (discussed in Chapter 5).

The clean break from crime is conspicuous by its absence in the literature, likely because the phenomenon has less to do with a change in behaviour as it is a process of renegotiating the residual self. In the present study, although three offender’s ended their behaviour abruptly, that did not mean that their criminal identity was suddenly transformed. The only pedophile in the sample (Hector) stopped molesting children after he was arrested 18 years ago, but still negotiates his identity with others while monitoring his internal states through an imported conversation of relapse prevention. The other two (Francis and Warren) summarily terminated the behaviours which got them in trouble with the law, but continue to smoke marijuana while considering themselves ex-offenders. They negotiated their ex-offender status with me during the interview: Francis

said that “everybody does it”, and Warren harshly criticized cannabis laws. Both of these rationales attempt to counteract the stigma of deviance through “techniques of neutralization” (Sykes and Matza, 1957). However, others in society may not find these rationales to be morally persuasive.

The other main theme to be found in the qualitative literature on leaving crime concerns the helping role of others.

3. The Transformative Power of Helping Others

The social interactions and close relationships which constitute help for ex-offenders are a consistent feature in qualitative studies of leaving crime (e.g., Devlin and Turney, 1999; Hughes, 1998; Maruna, 2001; Meisenhelder, 1977; Sommers, Baskin and Fagin, 1994). Help is generally conceived within the conceptual framework of Hirschi’s (1969) theory of social control. In this model, ex-offenders reach a stage where they are restrained from crime because they become bonded into society through personal and institutional relationships. Meisenhelder (1977) applied the concept of the social bond to explain why his ex-offenders left crime. Occupations which were described as subjectively meaningful, economically rewarding and had career potential were the ones which formed ties to conventional society. “We-relations” with others who espoused conventional values were deemed part of the process of “settling down” and included wives and other family members who gave meaningful reasons for staying clean. Immersion in conventional worlds also protected respondents from the stigma of their criminal records by indirectly removing them from sources of negative labelling. In a reciprocal process, ex-offenders began to feel accepted and trusted which then cultivated

their social and personal identity as non-criminal (pp. 327-329). Shover (1983) identifies the ties to others as an “interpersonal contingency” which facilitates exits from crime.

Cusson and Pinsonneault (1986) note the contribution of marriage and family in their analysis of how 17 male, Canadian robbers managed to go straight. These elements of the social bond

help the ex-offender a great deal in his effort to resist the temptation to commit new crimes. An interesting job and satisfying family ties give meaning to life and provide an incentive for respecting the law. One avoids acting out in order to keep one's family and one's job (p. 80).

The potential for a loss of both status (through shame) and the material benefits of work are among the costs of failing to go straight. The idea here is that conventional others act as informal social controls and emerge from “role reciprocities and structure of interpersonal bonds linking members of society to one another and to wider social institutions such into family, school and work” (Sampson and Laub, 1993: 18).

Relationships with others act as a form of “social capital”, or the embeddedness which intertwines individual lives with others, acting to restrain criminal tendencies and promote conventional behaviour (Brannigan, 1997: 411; Coleman, 1988). However, the ability to make connections to conventional others varies, depending upon the degree to which one was immersed in a criminal identity to the exclusion of other social relationships. In the conceptual language developed here, the reintegrative capacity of human relationships which comprise the social bond varies to the degree that the residual self is problematic. After decades of burning bridges along criminal pathways, many ex-offenders have few resources to develop social bonds to help them get back on the straight and narrow. Not surprisingly, those with transient criminal identities were most likely to seek help from those closest to them. Their lives were not fractured by years of

living in prisons or on the street, manipulating family members for drug money, or forsaking conventional educational and occupational pursuits. Although damaged, their bridges to conventional society can sometimes be repaired.

Adler's (1992) ex-drug traffickers are a case in point. Abandoning their illicit ventures depended on the degree to which their legitimate economic activities were integrated into the mainstream economy. Drug dealers with social ties to conventional, "concurrent activities" could draw on these resources to exit the lifestyle (p. 116-120). A similar observation is made by Biernacki (1986) whose interviews with 100 heroin addicts led him to conclude that they can transform their deviant identities and be treated as "ordinary people" - depending on the degree to which they overcome fear and suspicion held by non-addicts. The key to this transformation is the extent that former addicts can embrace "normal pursuits" such as employment, marriage, accumulating material possessions and meeting social obligations (p. 179). With respect to women who leave crime, Sommers et al. (1993) speak about the network of relations to others and how "identity transformation hinges on women's abilities to establish and maintain commitments and involvements in conventional aspects of life" (p. 145). Fagan's review of the research on desistance demonstrates that addicts have the best opportunity for recovery when they are able to develop networks of social support which reinterpret past behaviour through helping ideologies like Synanon (p. 398). Conversely, men who batter their partners are unlikely to quit if they are deeply embedded in a discourse of violence which is their main source of approval and social definition.

Margaret Hughes (1998) observes that "support and modeling" from others were the most salient factors helping inner-city, minority males men get out of crime. The themes

of unconditional acceptance (even during periods of relapse), the consistent availability of help, being able to develop feelings of being in a “family”, and the hope of job or educational opportunities collectively contribute to ex-offenders’ self-worth and self-esteem. Effective support people show genuine concern and caring (p. 148-49). Another clue comes from Celinska (2000) who has written about the conditions under which ex-offenders are most likely to be successful. She assessed the impact of a volunteer organization (the Exodus Group) based in Salt Lake City which was set up to help ex-offenders after release from prison. Assistance to ex-offenders begins through correctional planning during incarceration which does not sever existing familial and other social ties which offenders have to their communities (p. 108). Offenders aided by Exodus Group volunteers were significantly less likely to reoffend, compared to those who did not participate in the program¹². Although volunteers were primarily charged with helping ex-offenders find employment, she notes that “listening and letting the ex-offender *know you really care is probably of equal importance*” (p. 105; my emphasis).

Help is relevant to understanding personal change because the symbolic interactionist tradition allows identities to be renegotiated through communication with others, especially with those who are empowered to make affirmative statements about who one “really is” (e.g., parents, close friends, agents of social control and authoritative voices in Twelve Step groups). Understanding the foreground of leaving crime means hearing the conversionary properties brought by helping others, particularly the internal conversation of self which they share with ex-offenders. Thus, even when helpers are absent, their words remain in the internal conversations of those they assist. This shared

talk (or imported conversation) facilitates the exit from crime when it makes new sense of internal and external threats to going straight.

The literature reviewed in this chapter provides a background to the present study, but also serves as data in the sense that findings from other qualitative research can be integrated into the theory described in Chapter 9. My intention here is to provide an alternative perspective to the legalistic conception of being an ex-offender, and to adopt a sociological definition which has emerged from studying the process of leaving crime based on accounts of the very people who have done so. “Desistence” refers to behavioural change - but it is not the most significant feature of the interviews. My participants describe an *identity change* through a process of becoming someone with a reclaimed, reputable self. Their narratives focus on how they became the reputable self they present today. Later we will see that the question as to whether someone has quit crime can be negotiated with those with whom ex-offenders interact (for a similar definition, see Meisenhelder, 1977: 319). As it turns out, most did not only leave crime but have become “new people” in the process. Going straight involves a declaration in the present about *who I am*, to manage the residuals of a former self or *who I was*. Those with a discreditable self, regardless of whether their deviance came to the attention of authorities or not, share a common relationship with a residual, past self that is experienced both subjectively and through face-to-face interactions which bestow the experience of self. Ghosts of a past self differentially persist and present problems which occupy the consciousness, activities and social interactions of those with a disreputable past. The basic social processes described here concerns addressing the problems associated with the residual self.

Several theoretical generalizations about the process of leaving crime can be made from the data informing this study. They are consistent with the literature on desistance and that which captures the foreground of going straight. Following the grounded theory method, a fuller integration of the theoretical model is developed in Chapter 9. At this point, it would be useful to state the general theoretical model, as follows (a graphic overview is shown in Figure 4.1):

1. Ex-offenders convey or hold a stigmatized, residual self. The residual self is comprised of three interrelated phenomena: i) the visible or knowable signs pointing to a disreputable past, ii) the remnants of disreputable character traits, thinking patterns and emotional states which persist into the present, and iii) the social interactions which stigmatize ex-offenders.
2. The variety of problematic experiences associated with going straight is related to the degree to which the residuals of a past criminal identity constitute a basis for ex-offender's present identity.
3. Ex-offenders were immersed in a criminal identity to varying degrees. The criminal identity is comprised of i) a self-assessment about the extent to which they formerly embraced criminal values and beliefs and engaged in harmful, criminal behaviour and ii) the degree to which they occupied a devalued status (i.e., there is a difference in social disapprobation to former property offenders versus violent offenders).
4. The more a past, residual self is knowable to others and subjectively problematic, the greater the difficulty ex-offenders will have negotiating a non-stigmatized identity. Hardcore and transient criminal offenders vary in their selection and use

of enveloping or transitory help, respectively.

5. The problem of the residual self is differentially negotiated through culturally endorsed narratives of reform. To the degree that ex-offenders discriminate *who I was* from *who I am* in these narratives, the greater will be their success in resolving the problems of the residual self.

The chapter next describes the method of data analysis and theoretical work for arriving at the generalizations made above.

3. The Grounded Theory Method

In this chapter, I begin by describing the grounded theory method and take note of its general assumptions, that is, how it provides an explanation for social phenomena. Symbolic interaction is important for understanding the lifeworld of ex-offenders, especially regarding how the perspective conceives of the self. Some attention is paid to labelling theory which is informed by symbolic interaction and makes a significant contribution to criminology, specifically in the way it focuses on the interactive work of others in creating a deviant self-identity. I also discuss details concerning how the study was conducted, including participant selection, qualitative interviewing, and the ethical issues in a research that depends upon a trusting relationship between the researcher and the participants.

A grounded theory study typically begins with a research interest and then finds “people in the know” to develop concepts and hypotheses that are faithful to the evidence concerning the process under study. It is an open-ended, flexible method that may lead researchers into avenues of inquiry that were never part of their original intention. According to Stern (1995), the strongest case for using the grounded theory method is for investigating relatively uncharted areas or to “gain a fresh perspective in a familiar situation” (p. 30). The criteria for choosing between quantitative and qualitative methods best illustrated by Strauss and Corbin (1990):

If someone wanted to know whether one drug is more effective than another, then a double blind clinical trial would be more appropriate than grounded theory study. However, if someone wanted to know what it was like to be a participant in a drug study, then he or she might sensibly engage in a grounded theory project or some other type of qualitative study (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 36-37).

The method assumes that people who face similar problematic circumstances, or whose activity involves dealing with a “main concern”, will address them in common, pragmatic ways. Given the challenge of understanding the lifeworlds of ex-offenders in a theoretically relevant manner, the task here is to work towards a theory that fits the reality of leaving a discreditable self. Conceptualizations and hypotheses are developed which are understandable to both laypersons and sociologists (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The conceptual model should provide the most comprehensive, coherent, and simplest way to make sense of leaving crime. Glaser once described grounded theory as a “do-it-yourself methodology” (1978: 116), meaning that the researcher has control over the methodology, sampling, and theoretical development from start to finish. As defined by two of its major proponents (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), “the grounded theory approach is a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon” (p. 24), moving the researcher beyond “thick description” (Becker, 1993).

One of the allegations sometimes made about grounded theory is that it is not substantively different from analytical induction. This is a difficult claim to assess, especially when some sociologists are not certain about what constitutes analytical induction. Goldenberg (1992: 143) is unsure of whether his reading of analytic induction is correct, as is Turner (1953). Goldenberg finds that the logic behind analytical induction is not much different from what survey researchers do, especially in terms of specifying the parameters to which their hypotheses might apply (p. 151). Katz (1983) claims that unlike fixed research designs which produce probabilistic propositions, analytic field research “enfranchises research subjects and readers, giving each the logical right to

falsify and require modification of the theory” (p. 215). The ability of theory to be dynamically adjusted with the acquisition of more data is a feature of both analytical induction and the grounded theory strategy of “theoretical sampling”, discussed below. Analytical induction consciously looks for negative cases “to transform it into a “confirming case by revising the definition of either the explaining or the explained phenomenon. The researcher is enjoined to seek out negative cases and the resulting opportunity to modify the explanation” (Katz, 1982: 200).

Grounded theory is somewhat more modest its claims. It generates and suggests plausible hypotheses about general problems from the analysis of properties of categories created by the researcher when coding the data. Properties *may* be causes, especially if they are seen as such by study participants, but the method is more likely to identify the conditions, consequences, dimensions, types and processes which work to resolve or accommodate the main concern of people in a particular situation, or describe a basic social process such as “becoming”. Rather than explaining every case, when the categories and properties reach a point where no new categories or their linkages can be elaborated, “saturation” has occurred.

Glaser and Strauss (1967, pp. 103-105) contrasted their own “constant comparative method” with analytic induction. They emphasize the *theory generating function* of grounded theory without testing theory. While the theoretical product of analytic induction is universal, precise, and limited, Glaser and Strauss argue that data be analyzed until the categories generated from it leave nothing further to be learned from examining the same category. They also differentiate their approach from analytic

induction which focuses on causation, while the constant comparison adds properties such as processes, types, consequences, dimensions, and conditions.

In the present study, I made no attempt to seek out negative cases, but I did encounter narratives which were marginal in the sense that they did not fit into the chronologically ordered, linear story of leaving crime told by the majority of research participants. In the face of these discrepancies, the theory is modified, and the question continually asked of the data is how incidents or category fit with other categories and their properties, each of which must earn its way into the theoretical scheme by its presence, or “groundedness” in the data.

Grounded theory was developed in a time when verification of existing theories through hypothesis testing was the mainstay of academic work in sociology. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967 offered an alternative to this approach, giving researchers the opportunity to use their imagination to develop substantive theories (Locke, 1996). It consists of making theoretical generalizations from empirical observations – often in the form of field notes, interview transcripts or contemporary notes made during or shortly after an interview. Data collection, analysis and theory are reciprocal, repetitive processes, leading to general theoretical statements based on the constant comparison of emergent themes, categories and properties developed from the data. This requires generating categories from an open, thorough, line-by-line reading of data¹³. To do the work of grounded theory, Glaser stresses the importance of emergence (1992) and theoretical sensitivity (1978), insisting that a well-trained sociologist will ask two questions of the data:

[W]hat is the chief concern or problem of the people in the substantive area, and what accounts for most of the variation in processing the problem? And secondly, what category or what property of what category does this incident indicate? One asks these two questions while constantly comparing incident to incident, and coding and analyzing. Soon categories in the properties emerge which fit and work and are of relevance to the processing of the problem. The researcher must have patience and not force the data out of anxiety and impatience while waiting for the emergent. He must trust that emergence will occur and it does (Glaser, 1992: 4).

The assertion that emergence will occur *from* the data makes it appear as though they take on a life of their own, that is, beyond the interpretive work of the researcher. My experience of using grounded theory makes it feel as though categories and their properties do “emerge” from analyzing the interview transcripts. There are elements in the accounts of ex-offenders that seem to apply to every case; the discovery of a concept which captures a moment in this process is exhilarating, especially when it survives the constant comparison method. Various research participants (women, men, young, old, and First Nations people) describe leaving crime in ways that become cumulatively familiar, and at some moment generalizations about the contingent and contextual aspects of their experience seem to “leap from the data”.

Despite the seemingly magical qualities behind discovering emergent properties in data, Glaser insists that the skill to recognize patterns requires “an ability to generate concepts from data and relate them according to the normal models of theory in general, and theory development in sociology, in particular” (Glaser, 1992: 27). The researcher enters the field with as few pre-determined ideas as possible, and with a mandate to remain open to what is actually going on (Glaser, 1978: 3). Grounded theory can also be enabling, in the sense that it is well suited to discovering the main problem of research participants and developing a theory which accounts for processing that particular

problem (Glaser, 1998: 11). Theoretical sensitivity is cultivated from professional and personal experience and in-depth knowledge of the area under investigation.

The grounded theory method permits the examination of meanings and social reality through a simultaneous process of data gathering and analysis. Through constant comparison, data complexity is reduced by using concepts that categorize features of the data which appear to have something in common. A simultaneous exercise consists of linking concepts which appear to be related, and finding that some categories can be subsumed under a higher-order category which appears to unite them. Rennie (1998) states that the objective in grounded theory is to reach a supreme category that binds together all others, or the core concept which organizes all the others (p. 103). (The core category in this study is the “residual self” which will be outlined in Chapter 4).

Grounded theory is one means to make empirical generalizations about basic social processes (Bartlett and Payne, 1997; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992; Strauss and Corbin, 1990; 1994), in this case, the process of “becoming” as described by a group of ex-offenders. The method is interpretive, rigorous and provides researchers with a set of strategies to develop the selection and analysis of data, coding and constant comparison of codes, memo-writing for constructing concepts and their relationships, and theoretical sampling to exhaust categories and their properties. Ultimately, the researcher becomes increasingly ‘grounded’ in the data and develops richer concepts and models of how the phenomenon being studied really works (Ryan and Bernard, 2000: 783). By using the grounded theory method for sample selection, data collection and analysis, I am able to develop a theoretical understanding of what it means for ex-offenders to go straight. That understanding includes their description of the process itself, the causes and contexts that

they see as important in the decision to quit crime, and their subsequent experiences as ex-offenders. I am not proposing a theory as to *why* offenders leave crime, but rather in *how* members of this stigmatized group make meaningful the experience of leaving a discreditable self.

To generate theory in a substantive area, the researcher adopts a heuristic position of “disciplined restraint” while carefully examining the data and using codes to identify categories of action in the overall process. Grounded theory assumes that there is a certain agency within the data and it takes a qualitative method to reveal the social world as it is, thus leaving the method on a footing with the positivist tradition (Charmaz, 2000; Locke, 1996). The position assumes the existence of a world that is intersubjectively shared through the communication and negotiation of symbols. The research method explores a lifeworld shared by ex-offenders with others by asking questions and being empathetic to their realities. I have already suggested that the constructionist focus taken by deviancy theorists, and the receptiveness of criminology to qualitative methods makes room for a non-positivist (or post-positivist) paradigm of inquiry.

In making sense out of the degree to which grounded theory embraces positivist or postpositivist assumptions, I have used Charmaz’s (2000) overview of the method based on Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1994) and Glaser (1978; 1992). In her assessment, both interpretations of grounded theory favour a realist epistemology and enjoy the “silent authorship” of distanced experts. In an effort to accommodate the postpositivist sensitivities to the positivist underpinnings of the grounded theory method, she advocates taking a middle ground between objectivist and post-positivist camps (where Glaser and Strauss and Corbin fall, respectively). The alternative is *constructivism* which means

In addition to the qualified, objectivist approach taken here, I am simultaneously aware of Charmaz's (2000) call for a constructivist approach to "move researchers toward an explicitly constructivist paradigm" (p. 528). Here is how I have met the call for a constructivist approach to using the grounded theory method:

- The qualitative interview, which introduced me to the people who shared their lives, became the basis of many social encounters where we talked again about going straight. I was able to move from an in-depth interview to sustained involvement with many of the ex-offenders in a natural way;
- Although the grounded theory method does not *require* quoting research participants, I have chosen to do so in order to accurately present or illustrate their understandings and lifeworlds in a conceptual vocabulary;
- Where I might be interpreting the lives of others in a way which might be offensive to or contested by them, I sought specific comments from them on how I was reading their experiences, and whether they could be written more accurately;
- After the interview and later analysis, I sought the comments of some people who participated in this study to gain their thoughts about the key concept developed here – the "residual self" (Francis, Harry, Brad and Hector);
- Notwithstanding the philosophical and methodological issues raised in this chapter, I have tried to write this thesis in straightforward language to make the work available to those beyond the academic community.

With some modifications, I have followed the constructivist approach in this study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). The procedure for knowing about a key process is naturalistic in the sense that no pre-determined hypotheses guide the method, and research participants are taken at face value for describing subjective states and their positioning within the interactions and reactions of others. Knowledge about phenomena is co-created by the researcher and participant, rather than it being held out as constituting an objective state of affairs to be dutifully reported by the former through an impartial, detached method of inquiry. A knowledge-generating relationship between the researcher and those studied requires first-hand familiarity with the meanings which guide participants' understandings of how things work, and how those meanings are expressed in their terms (Charmaz, 2000: 525). Citing Kvale (1988), Miles and Huberman (1994) draw our attention to how this works when they write that

... during an open-ended interview, much interpretation occurs along the way. The person describing his or her lifeworld discovers new relationships and patterns during the interview; the researcher who occasionally "summarizes" or "reflects" what had been heard is in fact condensing and interpreting the flow of meaning. As Kvale [1988] suggests, the "data" are not being "collected" but rather "co-authored" (p. 35).

Ongoing and sustained involvement in the lives of research participants assists in vicariously experiencing their realities and piecing together relationships between initially disparate themes, struggles and concerns. I was able to accomplish this sustained relationship with ex-offenders in the research plan, and to this day, maintain contact with many of the people who told me about their lives. By getting to know my research participants, I understand the problems associated with being an ex-offender and how they affect entry into, or maintenance of trusting relationships with others. The interactive

work by ex-offenders who process these problems includes pragmatic solutions to the deviant status which they face. Grounded theory helps me discover my research participants' main concern to generate a substantive theory that explains how it is processed (Glaser, 1998: 11)¹⁴.

This thesis is “the telling of the told” (Van Maanen, 1988), an interpretive act which brings the lived experience of a marginalized group to the fore. My research participants shared with me their experience of having a disreputable self, and the efforts to overcome the stigma imputed to them. I have striven to give access in depth and detail to the meanings which ex-offenders attribute to their social worlds in order to represent those worlds fairly and consistent with their meanings (Charmaz, 1995: 54). Towards that goal, I have tried to put myself in their position as they relate past episodes and their present inner feelings, and I am continually reminded of situations where I experience, or have experienced, something akin to the processes they describe. Although there is some distance between the reality of occupying a quasi-stigmatized position in society and its narrative representation (and the reading of it), I argue that the concepts discovered here go beyond the interactive context of the interview. The similarity of their experiences associated with “going straight” allow for analytical generalizations to be made about the reality of leaving crime.

A. How does grounded theory explain?

What is the outcome of grounded theory? How does it explain? To address these questions, I take note of an ongoing discussion regarding the status of grounded theory within the philosophy of science and among several qualitative theorists (see, for example, Charmaz, 2000; Miller and Fredricks, 1999; Morse, 1994; Rennie, 1998).

Miller and Fredericks (1999) attempt to situate grounded theory as an increasingly credible and defensible procedure within qualitative inquiry. However, they argue that grounded theory has an obligation to specify the conditions under which the twin exercises of discovery and justification are made (p. 540). Although it is possible to derive predictive statements from grounded theory (a criterion of specialized knowledge-gathering procedures in the social sciences), it is better to understand the method as “accommodationist” rather than “predictionist”. The former term means that grounded theory accommodates data by referencing it to other literature (p. 546). Similar to other inductive strategies, *grounded theory explains by providing a theoretically plausible answer to a problematic situation* (p. 543). This accommodationist theoretical exercise means that grounded theory cannot claim to be a unique method if it validates itself through existing literature. Construed in an accommodationist argument, “grounded theory is basically a way of making an inductive argument dressed up in a new label” (p. 548). Despite their reservations about the ability of grounded theorists to identify the “more specific mechanisms of a logic of discovery”, Miller and Fredericks argue that its very strength lies in its deliberate *search for the logic or methods* about how one develops a theory, and the flexibility it affords investigating both macro and micro-level issues (p. 549-550).

I note that Miller and Fredricks (1999) depend on Straus and Corbin’s (1990) rendition of grounded theory for their analytical framework, and only mention Glaser in passing (1967; 1978). Glaser (1992; 1998) would likely object to the claim that grounded theory justifies itself when it accommodates extant literature or theories. He has consistently maintained that the grounded theory method *discovers* new theory

(especially in substantive areas), and its relationship to existing theory or “the literature” validates what has been discovered through this inductive method. Put differently, the existing literature accommodates the discoveries of grounded theory, not the converse.

Irrespective of these arguments, some of which Glaser (1998) addresses, he calls debates like these “rhetorical wrestles” which waste time because the method has already been established and defended (i.e., in Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1978; 1992). Glaser qualifies grounded theory by noting that it is not a *purely* inductive method because deduction is what drives theoretical sampling, or “carefully deduced probabilities on where to look next for what data one might find to induce further a growing theory” (Glaser, 1998: 43). (Theoretical sampling is discussed in more detail below).

Within the context of these ongoing debates, I hope to make my inductive theorizing as transparent as possible to show a method of inquiry that produces knowledge of the social world. I have engaged in a process of manipulating theoretical schemes (“how are things linked to together?”), speculating and conjecturing while testing ideas against the emerging patterns in the data (“this concept seems to capture what’s going on, but does it fit all cases?”), and constructing alternative explanations (“could it be that ‘X’ is responsible for the variation in a category and not ‘Y’?”). These theoretical schemes are held against the data through constant comparison until a “best fit” is obtained (Morse, 1994: 32-33).

I turn now to symbolic interaction, the paradigm which informs the grounded theory method, because its conception of self is crucial to understanding the process by which offenders negotiate the status of ex-offender with others.

B. Symbolic interaction and grounded theory

Grounded theory lends itself well to the symbolic interactionist perspective because it is a method to discover what is really going on within the data by developing concepts and showing their inter-relationships, “since the concept is the pivot of reference, or the gateway, to that world” (Blumer, 1969: 151). Although the symbolic interactionist perspective has been under-utilized in criminology since its inception in the Chicago School, it remains an accepted orientation today, and interactionist constructs are increasingly integrated into sociological thought (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Fine, 1993; Fisher and Strauss 1978). The grounded theory method operates under the assumption that human action is patterned and knowable according to the meanings and definitions provided by actors in any given context. The approach taken here is naturalistic in the sense that it respects the subject’s “definition of the situation” (Matza, 1969: 25). It derives its theoretical basis from symbolic interactionism¹⁵, a stance which gives primacy to how individuals order and make sense of their world according to shared meanings developed through social interaction and conveyed by the reflexive use of language and other symbols (Bartlett and Payne, 1997). Symbolic interaction is the most theoretically coherent and methodologically informed of the various interpretive approaches to studying lived experiences (Dietz, Prus and Shaffir, 1994: 4). It can be traced to the early Chicago School theorists who gave primacy to direct observation in developing theory. Their work emphasizes the situated and local character of truth, and the value of understanding the subjective experiences of men and women in the ethnographic tradition (Scull, 1988: 672).

The philosophical underpinnings of symbolic interaction can be traced to Charles Pierce (1839-1914) who is largely responsible for American pragmatism, a perspective that emphasizes that things are ascribed meaning by virtue of their consequences. Pragmatism suggests that people construct meanings in ways that allow them to get things accomplished at a practical level (Prus, 1996: 47; Turner, 1991: 372-73). The perspective eschews moral absolutes and adopts a relativistic stance where people create their own values, meanings and sense of purpose. It is humanistic in the sense that it stresses the primacy of ideas for meeting genuine needs and interests, and that “truth” is what we adopt to meet our psychological needs, rather than as something knowable against an external, scientific standard. Both William James (1842-1910) and John Dewey (1859-1952) further developed the tenets of pragmatism towards an epistemology that emphasizes the accumulation of knowledge based on its usefulness for living. True ideas are based on experience and, to a degree, provide consistency and predictability in human affairs.

The concept of self behind this dissertation comes from the interactionist tradition originating with Charles Horton Cooley (1902), George Herbert Mead (1934) and Herbert Blumer (1969). In this perspective, the self is a dynamic, interactive *process* of sharing symbols that have a common meaning among many members of society. Symbolic interactionists in the Chicago School understood the self as a reflexive and contingent entity that is forged in and through communicative exchanges with others. Building on the work of the Harvard psychologist William James, Cooley elaborated on the concept of self, seeing it as a process in which people view themselves as objects, along with other objects which can be assigned meanings in a social environment. For

Cooley, the metaphor of the “looking glass self” captures the process whereby the gestures and language of others serve as mirrors in which people see and evaluate themselves, just as they might evaluate and assign meanings to other objects. People’s consciousness is shaped in continuous social interaction; the self emerges and is given a reality only in relation to others. It is

a somewhat definite imagination of how one’s self – that is, any idea he appropriates – appears in a particular mind, and the kind of self-feeling one has is determined by the attitude toward this attribute to that other mind... So in imagination we perceive in another’s mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it (Cooley, 1902/1964: 169).

Cooley’s ideas on the self “as process” influenced George Herbert Mead (1863 - 1931), a sociologist at the University of Chicago who developed and synthesized interactionism into a coherent theoretical perspective (Fisher and Strauss, 1978: 485; Turner, 1991: 373). For Mead, the self is reflexive in the sense that it can be both subject and object - a point of view - and experienced indirectly from the expressed standpoint of others. Mead carried forth the dictum from W.I. Thomas (“I am not what I think I am. I am not what you think I am. I am what I think you think I am”) to elaborate on Cooley’s “looking glass self”, arguing that it was possible to have multiple selves, expressed through roles which are pragmatically derived and adjusted within different social contexts. The Meadian “generalized other”¹⁶ adopts the attitude of the community. This internalized standpoint of others provides a platform for getting outside oneself and thus viewing oneself as an object or symbol. Objects are anything that can be indicated, pointed to, referred to, and designated. The nature of an object consists of the meaning that it has for a person for whom it is an object. Common objects have shared meanings in any given group because members of it engage in a process of mutual indication. By

having the ability to place oneself in the role of others, and vicariously experience their attitudes, dispositions and perspectives, people engage in a covert rehearsal of several lines of action, selecting the most pragmatic one for accomplishing social action. Action that is imaginatively assessed to produce inappropriate outcomes is inhibited. Social order thus becomes possible as people develop minds and selves that internalize the moral viewpoints of a generalized community, which is used to assess and shape their own behaviours and that of others (Dietz, Prus and Shaffir, 1994: 14).

Furthermore, a person may act 'socially' toward himself or herself as an object (e.g., with blame, praise, encouragement). Accordingly, the self is 'society in miniature', an object of interaction which constitutes 'mind'. Whereas the processes of self-creation and change are well articulated in symbolic interactionism, the self also has a referent at any given moment. Self is the dialogue or conversation with the self, and can be "heard" in a reflective moment when one takes stock of what one is thinking. We think in a conversation-like manner that provides an ongoing assessment of reality and what is "really going on". Grounded theory seeks to explore the inner conversations of people to reveal their main concerns and how they are resolved.

Blumer (1969) established the foundations for an interactionist methodology, captured by three premises in a classic work: things are known by the meanings they carry, meanings are created through social interaction, and meanings are modified through interaction (p. 2). He contends that any procedure that aims to study the activities of a group must necessarily be through the eyes and experience of the people who constitute the activity. The method must embrace an intimate familiarity with the group's experience within the context of where it occurs.

One should not blind oneself to a recognition of the fact that human beings in carrying on their collective life form very different kinds of worlds. To study them intelligently one has to know these worlds, and to know the worlds one has to examine them closely. No theorizing, however ingenious, and no observance of scientific protocol, however meticulous, are substitutes for developing a familiarity with *what is actually going on* in the sphere of life under study (Blumer, 1969: 39; my emphasis).

For Blumer, human behaviour has an indeterminate and contingent quality because people construct their acts in terms of what they take into account. Lines of action may be initiated or terminated, abandoned or postponed, and if started, they may be transformed or dynamically adjusted (p. 64-65). Social action is “built step by step through a process of self indication” (p. 81) or through a process where people act towards things based on the meanings they create and share with others. Blumer asks us to “respect the nature of the empirical world and organize a methodological stance to reflect that respect” (1969: 60)¹⁷. The methodological strategy is to inductively develop generalizations with sensitizing concepts which are drawn from the lived reality of people as they interact within their specific situations - in this study, as they interact with self and society to address their main concern.

1. Labelling Theory

Symbolic interaction has made a prominent contribution to criminology, particularly when it comes to understanding how interactive work by authorities can stigmatize individuals to the point where they begin to define themselves according to the labels applied by police, courts, correctional agents, mental health professionals, or moral entrepreneurs. Labelling theory requires some attention here because it attempts to explain entry into deviance through the lens of symbolic interaction, and provides some clues for understanding the “de-labelling” process of leaving crime. It may be tempting to

view leaving crime as simply a process that reverses the effects of negative labelling and self-deprecation that are produced by agents of social control. However, the picture is far more complex, just as the linear depiction of processes leading from conformity to crime by labelling theorists has led to significant qualifications of the theory, and suggestions that it is not a theory at all, but does provide us with sensitizing concepts (Pfohl, 1994: 383-390).

The neo-Chicagoans studying deviance (e.g., Edwin Lemert, Howard Becker, and Erving Goffman) kept alive the Chicago School's emphasis on direct observation and fieldwork to examine "the process of becoming deviant and the part played by the official registrars of deviation in that process" (Matza, 1969: 37; Scull, 1988: 672-73). Given the receptive and fluid quality of self – developed and maintained through symbolic exchanges with others – those who were treated *as* deviants often *became* deviants in their own estimations of self worth, and often found support in the companionship of others facing similar exclusion. Rather than an absolute phenomenon in its own right, deviance came to be treated as a relative concept and created when social definitions were applied by agents of social control or "moral entrepreneurs" (Becker, 1963). Put differently, nothing is really "there" until social definitions are applied (Scull, 1988: 678).

[T]he very act of labeling, by materially limiting the future choices of the person and by being presented to the person as being the truth about his or her nature with all the force of authority, has a self-fulfilling effect. The old adages, 'once a thief always a thief', 'once a junkie always a junkie', become true not because, as earlier criminologists had maintained, this was the essence of the person involved, but because the power of labeling transformed and cajoled people into acting and believing as if they possessed no freedom in the world... (Young, 1981: 290).

Labelling theory suggests an alternative reading of social control to make it an independent variable for deviance, rather than the converse. No longer seen as occupying

a benign or functional position in society, the reaction of authoritative others results in an irony where their efforts exacerbate the very problems they seek to address¹⁸. If deviance evolves from the stigmatizing reactions of others who inadvertently assist in creating a deviant identity, then it follows that deviance is “constructed” because it cannot exist independently of the reactions of others (Adler and Adler, 2000: 9). Once ascribed, the deviant label takes adhesive properties, leading to the subjective experience of *being deviant*:

[As] the labeling theorists were quick to point out, once acquired, the deviant status was very difficult to relinquish, both because of the reluctance of the wider community to accept the deviant back in its midst, and because the experience of being singled out and publicly branded in this way typically results in a deviant world-view. In this way, the societal reaction allegedly produces a kind of *role imprisonment*, locking the deviant up within the confines of an all but impenetrable symbolic jail (Scull, 1988: 679; my emphasis).

The symbolic jail is the “master status”. It is one conferred by others on former deviants, leaving them in a situation where they are damned if they do, and damned if they do not. This condition occupied by ex-offenders has been articulated by Brian McLean (1991). Once it became public knowledge, his master status of ex-offender overrode any other identities that he acquired in academia and his activist work. The stigma of having a disreputable past means that he, like other ex-offenders, becomes mired in an interpersonal quicksand where definitions of self are over-ridden by what others choose instead to infer.

[T]he more a person attempts to resist [the imputational work of others], the more their behaviour is seen as a confirmation of their master status. Thus, if one passively accepts this status, s/he is stigmatized; if one resists it, s/he is stigmatized. If one changes one’s behaviour in a positive way, it is seen as a ‘con’; if one changes one’s behaviour in a negative way, it serves as an affirmation that the master status is correct. Anyone

experiencing the stigma of a prison sentence will be more than familiar with this 'double jeopardy' kind of paradox (MacLean, 1991).

If deviant labels are socially contingent, perhaps their removal is likewise determined, and the identity work in becoming de-labelled follows a similar process. The label becomes inappropriate and unfair when the deviant abandons whatever behaviour generated this ascribed status. But more is at work here than suggested by the status-conferring interactions of authoritative others in structured settings like the courtroom or psychiatrist's office. Later reformulations of labelling theory illustrate a greater degree of agency by stigmatized people in rejecting the labels applied by others. Kitsuse (1980) noted that *tertiary deviants* (as opposed to primary and secondary deviants) rebel against their labels and collectively combat their lowered status by "rejecting the rejection", thereby neutralizing their labels. Some prostitutes and the physically disabled would be examples of people who refuse to "own" the tag imputed by society about their moral worthiness.

One question that emerges from the accounts of leaving crime concerns the share of deviance which is owned by ex-offenders themselves, based upon how they understand themselves in relation to others in society. We will see that some ex-offenders report they feel unusual because they are "available" to deviant or criminal behaviour because of their *own* assessments, independent of what others say or know. Most ex-offenders who were addicts or had problems with anger management did not enjoy being addicted or angry, irrespective of the thoughts and appraisals of others. For many of them, the subjective experience of *being deviant* – in and of itself – defines the degree and extent to which leaving crime is a problem, and certainly one that is compounded by the evaluations of others. But labelling alone by state agents does not appear to be enough,

especially when four of my respondents considered themselves deviants even though their crimes had never come to police attention. It appears that some offenders can subjectively experience feeling abnormal outside of the interactions they encounter with and among others.

As mentioned before, sociologists define deviance as actions, beliefs or conditions which, when known by others, will result in a negative moral evaluation (Goode, 2001: 37)¹⁹. Deviance can be conceptualized as falling along the lines of two continua which may be simultaneous: i) the degree to which one subjectively experiences oneself as unusual from others on some personal trait, and ii) the degree to which an external audience ascribes deviance on the basis of official records, informal knowledge or a configuration of visible symbols associated with deviant behaviour (e.g., jailhouse tattoos, “needle tracks”, prison or street argot). Regarding the subjective component, there is a qualitative difference between believing that one could never viciously assault another person, and an omnipresent sense that violence is optional in situations which are consciously avoided, lest there be a temptation to invoke violence “on demand”. Some ex-offenders with histories of criminal violence report a deeply held belief that there was “something wrong” with them. This subjective dimension of feeling deviant has largely been left out of labelling theory which is inclined to favour the notion that the subjective experience of being deviant cannot exist independently of evaluations made by others.

C. The Methods of Analysis

The analytical method is detailed here to make the process of developing grounded theory as transparent as possible. This “audit trail” permits other investigators to follow the development of a project (Halpern, 1983, cited in Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I am also

trying to address the tendency in some qualitative research where grounded theory is alleged to be the method, but no description is given of the coding structure, how the theoretical categories emerged, and on what basis theoretical sampling was conducted (for a discussion of these issues, see Locke, 1996). The techniques described below are not mechanistic steps because the initial theory is germinated on a first reading of the transcripts, but substantiation and clarity occurs over time by staying analytically close to the data. “Staying close” means avoiding the temptation to make early speculations about why ex-offenders do or say things, because the theory about becoming an ex-offender must be grounded in their own accounts. Intuitions about why things are meaningful or how concepts are related must also be grounded, not superimposed from pre-existing constructs learned elsewhere. In practice, this means thinking about my thinking, and checking the interview transcripts and their codes to see if theorizing or hypotheses can be substantiated within the developing categories and their inter-relationships.

In studies using grounded theory, interviews or field notes are transcribed as early as possible after they have been collected to allow the researcher to recall details and begin coding which subsequently provides avenues for further inquiry. The responses of the first interviewees highlight what seems to be important for this sub-group, and future interview questions can include questions for elaborating on some interesting aspect that may not have been fully explored in the beginning. The ongoing analysis of each interview it is transcribed gives greater focus to what is really going on for the study participants. This process helps the researcher listen for common experiences in the next interviews, and pursue or abandon various lines of inquiry that appear to be meaningful for a group of respondents experiencing a similar process²⁰.

The first analytic step is to code the field notes or interviews for emergent patterns. The steps described in this chapter follow Glaser's (1992; 1998) general method of constant comparison for emergent themes without forcing the data into preconceived conceptual blocks (see also Bartlett and Payne, 1997: 183-194).

1. Open Coding

A grounded theory project begins with carefully reading data (usually audio tapes, transcripts or field notes) and noting the regularities, variations, themes and properties. This requires comparing incidents within the data and looking for similarities and variations among respondents' descriptions of how they process their main concern. The main concern of those studied may not become immediately apparent.

Coding the data is a prerequisite for generating conceptual categories and their properties from the evidence (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:23). Marginal notes were made which 'code' or signified an item of interest for later analysis and comparison with other codes, typically because a line-by-line reading of the data led to some tentative sense of what was going on for the research participants (Sandelowski, 1995). Provisional labels were given to the codes, sometimes with *in vivo* names when the language of respondents identified an experience which related to their main concern. Labels were applied to phenomena in categories by breaking down, examining, conceptualizing and comparing data (Glaser, 1992: 40-48; Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 61-74). Each incident or passage was read, line by line, for the category or property of a category to which it referred. The first pass was done relatively quickly to find the latent patterns underlying many incidents (Glaser, 1998: 145).

The analytical orientation was to continually ask what is “really going on” in the data as respondents discussed leaving crime and what it meant to them²¹. Simultaneously, and at a different level, the researcher is also asking about the basic social psychological process that deals with the main problem of research participants (Charmaz 1994: 98, Glaser, 1998: 140). For example, respondents reported reaching a point where they felt as though their life was collapsing both within and externally to them (e.g., in their words, “bottoming out”). When forms of this experience appeared again and again in the data, they were coded ‘crises’ and allocated various properties as they emerged (e.g., crises in social, financial, physical, mental and emotional areas of life).

All transcripts were transcribed with voice-recognition software (Anderson, 1998) and coded with computer software (Atlas-ti) designed for qualitative data analysis (QDA), a tool for coding, developing hypotheses and testing theory (Kelle, 1995; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Qualitative data analysis with software specifically designed for grounded theory is a rational, electronic means of handling textual data to facilitate the steps of building grounded theory.

One of the first themes to emerge was the depth of commitment to a deviant identity which ex-offenders reported before they made the decision to leave crime. This category refers to the age at which they first reported becoming involved in crime, the seriousness of the crimes they committed (property, violent, using drugs or drug trafficking), whether or not addiction to drugs and alcohol were an issue, and duration their criminal careers extended. Some began offending in their childhood or early teens, and persisted in serious offending over several decades, while others began as young adults, were involved in mostly property crimes, and their adoption of a criminal identity was short-

lived. By comparing each case, it became apparent that there was wide variation in the extent to which ex-offenders used language, displayed visible symbols and carried an identity which signified a previous, disreputable self. My first reaction was to code the offenders into groups of “hard-core” and “soft-core” offenders. The placement into these categories is valuable but largely descriptive, and tells us little about the preoccupying work of ex-offenders, or how these empirical referents form a substantive theory of leaving crime.

By re-reading the data, it was possible to go beyond “types of people” descriptions to find that the former self is actually a *reference point* for inner changes which respondents discuss since they left crime. The frequency, prominence and positioning of claims about the present self are not remarkable unless heard alongside descriptions of a past, criminal self. The moments where ex-offenders discussed their crimes and the former bad self they once occupied was coded in a manner which was true to their descriptions. For example, ex-offenders often mentioned the bad reputation which they had in their past. Each time there was reference to having a bad reputation, the passage where the claim was made was coded “bad reputation”, without knowing *how* it would fit in later, or even *if* it would be meaningful in a theory of leaving crime. It was nevertheless identified and coded because it kept appearing in the data. A generic description was included with the code so I could recognize “bad reputation” when it came up in the data (i.e., “Respondent says something like: ‘I had a bad reputation from my criminal lifestyle’”). Other statements which appeared many times in the data were respondents’ forthright references to a criminal or delinquent identity which they assumed (with the code description: “I was a delinquent, a criminal, a ‘committed criminal’”. Committed to criminal value system. An

example is the commitment to “no ratting” or providing authorities with information on the criminal activities of others or “I am a solid con.”)²². At first, there is little pattern to the statements or incidents which emerge time and time again throughout the coding process. The pattern emerges when the codes form categories which have variation and parameters. The categories then begin to “fit” into a basic social process of identity transformation. Offenders spoke about the following:

- living a hedonistic street life consisting of a cyclical pattern of drug use, partying, and crime to score money for drugs;
- membership or contacts in the criminal underworld with bikers, drug cartels or other organized crime groups (hereafter referred to as “OCG”);
- having experienced “prisonization” “Prisonization” is a term coined by Donald Clemmer (1940) to describe the process where people in prisons (including the guards) take on the mores and folkways of the penitentiary;
- becoming skilled in some criminal activity (e.g., safe-cracking, armed robbery or fraud);
- experiencing a thrill when committing property crimes;
- enjoying violence and intimidation

What do these features have in common? They tell us something about an undesirable *past life* as it relates to the degree of *criminal* behaviour and identity²³. And again, this category relates to yet other coded statements about the same “past” person they no longer feel themselves to occupy. There were also codes identifying the social and psychological characteristics of this past self which were almost always negative

(e.g., being socially isolated or rejected, or having anger management problems, respectively). There were 341 passages in the 24 interviews grouped under 22 different codes referring to the past self which could then be then categorized under three general categories: criminal, social, and psychological characteristics of the past self. Collectively, the three categories represent *who I was*, which is meaningful and distinct from claims which ex-offenders make about themselves in the present.

The potential for theory building becomes possible when links and relationships are developed among the code categories. In the illustration used here, declarative statements about how ex-offenders experience themselves in the present were coded in the same manner as the process above to create the overarching category, *who I am*. *Who I was* and *who I am* are interesting but theoretically unrelated without the concept of “credentials” which describes how the two categories are related (discussed in more detail in Chapter 7). The relationship of past and present selves are subsumed under the category of ‘credentials’ because they provide the necessary qualifications for *becoming reputable* – which is the main concern of ex-offenders.

Had I tried to analyze what ex-offenders reported on the basis of their criminal record, age, ethnicity, gender, or other “face-sheet” variables (Glaser, 1978: pp. 56-58), my own assumptions would have driven the analysis and findings. As it happens, the patterns reported by female ex-offenders *do* suggest a higher degree of agency in leaving crime than men. Men were more likely to credit external forces for their transformation. But having that difference *emerge from* the data, rather than making *a priori* deductions concerning the importance of gender after reviewing a body of literature, is an inductively derived observation which is worthwhile exploring. Additionally, I learned

that officially identified deviants appear not to differ in the process of assembling the credentials for transcending the past self compared to those who escaped official processing. Leaving the subjective and social problems relating to *who I was* are the common denominators among those interviewed, regardless of who knew about their law-breaking activities.

Other categories emerging from the data include the degree and extent to which ex-offenders relied on helping others to sustain the decision to leave criminal lifestyles. The category of help was so heterogeneous during the first round of coding that any kind of grouping category seemed unlikely. Supportive others and groups ranged from family members “in the know” to agency personnel in drug and alcohol treatment programs, mentors, Twelve Step participants, physicians, and employers. These were broken down into types of help based on what was being provided. The most significant aspect of this category was not the number of helpers, or their relation to the ex-offender. It was support for a non-criminal identity through an internal conversation which addresses the subjective aspects of a criminal self. Help did not lend itself to meaningful categorization until it was seen within the greater project of addressing the main concern of ex-offenders: to become reputable. How does help make one reputable? One who enlists help is seen by others to be actively engaged in transformation and others are likely to positively affirm their efforts. Help delivers a new, internal conversation of *who I am* for ex-offenders against the relief of a disreputable self.

After coding about half the transcripts which constitute the basis for this study, it appeared that no new categories were emerging from the data. Some initial categories needed revision and an increasing level of distinction to create additional properties of

the categories. Morse (1994) calls this stage of qualitative data analysis *comprehension* where “the researcher is able to identify stories that are a part of the topic, identify patterns of experience, and predict their outcome. When little or nothing new is being learned, when the interviewer has “heard everything”, then saturation is reached and comprehending is complete” (p. 30). Selecting participants and coding the last half of the 24 interviews revealed little more about the process of leaving crime which had not already been categorized by earlier coding.

The key concept to emerge from this study is the *residual self* which became evident fairly early in the reading, and all other processes and problems become peripheral to the lingering ghost of *who I was*. The old self is transcended yet available under conditions of which ex-offenders are cognizant. The nature of the residual self will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

2. Memos

The coding process is accompanied by a continual process of constructing memos which refer to theory, method or commentary about the coding. Coding must always be interrupted by memoing the ideas behind the code, and reasons why a code has earned its way into the analysis. Later, the memos are sorted as relationships between codes become apparent, and negative cases are noted which have to be explained in the conceptual and theoretical overview being constructed. Some codes are abandoned, others are subsumed under a category of another code, and a few can be split into more than one code. Even if a category or code is abandoned, some record of that decision needs to be kept for later reflection. The data are fractured and reconstructed in various interpretive schemes to build a theory which is parsimonious and explains the variation in processing the problem

which respondents report. When writing up the analysis, the memos are crucial for identifying the relationships within the data to construct a theory.

Shortly after the interview, I wrote memos to record my impressions about each research participant and any features of the exchange which were especially noteworthy. Later, the recorded interactions were transcribed manually or by using voice recognition software, both methods which facilitate a “first analytic moment” with the data (Anderson, 1998). Those moments afforded the opportunity to continually refer back to the original memos and revise them.

My memos were sorted and integrated with passages in the transcripts, referring to emerging themes, patterns and insights, as well as how future interview questions could be refined to focus on key parts of the “going straight” experience²⁴. The memos were also useful for documenting, critiquing and refining my interviewing style ensuring that successive interviews were more effective in exploring common problems faced by ex-offenders. Once the interviews were transcribed and printed, a copy was sent to each respondent with a covering letter, inviting them to read and comment on the transcript, and notify me if they spotted errors, or wanted to make additions or corrections. Only one respondent replied with comments about the transcribed document.

3. Theoretical Sampling

The purpose of theoretical sampling is to take categories which have emerged from the first sample of data, and then choose theoretically relevant samples to help test and develop categories further. The hope was to elaborate on emerging categories and make comparisons across different types of experiences with leaving crime (Ebaugh, 1988: 30). Rather than collect transcripts and then conduct analyses, the first few transcripts are read

and categorized which then stimulates further data collection based upon the important processes, events and subjective states which those “in the know” appear to be saying about their main concern. Throughout the comparative analysis, the researcher should be “theoretically sampling” to see if the conceptual categories which are generated from the data will emerge in further samples which have been deliberately chosen to assess the emergent properties of the theory. By way of illustration, the narratives of drug addicts who used Twelve Step programs appeared to have certain redemptive qualities, especially the common vocabulary employed to describe who they were, the source of help, and the differential effort required to remain straight. Non-drug addicts were deliberately recruited for the study to see if the accounts of leaving crime held the same epiphany-like qualities, or where and if the variation occurred in processing the main concern.

Grounded theory requires continually returning to the data to compare, revise codes, and write memos. During this exercise, a question about an emergent code or category may reveal that “something is missing” because some promising category seems related only to some types of people or one moment in the basic social process under study. In these instances, the task of the grounded theorist is to seek out other cases in a purposive form of sampling to elaborate, expand, revise or possibly abandon a theoretical lead. Theoretical sampling is “the ‘where next’ in collecting data, the ‘for what’ according to the codes, and the ‘why’ from the analysis in memos” (Glaser, 1998: 157)²⁵.

I learned that the process of becoming an ex-offender is far from conceptually neat or linear, but falls along a continuum of subjectively experienced self-conversion or conversions, changes in thinking and being, a reconstituting of attitudes towards the wider society, amending the proximity and intensity of associations with deviant peers,

and occasional ambiguity about one's real self. Theoretical sampling spawned new questions, answered earlier ones, and raised a few which still seem to have no definitive answers.

Ten of the 24 interviewees provide the clearest accounts of leaving crime because they represent the usual type of research participants sampled in most qualitative studies with ex-offenders (e.g., Cusson and Pinsonneault, 1986; Maruna, 2001; Rex, 1999; Sommers, et al., 1994). If only these ten respondents' accounts were used to develop the theory, the result may have been a neater and more quickly emergent model. However, less would have been learned about leaving crime without the inclusion of the "not-so-bad" research participants; they confirm and provided new leads into the development of the theory.

4. Theoretical Coding Families

Theoretical coding families emerge as connections between categories and their properties and "serve to weave a fractured story back together again" (Glaser, 1978: 72). It is the process of developing relationships between the categories as each case is re-examined through a process of constant comparison²⁶. For example, Glaser identifies a number of coding families, one of which has to do with the relationships between things: causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances and conditions. These are not exhaustive, but are only meant to make the analyst theoretically sensitive to patterns in the data and are useful to keep in the back of one's mind while coding. Another coding family is comprised of processes such as stages, phases, progressions, passages, gradations, transitions, steps, ranks, careers, orderings, trajectories, chains, sequencing, shaping and cycling. The "process family" of theoretical codes works best with the data

here because ex-offenders spoke of distinct stages: being in crime, experiencing a turning point, engaging in a struggle to become different and maintaining the new self²⁷.

“Categories emerge upon comparison and properties emerge upon more comparison” (Glaser 1992: 43). The researcher must be theoretically sensitive through having read widely in his or her chosen field (in my case, criminology and sociology), but consulting others’ answers to the research question in mind should be avoided lest their concepts prevent original ideas from emerging. As much as possible, the researcher should try to bracket or otherwise limit *a priori* knowledge from entering the research process, although the method is often critiqued for its naïve inductionism (Haig, 1995). The emergent theory is grounded by returning to the data and validating it against actual segments of text. This means identifying and bringing forward social aspects of a process which possesses more common and universal relevance by extracting their abstract, transcendent, formal and analytic aspects (Lofland, 1976: 31-33). As mentioned above, there is a role for the literature in the grounded theory method – but *as data*. The literature becomes one more source of information which assists in developing, refining and elaborating the emergent theory.

The research activities of data collection, coding and interpretation “should blur and intertwine continually, from the beginning of the investigation to the end” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 43). By way of illustration, the following exchange between “Beverly” (a pseudonym) and myself illustrates a number of the methodological points raised above. First of all, Beverly was selected for interviewing because she is a woman, but not just for the purposes of increasing the diversity of the sample population in any quantitative sense. The sampling is driven by a conceptual question and not necessarily a concern for

representativeness on demographic variables. Among other things, I was led to believe that the desistance experience of women might be different from men after interviewing two of them whose stories were remarkably similar in that they entered crime in the presence of men, but left without them. The specific question asked of Beverly is theoretically informed because “making amends” had emerged as an important part of going straight for others whom I had previously interviewed. Beverly’s response has been coded according to a framework which had been developing throughout the data-coding stage. (Italics emphasize what I think is important in the passages; words or phrases in capital letters were emphasized by the speaker).

JFA: When you decided to go straight, did you feel that there was some amends that you had to make to other people, and can you tell me a little bit about that?

Beverly: Hmm. (1) That’s *part of the program*, actually, the ninth step where you make direct amends to people and that’s (2) the only way, that’s the only way that I can ah and *stay clean and straight* is to say, this is what I did, this is MY RESPONSIBILITY in that situation. Some of the things that (3) I *had to make amends* for, were like sending for those charges. That was part of it, right. Like OWNING IT and saying, yeah, I did this, I’m guilty of doing it and if (4) I *keep hiding my head in the sand over it, right, rather than admit that I did it and face the music*, right, ah some of it was more like at an emotional level, like going to my sister and, and apologizing for all the things, like stealing of twelve dollar check from her, things like that. Going to my mother and saying, all those times that I said I needed my rent paid, it wasn’t true (Beverly at 1069).

Each of the numbered sections in the passage from Beverly refers to the itemized points below:

1. Beverly talks about amends as “part of the program” which indicates an *imported conversation* from a Twelve Step group to make sense of her past. The problematic nature of the residual self is addressed through *help* which focuses on

providing a new internal conversation of self. Beverly's metaphors and description of self were very similar to those of other research participants who had sought the help of Narcotics or Alcoholics Anonymous.

2. The "only way" is part of the imported conversation provided by people in Twelve Step groups, and simultaneously captures how she resolves the main concern (that is, to "stay clean and straight"). Beverly's decision to "take responsibility" for her situation is also part of the imported conversation, and indicates deep change from *who I was* – a dependent addict. She follows through with her redefinition of self with action: asking Crown Counsel in another province to "waive in" charges for which there were outstanding arrest warrants.
3. The list of things which Beverly cites for making amends are concrete examples of defining herself in a new way. She learns from the self-help group by adapting or importing their conversation of self for herself, providing the motivation to *do* and become *who I am*. The internal conversation provides Beverly with the motivation or action to do things which will later be interpreted by others as *credentials* for the changes she describes.
4. The "previous" Beverly who avoided uncomfortable situations ("hiding my head in the sand") now has chosen to "face the music". The contrast between *who I was* and *who I am* are credentials of self change, indicated to both herself and external audiences. These credentials increase her chances of being perceived as reputable by others, and show her the evidence of her own transformation. She *becomes* a new self.

The process of grounded theorizing would be incomplete without having some way to connect the hundreds of memos which are made throughout the process, not only on the data from the present study but also from reading the literature. The literature review and its analysis is done last in a grounded theory study because research on the topic is considered as data which fits or revises the grounded theory. Only through the process of theoretical sorting can this be accomplished.

5. Theoretical Sorting

Theoretical sorting answers the question, “where does this code or family of codes fit in”? It is the stage of organizing concepts in preparation for writing up the theory (Glaser, 1978: 116-127). It includes memos from the extant literature on the topic, in addition to developing, describing and presenting concepts in a readable fashion from a new understanding of a multi-dimensional (as opposed to linear) process. The relationship between the concepts will be examined for how they fit, work and are relevant. Decisions will be made about the number of concepts to be used in the theoretical explanation, with parsimony being the guiding criterion. The analytic work involves sticking to the central theme of the theory by continually monitoring and defending to oneself the relevance of each point raised²⁸.

With patience, sorting comes naturally and cannot be forced, especially after the core category is identified (in this case, the “residual self”) as the main concern of those studied. All other concepts can be sorted and related back to the core category, and the conditions under which elements appear in a basic social process need to be noted for writing into the final theory. Sorting in this way allows the researcher to address where

things fit when the literature review is conducted to identify areas of incompleteness or important, unaddressed processes.

6. Product Proof: The Criteria for Assessing Grounded Theory

If grounded theory works, fits, is relevant and modifiable, it meets the standards by which grounded theory is judged. The theory should also be parsimonious and have scope (Glaser, 1992: 11-19; cf. Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 249-258). “Fit” refers to the degree to which the categories and their properties match the realities of those studied, or practitioners or other researchers in the area. (This is another term for validity, or the degree to which the concept adequately expresses the pattern in the data which it purports to conceptualize. Evidence of validity is enhanced by constant comparison). A grounded theory will work when it explains the major variations of those studied who address a common problem. Do the concepts and their inter-relationships sufficiently account for how the participants in a study resolve their main concern?

A theory which fits and works is *relevant* when it deals with the main concern of the participants involved, and it engenders trust among readers of it.

These [grounded theory] criteria engender trust because a theory with fit, relevance and that works and that can easily be modified has “grab” without pressure to force it on data. People feel like they can use it meaningfully. It feels familiar because this is the way we all go through life. We are all doing mini grounded theories to figure out how to process our lives at every turn. As we learn in life in an area, we feel that we have gone from a “no nothing” to an expert. Through this latent consistency, grounded theory seems to make sense to people (Glaser, 1998: 237-238).

Although I hope to develop a theory on leaving crime which is trustworthy, I also think this study is relevant within the qualitative literature on the topic, and also for those who study “desistance” as described in Chapter 2. Relevance can be gauged on its appeal

to the academic literature, and also how the conceptual scheme has “grab” and seems to fit with what readers know about ex-offenders, or how ex-offenders themselves understand going straight. Given the ubiquity of delinquency in Canadian society, some or many elements of the theory will make sense to readers as they locate their own experiences within the concepts developed here. Because it is a theory of “becoming” or acquiring a new identity, it may be relevant to other forms of moving from a disvalued status, such as becoming a non-drinker, a non-smoker or losing weight.

The theory becomes modifiable when it is written in a way that invites the revision or expansion of its major concepts, or the categories and properties which make up the concepts. Grounded theory is not verifiable in the traditional sense, and is thus never right or wrong. Glaser (1992) argues when these four criteria are met, “the theory provides a conceptual approach to action and changes and accesses into the substantive area” (p. 15; 1998: 18-19). The procedures and “logic of justification” behind grounded theory help to generate hypotheses which are accountable to the data. While verification is valued in its own right, it is not a part of the grounded theory analysis, whereas validation is both valued and part of the method (Locke, 1996; Rennie, 1998: 107).

Researchers using grounded theory will vary to the extent that they subscribe to the methodological advice given by Barney Glaser or Anselm Strauss (and Juliet Corbin). Anselm Strauss died in 1996, leaving a debate with Barney Glaser about the appropriate methods for generating and evaluating grounded theory. Glaser (1992) believed that Strauss (in Strauss and Corbin, 1990) abandoned the original intention of grounded theorizing by distorting and misconceiving major issues about which they originally wrote (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In my view, there is considerable merit to Glaser’s

(1992) objections to Strauss and Corbin's (1990) tendency toward prescriptions for 'seeing' and categorizing data so that it is easy to get lost in the rules. Glaser (1992), on the other hand, advocates a holistic approach to reading data, invoking a theoretically informed, sociological imagination as a receptor for emergent properties within the data. (For more discussion on the Straussian and Glaserian schools, see Rennie, 1998; Stern, 1994; or Charmaz (2000) at note 4 on p. 529). In researching for this thesis, a more formal, structured approach in grounded theorizing (i.e., Strauss and Corbin, 1990; 1998) was by-passed in favour of Glaser and Strauss's (1967) original writing of grounded theory. As for the standards by which grounded theory should be evaluated, Strauss and Corbin (1990; 1994) argue for the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability to replace the familiar quantitative standards of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 21).

Some might question how interviews with 24 ex-offenders can constitute a means for making generalizations about a process experienced by thousands of people. How do we know that the theory generated here really represents "going straight"? The method and logic of grounded theory permits the development of hypotheses about the process of becoming an ex-offender. (As mentioned above, nothing prevents the concepts developed here from being operationalized and tested with either qualitative or quantitative methods).

First of all, coding the narratives drew attention to a general process of self-change with a few exceptions (e.g., "marginal cases") which initially could not be accommodated in the emerging theory. For example, I was baffled when a few people who volunteered to be participants in this study told me that they continued to engage in crime, yet

described themselves as “ex-offenders”. Rather than exclude them from the pool of informants, the theory does account for these exceptions, and should be modifiable when presented with new information. The theory makes general hypotheses to account for the process of becoming an ex-offender in a conceptual language which has been developed from the data to the point where further reading of cases provides no new concepts. If someone were to provide a new case or new data (as does some of the qualitative work reviewed later), the cases should fit under the conceptual scheme developed here. Some research participants were more articulate on certain dimensions of leaving crime, focusing on moments of the process at greater length than others. However, each of the concepts discovered here has an empirical footing in the data, and all were experienced in some form by all of the ex-offenders. All concepts apply to some extent, although the degree to which they represent parts of their narratives varies (e.g., all ex-offenders report getting help, but the degree of help varies, depending upon the extent to which their former identity was disreputable).

Having described the method for developing a theory of becoming an ex-offender, I now describe how the study was conducted.

D. How the Study was Conducted

This study was conducted from January 1998 to August, 1999 in an area of Canada which will be referred to as “Westhaven” which includes rural and metropolitan populations. The estimated population of Westhaven was 241,949 in 1997. The proportion of the adult population (aged 25-34) with less than Grade 12 was nearly 27%; the unemployment rate was approximately 12% during the first study year (1998). This

geographical area is populated by three larger cities (the largest having a population of 73,000 in 2001) and several smaller towns ranging in population from 800 to 10,000.

1. Selecting Research Respondents

Reaching ex-offenders in Westhaven was accomplished through a number of methods, including fortuitous ones which developed as I became immersed in the research (for similar experiences, see Biemacki and Waldorf, 1981). Some unsolicited chain referrals were made from people initially interviewed, and two alcohol and drug counsellors referred three of their clients when they heard about the study. The sample of ex-offenders informing this theory is by no means representative of all ex-offenders, nor is it intended to be. The study concerns a *process*, not a representative sample of people, and the process is assumed to have generic features for those who have left a disreputable past. In terms of generalizability, most ex-offenders (whether officially processed or not), should be able to find themselves in the conceptual language developed here.

Practitioners who work with offenders and ex-offenders should be able to see this study which articulates with their impressions about the process of leaving crime. The research participants were selected on the basis of the research question (Strauss and Corbin, 1990: 38): how do ex-offenders experience the process of leaving crime, what problems result from that decision, and how are they addressed?

This study is about *the process of leaving crime* – where women and men leave a previous criminal lifestyle and assume new identities. Their accounts shed light on this process of “becoming” by identifying the context and contingencies of going straight. All ex-offenders in this study reported periods of prolonged criminal activity (ranging from three to 27 years) involving violence and/or property offences, or drug use and trafficking

followed by at least two years of crime-free living. Although the sample consisted of ex-offenders, it was not required that they were arrested or served lengthy prison terms. Someone may be an 'ex-offender' without coming to the attention of the police. Four of the 24 offenders (three women and one man) escaped official attention for offences which carry lengthy prison terms (such as trafficking in controlled substances).

Initially, getting in touch with ex-offenders proved to be no easy task. Those who have been convicted of criminal offences are a particularly difficult population to reach. Most ex-convicts keep a low profile and have few common meeting places, unlike other stigmatized groups such as battered women in transition homes, people with eating disorders in self-help groups, victims of sexual abuse attending therapy, heroin addicts in treatment, or social clubs for homosexual men and women. Accessing ex-offenders required innovative ways for contacting them, especially those who wished to conceal their criminal past from public knowledge. Although most ex-offenders in my sample expressed few reservations about the visibility of their past lives, six of the 24 were very concerned about confidentiality. This smaller group had no contact with organizations often associated with ex-offenders such as the John Howard Society, the Elizabeth Fry Society, Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. In every respect, their lives were normal and their past unknown to all but their closest relatives and friends. Several steps were taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity for respondents (discussed below under the heading, "Ethical Issues"). Other research participants were open about their previous criminal involvement, but wanted certain aspects of it to remain confidential.

Many sociologists have used chain referral or snowball sampling to reach low-visibility groups. These methods use referrals through an initial contact person who knows others who would be of interest to the researcher. The advantages of snowball sampling for reaching respondents to discuss sensitive issues has been well documented (Biernacki and Waldorf, 1981; Wright, et al., 1992). However, it occurred to me early in the study design that chain referrals initiated through the John Howard Society or Narcotics Anonymous would reveal a relatively homogenous subset of ex-offenders: older males with histories of prolonged criminal involvement and drug-abuse. I was also interested in reaching men and women who had been pardoned, or whose criminal lifestyles did not result in prosecution and subsequent criminal records. One can have a disreputable self without information about one's actions coming to the attention of criminal justice officials. Several respondents in this study reported extensive involvement in serious crime, but were able either to avoid detection entirely, or were caught by police and prosecuted for only one or two offences. The criminal record history, or self-reported involvement in crime and deviance, did not seem to lessen their interest in dealing with the stigma of their past.

The first recruitment effort for study participants entailed a request for interviews with ex-offenders in a notice posted near a high pedestrian traffic area at a John Howard Society in Westhaven. This advertising led to four interviews with men of similar backgrounds (e.g., older male ex-offenders with histories of drug addiction and whose criminal pasts were not concealed). This poster and two others like it at a university were general enough to allow those interested to interpret whether their own experience conformed to the criteria:

Have you ever decided to go straight?... I am looking for people who have decided to clean up their act, go straight, get their act together, become a 'square john'... If any of these phrases sounds like an experience that you've been through, I'd like to get together and talk.

Because of the open nature of the recruitment poster, a variety of interpretations could be made by readers as to whether they might be a desirable candidate. When contacted by prospective interviewees, this method allowed me to make some preliminary judgements about whether or not someone really had a "disreputable self"²⁹.

To reach a more diverse sample for the study, I advertised for respondents by placing signs in high traffic areas in two campuses of a mid-sized university. It reads as follows:

Having you ever decided to "go straight"? If not you, perhaps you know someone...

John Anderson (Criminology Department, Malaspina University-College) is conducting research for a PhD in sociology. His thesis will explore the experiences of men and women who have decided to exit criminal lifestyles. John would like to hear about the experiences of ex-offenders who have been crime-free for at least two years.

Participants will be interviewed at a mutually convenient time and location. All information provided during the interview will be held in confidence, and no person will be identified in the research or subsequent publications. Ex-offenders of any age are invited to participate.

The university also issued a press release on my behalf to local newspapers which covered the entire Westhaven area. This advertisement was subsequently picked up by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and a CBC staff member interviewed me about the study which was broadcast on May 19, 1998. These various forms of public notification³⁰ did not reveal all the criteria for eligibility, nor did they specify that a stipend would be paid \$20.00 for participation. This recruitment method allowed two things to occur. First, casting a wide net for respondents allowed me select who I would interview after screening participants in an initial telephone conversation, and later, what

interviews I would transcribe and analyze. Four respondents were interviewed but their transcript was not used for analysis. One person's involvement in crime was considered too short and involved offences within the normal range of teenage development (excessive drinking). I did not believe one respondent's inconsistent and contradictory narrative. Another respondent initially volunteered for the study but later retracted his offer because of concerns about stigma raised by his wife and co-workers. A fourth person was wrongfully accused of a crime and did satisfy the needs of the study.

After the initial telephone conversation, meetings were arranged at University campuses in Westhaven. Two respondents asked to be interviewed in their homes, and one interview was conducted in my home. (The respondent was in the process of moving and said it was too chaotic to be interviewed in his residence). Twenty-four interviews, averaging two hours in duration were audio-taped and transcribed. With several of the respondents, a relationship developed during the interview and led to an ongoing friendship which continues to the present.

Theoretical sampling was deemed necessary to test emerging patterns in the process of leaving crime, and was achieved by including different types of offenders (e.g., women, First Nations offenders, and those whose criminal pasts were undetected by criminal justice agents or known only to a select few). As mentioned earlier, it became apparent that women might have a different experience around leaving crime than do men because their conversations had a greater degree of agency in the decision to leave crime. Four of the respondents selected were First Nations people (three men and one woman) after the first interview with one of them discovered help from a "spiritual re-awakening" which was different from any other of the respondents. I was interested in

how their experiences might inform a grounded theory of leaving crime. One of the underlying questions in this study is whether going straight is a social process which has generic features - despite of the demographic characteristics and histories of those experiencing it.

2. Qualitative Interviewing

The method used for collecting data is qualitative interviewing (Kvale, 1996; Riessman, 1993; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). This type of interviewing is used without over-structuring the encounter to the point where the questions asked begin to shape the data and findings. There is a difference between asking people to describe, in their own words, a process or an event which they have experienced, and structuring an interview with questions which are designed to test a hypothesis. The style of interviewing used here encouraged the respondent to feel at ease and tell his/her story on his/her terms, with guidance provided by several focus questions (Denzin, 1978; Ebaugh, 1988: 33). At the end of the interview, participants were told that a stipend was part of the research plan and paid \$20.00 (two refused the offer, and two recommended a bottle of liquor as an alternative).

Interviews are conversations where meanings are cooperatively constructed, and recorded by the interviewer. Douglas (1985) advocates “creative interviewing” where relationships are built with participants over time as a means to “optimize cooperative, mutual disclosure and a creative search for mutual understanding” (p. 25). While qualitative interviewing may require focusing on a theme (Kvale, 1996: 94-95) and refining initial concepts into specific questions (Marshall and Rossman, 1995: 17-19), in the present study, the general question was framed in terms of “what is it like to become

an ex-offender?" Participants are asked to "tell their story" from what they consider to be the beginning, and how they came to be who they are in the present. Initial questions ask for detail and elaboration in a more or less chronological order. As themes emerge from each narrative, they provide the basis for refining questions and focusing on what seems to be the most important moment in becoming reputable.

This method engages people in a conversation where the purpose is to "obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale, 1996: 5-6)³¹. Qualitative interviewing remains open to an inductive process of concept identification and elaboration informed by the data (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 238-254), a characteristic which makes it ideally suited for a grounded theoretical approach. It is appropriate in situations where the purpose of the research is to unravel slowly evolving events, or to learn how present situations resulted from past decisions (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 51). It allows informants to provide historical information and gives the researcher control over the direction of questioning (Creswell, 1994: 150-151).

I asked questions which focused on the order and timing of processes identified by the research participants as meaningful precursors to change³². The first part of the interview focused on the nature of the criminal past which the interviewees had left behind, including when they first started breaking the law, the kind of crimes they committed, how other people thought of them during their active criminal period, and the length of their involvement in crime before deciding to go straight. This was a natural place to begin because the exploration of desistance begs the question, "desistance from what?" I also found that without prompting, ex-offenders began their narratives from

where they believe entry into crime began for them. Many recalled their earliest memories as children to make sense of why they got involved in crime.

The second part of the interview explored the role of others in leaving crime and becoming who they present themselves as today (*who I am*). The helping role of friends, family or strangers was deemed important, as well as whether or not they had to apologize or make amends for their past actions. Some offenders have never been able to convince others, particularly family members, that their conversion from crime and addiction was genuine and permanent.

The third part of the interviews focused on the concerns which participants identified as ex-offenders. It became apparent that the most significant problem for ex-offenders was the how they might claim a new identity when there was always the chance that someone may challenge, doubt or incriminate their declarations about reform. Participants assessed “how they are different”, such as the choice of friends or lifestyles, or how they were more authentic than in a past life of crime. At the end of the interview, they were asked if there was anything else which they felt a need to talk about, based upon the topics we had covered. Most interviews lasted about two hours, but over the course of the study, I later encountered people whom I had previously interviewed and the conversation invariably returned to issues we explored in the interviews.

Some interviewers suggest a fairly structured approach to qualitative interviewing in order to ensure that the same information is elicited from each respondent (Weiss, 1994). Others, such as Reinharz (1992), advocate a close relationship between the researcher and subject, especially for interviewing. I opted for the latter approach, believing that respondents would become more open if they felt as though they were not being judged

for their narratives of crime and redemption. This approach appeared to work as I had hoped. I was surprised by the depth of trust which research participants demonstrated in their candid responses, and several of them told me things which they claimed nobody else knew. Five interviewees told me that they had found the interview experience “therapeutic”. Three men cried during their interviews, and several respondents told me that the interview helped them make sense of their own experience with going straight (e.g., “This is the first time I’ve really had a chance to put it all together”, “You’re the first one to validate my experience outside of Narcotics Anonymous”, or similar statements). The interviews occasionally strayed into other topics and I allowed this to occur so that my informants would not get the impression that they were being interrogated. Under these conditions, I shut off the tape recorder to allow us to speak off topic, but directed the conversation back to the interview format when it appeared comfortable to do so.

Conducting this type of research with ex-offenders raised a number of ethical issues.

3. Ethical Issues

The research proposal underwent a university review process to ensure adherence to standards of research conduct where humans are involved. The anonymity of respondents is the main objective here, especially since most of them discussed crimes for which they were neither arrested nor charged.

Westhaven consists of several small towns where the identity of some respondents are likely to be known simply on the basis of background information. The anonymity of interviewees has been protected by using pseudonyms. I have changed the contextual information where necessary to protect anonymity, and some demographic information

has been altered where it might lead to their identification. Protecting the identity of respondents raises several challenges.

1. One respondent revealed information about previous involvement in organized crime which he later described as constituting a “death warrant” should my transcript of our interview “fall into the wrong hands”. (The tapes of interviews were erased after transcription). The transcripts are stored electronically and protected through two levels of password access, and file encryption software. The transcript files are backed up on a remote network server with file encryption. Some respondents were involved in well-known organized crime groups in their former lives. These groups are not specifically identified, except with the acronym, “OCG” (organized crime group).
2. One respondent (“Hector”) is a pedophile in treatment and is concerned that details of his case, if made public, would jeopardize reintegration in the community. Every effort has been made to disguise his identity, including details of his crimes.
3. Three respondents were so cautious about having their past revealed that they initially took pains to conceal their identity during my first contact with them over the telephone. Only when they were certain that the research was legitimate did they agree to be interviewed. They were assured that their interviews would be treated confidentially, and I described the steps taken for protecting their identity.
4. Some transcripts contain information which might be damaging to the interviewee if other family members were aware of it. The research design called for a copy

into the problems which many ex-offenders encounter. Is it ethical to use information about other people's lives, gathered outside the university setting, where consent forms have been not been signed for each encounter? To interrupt a smoothly-flowing conversation by producing a consent form would be awkward and likely result in contaminating the free exchange of ideas. After consulting with a university ethics advisor, I decided to use insights gained from these conversations in a general way, and only after asking my respondents something like, "Can I use that - what you just told me - for the thesis?" Throughout the project, I have respected my interviewees' requests that I not disclose some things which they told me. All informants were asked to sign a consent form which clearly stated the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and how their identity would be protected (see Appendix 'A').

Having now provided the rationale and method for the study, the next chapter will describe the main concern of ex-offenders. As mentioned before, the logic of grounded theory requires asking oneself about the chief concern or problem of the people in the substantive area under study, and what accounts for most of the variation in processing the problem (Glaser, 1992: 4).

4. The Main Concern of Ex-offenders

Residual: 1. *adj.* Remaining, left over || of or relating to something which no longer remains (*Webster's Dictionary*).

In this chapter I will identify the core category which forms the main concern of ex-offenders. This is what Glaser refers to as the chief concern or problem of the people in the substantive area (1992:4). Rennie (1998) describes the process of arriving at a core category in a grounded theory study as follows:

A given datum is assigned to as many categories as seems fitting. As categories are conceptualized, interest is taken in the apparent relationship among them. Categories in turn may be grouped according to a meaning that appears to unite them. Grouped categories are named as a higher order category. The categories it subsumes are considered its *properties*. This categorizing of categories is carried through higher orders of abstraction, with the objective of conceptualizing a supreme category that colligates all others. This category is referred to as the *core* category, the key concept that organizes the theory (p. 103; italics in original).

The main concern of ex-offenders is dealing with a residual self, the parameters of which will be illustrated with two examples, below. For some, the residual self is evident through visible markers such as tattoos, speech and mannerisms and collateral physical stigma. Discrediting information in the form of criminal records and shaming information held by others remind ex-offenders of a self they used to occupy. These are the challenges which people must negotiate or overcome to become “ex”-offenders.

Ex-offenders overcome the stigma of occupying a discreditable self by presenting to themselves and others a reputable person. Becoming reputable means experiencing inner changes which address the shame associated with the past. Telling others that one is safe, honourable or ordinary presents a problem for the study group because of their ambiguous and oxymoronic moral status. “Ex” suggests “former” but “offender” carries with it the symbolic imagery associated with popular images of criminality³³. Those with

a disreputable past have been - or risk being - labelled by society with a tag which suggests a dangerous or dishonourable self in whole or part. Consequently, there is a part of the past which remains with ex-offenders in the present, or a self which continues to reside in the interaction with sceptical others, despite their efforts to abandon *who I was*. The difficulties associated with the residual self vary considerably, depending upon the nature and extent of one's criminal past, the extent to which it is public, and the degree to which ex-offenders see *who I was* as having residuals which need management and control.

An example of the social properties of the residual self can be seen where a single criminal act in the distant past defines a person's present character and trustworthiness. A Canadian Member of Parliament, Jack Ramsey, was convicted in 1999 of attempted rape of a 14 year old First Nations girl in Pelican Narrows where he used to be an RCMP officer. Although the offence occurred in 1969, Ramsey's residual self (*who I was*) has been used by some audiences to redefine *who he is*. (The stigma of this conviction was made even more damaging, given that during his tenure in Parliament, Ramsey has been a champion of victims' rights and was strongly critical of the leniency shown to convicted sex offenders by the courts). These "secret" dimensions of the residual self represent one property of the problematic conditions faced by those with a disreputable past. At the very least, they occupy some definition of "who I am". The reactions of others to those with a discreditable past are stigmatizing and form the exclusion which research participants experience³⁴. Two examples further illustrate the parameters of the residual self.

Edward, whom I came to know very well since we met for the purposes of this study, conveys the image of middle class respectability. He has done so well materially in life that he told me that the very appearance of his residential estate is “enough to deflect any suspicions about my past” (Edward at 445). He is married with children, is highly educated and belongs to a profession, and is well respected because of his advocacy work for children in the community. He was raised in a two-parent family of working professionals where none of his siblings were involved in crime. As a teen, he began using and trafficking in cocaine and other illicit drugs which resulted in him being jailed. Aside from his involvement in drug use and trafficking, Edward was normal in every other respect, including being integrated into his mid-sized community through family and school. During the probationary period of his sentence, he became a protégé to someone in an occupational field where he had some interest. About the same time, two close encounters with being arrested during the community portion of sentence convinced him that he needed to completely abandon the drug world. He made a firm decision to leave crime. Four years after completing his sentence, he applied for a pardon and had his criminal record sealed two years later, enabling him to join his professional occupation of choice. In all respects, the subjective residuals of Edward’s past life have been surmounted, but he is left with an ongoing, troublesome concern that the disclosure of his secret past would threaten his current status and occupational position. For Edward, the residual self emerges in his belief of how others might react to a self which he no longer occupies, should knowledge of his history become public. Edward’s main concern is keeping his past secret from others who might use discrediting information to challenge the self he now presents as *who I am*.

On the more extreme side, Darryl began what he calls “a life of crime” early in his teen years. He reported a long history of aggressive behaviour, violent crime and spent much of his adult life in prisons. He was addicted to illicit drugs and supported his habit through scores of frauds, break and enters, thefts and violent robberies. Darryl describes most past relationships in his life as a means for getting close enough to people to defraud them of their possessions. After a near-death experience and ostracization by everyone within his social sphere, he reached a crisis point when he became deeply troubled with the person he was. With the ongoing help of a Twelve Step group, a mentor and a therapist, he has created an internal conversation which makes sense of the subjective reality he experiences (i.e., the emotional and cognitive precursors which may portend a return to alcohol, drugs and crime). For Darryl, the residual self - *who I was* - occupies a significant amount of his daily consciousness. He remains steadfast in a commitment to go straight. Scars, tattoos and health problems are signifiers of his past life in crime which sometimes must be explained to others. These two research participants reflect contrasting relationships with a residual self. Edward has virtually transcended *who I was* in subjective and social respects, while Darryl engages his residual self on an ongoing basis to remain crime-free. The main point of the thesis here concerns a process of *becoming*, and is not about individuals *per se*, although individuals represent the process, give it life, and can describe it to those who ask.

To assist in understanding how the residual self fits with the concepts to be developed in the balance of this dissertation, I have created a graphically displayed conceptual framework (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 18-22) in Figure 4.1 on p. 123. This provisional model shows two periods which emerge in the stories told by ex-offenders:

The residual self is indicated to others by two objective realities consisting of i) three types of visible markers and ii) two types of discrediting information possessed by others which has the potential to discredit claims about *who I am*. The next section describes how these overt residuals are pointers to a disreputable past.

A. Pointers to the Past

Transcending the residual self is difficult, depending on the degree that it is publicly known and subjectively experienced. Going straight is more problematic when ex-offenders carry visible stigmata or information which will be interpreted as something discrediting about them, unlike others who can keep *who I was* secret because they were never detected by authorities, or their criminal records have been sealed under the *Criminal Records Act*.

Ex-offenders experience stigma in the treatment they receive within a range of social contexts. Reactions from others tells them that they are essentially flawed, especially when communicative exchanges draw attention to “who they really are”. People treat ex-convicts with a more or less permanent, generalized distrust. Beverly puts this general condition in her own words by referring to *who she was* and *who she is*, and the difficulty others have in appreciating her situation.

Beverly: Like it’s hard to say those kind of things to people, right, like *this is how I used to be*, right, *this is how I am* now but I don’t think very many people would actually have the open mindedness to believe that, that you could change (Beverly at 1019).

The “open-mindedness” to which she refers is the reception of others to her new self, or *who I am*. Despite the persona which ex-offenders may present to others, there are lingering residuals of their former lives which affect how others evaluate them. Some

residuals are more visible than others, and therefore account for the variation in how ex-offenders address the problems of becoming reputable.

Body signs are the symbols by which others in society will make moral inferences about those who possess them, and are not limited to criminality. These signs may invite an unfavourable evaluation by others. They are stigmatic because they were either acquired during the phase in which respondents were active criminals, or are commonly associated with popular notions of criminality. There are three main properties of body signs which are related to residual self: tattoos, speech and mannerisms, and collateral physical stigma.

1. Tattoos

The presence of highly visible tattoos (or scars) remaining on the body from prison suicide attempts are pointers to a past self. These symbols often provoke suspicion, contempt or inquiry from others. In some cases, knuckles with “FTW” (‘Fuck the World’), ‘FUCK’, ‘HATE’, or an inverted cross³³ draw reference to a past self in all but the most fleeting of social encounters. For some offenders, their appearance is a reminder to others and themselves of *who I was*. The problems associated with becoming a new self are magnified because the self they now occupy is different from the meanings which discrediting symbols tend to convey.

Offenders with tattoos see them as indicators of a residual self because others judge them immediately. Kirk was heavily tattooed and dressed in torn jeans and a sleeveless t-shirt when we first met: “That’s the way I dress but it’s this, this you know, that tattoos and my rings and *people just kind of like, you know, ah judge you right away* (Kirk at 1460). Similarly, Lance had heavy blue-ink tattoos on his upper arms and told me, prior

to the interview, that he would rather not have them because they “refer to somebody that I’m not anymore” (field notes). Harry’s comment was, “Well people see you in the supermarket, eh, and your ink is definitely not from doing time in the navy, so they know, they get it right away” (field notes). Tattoos are also meaningful signifiers in the sense that they are recorded by police in much the same way as fingerprints, the descriptions of which are stored on the Canadian Police Information Computer (CPIC) to help identify those who come to police attention, or for investigative purposes.

Irwin (2000) notes that the tattoo has been traditionally associated with delinquency, criminality³⁶, dysfunctional families, drug abuse, personality disorders and low self-esteem. Although tattooing reached a more conventional status in the 1990s, she argues that “the dominant image is that becoming tattooed is an abnormal, problematic activity forcing tattooed individuals to bond with other tattooed individuals to combat the collective social stigma cast upon them by a disapproving society” (in Adler and Adler, 2000: 469). Tattoos are rarely taken to mean anything in isolation, but rather are interpreted along with other features, such as image quality, words in the tattoo, what they symbolize, and their visibility on the body. Tattoos have been associated with criminality since the time of Lombroso who wrote about the inherent attributes of “born criminals” (Lombroso, 1876, in Williams and McShane, 1999: 37). Today, tattoos can have the same effect, or so they are seen to be by some of the ex-offenders who inform this study³⁷.

2. Speech and Mannerisms

Other signs are stigmatic in that they signal a disreputable condition. Mannerisms, speech, and attitudes have the potential to tell others about a former deviant self,

especially if the audience is sophisticated or 'street-wise'. Darryl recounts what it means to be an ex-convict to other ex-convicts, and the significance of that status for others who have done time in maximum-security institutions:

Darryl: I still have ah, when I go into jails, and talkin' to ex-cons, ah, they recognize who I am, *by the talk*, the *walk*, the *attitude*, ah, anybody's that done any pen time will recognize somebody else that's done pen time immediately... and it kind of sets people back, oh you, you were in [maximum security federal prison], yeah, sort of kind of look, they know not to fuck with you then [laughs] (Darryl at 635)³⁸.

Language is a powerful symbolic resource which enables a social audience to create moral inferences about the user (just as regional accents may convey meaning about the speaker). Profanity also has the potential to attract stigma to the user, especially when it is employed indiscriminately in the presence of others who think it is inappropriate. Wayne told me that his young nephews were calling him "Uncle Fuck" during his criminally active period because "that's all they heard me say" (Wayne at 1397). Like Wayne, many other research participants now avoid swearing in many contexts and tell me that part of becoming an ex-offender means addressing how they communicate with others. Heavy profanity is a disreputable attribute which several ex-offenders now avoid because it is an indicator for the very self they wish others *not* to use as a basis for relating to them³⁹. The effort to manage language will be difficult if deviant peers in a former life are sceptical of their efforts to become a "square john"⁴⁰, preferring instead to relate in familiar jargon. Aside from profanity, language has the potential to convey literacy and socio-economic status levels through mispronunciations, the overuse of specific adjectives and adverbs, and the range of vocabulary. The social stigma of being an ex-offender is often felt by members of this group whose levels of literacy are below the norm (Martini and Page, 1996).

Nothing here suggests that having a tattoo or using particular manners of speaking will, in and of themselves, form the basis for inferring a deviant status. Signs like these become problematic when the inferential, imputational, self-defining work by others raises obstacles for ex-offenders as they try to become someone other than what the signs may convey. At worst, inferences from these signs will shape the opinions of evaluating audiences and form the basis of exclusionary interactions accordingly. Having a combination of a “jailhouse attitude”, mannerisms, tattoos, and language styles which are interpreted as illiterate or offensive forges different signifiers into an integrated, disreputable image. For offenders who have spent significant portions of their lives in criminal subcultures prison or on the street, body movements and attitudes identify them with a past, disreputable self. To prevent or mediate troublesome inferences invoked from these symbols, ex-offenders provide an account for them which moderates their stigmatic properties.

3. Collateral Physical Stigma

Three ex-offenders carried collateral stigma from being a heroin addict: they discovered that they had been diagnosed with Hepatitis-C. The particular way in which they had acquired this blood disease (i.e., through intravenous injections of a controlled substance) excluded them from “honourable” compensation from the Canadian government⁴¹. Although the federal government announced its intentions to provide compensation for those who were contaminated through blood transfusions, those whose disreputable conduct earned them the same disease receive no such remuneration. By excluding one group of those suffering from the same disease, the official response to having Hepatitis-C affirms an ex-offender’s deviant identity. For these people (and those

with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome or AIDS), the residual self is painfully evident, both physically and socially. Although these conditions may not be immediately visible to others, those who enter into close relationships with ex-offenders with these conditions will eventually discover, or be told about, this collateral physical stigma and respond with acceptance or rejection. Taking medication, watching diets and avoiding certain leisure activities are constant reminders of decisions made in the past which continue to haunt them in the present.

The appearance of collateral damage with the other stigma generators is theoretically important for understanding the struggle with residuals of a past self, because the inferential work by society constitutes part of the residual self. As the number and quality of stigma generators become apparent to others or have to be managed by ex-offenders, the more likely it is their consciousness will be consumed with managing these same residuals. The most problematic conditions are for those with prolific criminal pasts who were formerly addicts, and carry signs on their bodies which constitute discrediting information about *who I am*. Collectively, the visibility of signs pointing to a disreputable past invites stigma: someone possesses qualities which make them bad, dangerous or weak, reducing their value in the assessments of others - from a whole and usual person to someone who is tainted (Goffman, 1963: 3).

Part of the difficulty about other's reactions is the tendency to interpret the signifiers discussed above as evidence of a residual self which remains *lurking*, in contrast to how ex-offenders may experience themselves as having transcended *who I was*. The opinions of others certainly do matter, given the reflexive and dynamic nature of the self. Social audiences may take information provided by ex-offenders about their past and connect it

to other parts of their presentation of self to construct an image of a disreputable person. The tendency of a social audience to connect disparate character traits to construct an integrated deviant image has been noted by labelling theorists under the concept of “retrospective interpretation” (Schur, 1971)⁴².

B. Discrediting Information

Criminal justice agencies contribute to the problematic conditions faced by offenders trying to become reputable by keeping official records which contain stigmatizing information. The most effective protection against becoming disvalued by others is to keep discrediting information hidden. The option to remain secret may not be possible when deviance leaves historical traces in official records or in the memories of others. A powerful source of discreditation is knowledge used in personal relationships like the family to punish, shame or control ex-offenders. Derogatory judgements made by others about the morality of an ex-offender become the coordinates of a self which others reflect back to them, irrespective of credentials which they now hold in the present. Knowledge about someone’s past can be used to challenge how they define themselves. One of the more adhesive qualities of having a disreputable past concerns the meaning and use of criminal records.

1. Criminal Records

Knowledge about others helps us evaluate them and the social context in which the interaction takes place. Goffman (1959) noted that information is sought about individuals when they enter the presence of others, enabling the situation to be defined and expectations shared. Records of arrests, court appearances, convictions, and provincial or federal prison sentences are typically kept confidential, but still represent a

threat to claims of *who I am*, given that such record-keeping is a human process and subject to disclosure through error and malfeasance. Ex-offenders realize the limitations of having a criminal record, especially for employment, working as volunteers and travelling outside the country, or being “run through the system” during routine police inquiries for driving infractions or other minor indiscretions.

Restricted access to criminal records held by the government underscores society’s recognition that those with convictions can be subject to unfair disqualifications if the information were disclosed. A major purpose for keeping records is for authoritative persons to make discretionary judgements about one’s morality, or in court proceedings, the penalty which would best suit the aims of sentencing. The relief provided by the Canadian *Criminal Records Act* attempts to address these very conditions⁴³ by limiting officials’ access to pardoned criminal records.

Employers stipulate that job applicants complete a “satisfactory” criminal record check, and most public safety positions are unavailable to those with (unpardoned) criminal records⁴⁴. Although federal agencies, Crown corporations and many provincial bureaucracies have policies which forbid employers from asking about the existence of criminal convictions which have been pardoned⁴⁵, members of the RCMP (and perhaps others) may circumvent this requirement by asking potential recruits or those seeking security clearances to answer the question, “Have you ever been in trouble with the police?”⁴⁶ Obviously, the existence of a criminal record is deemed important because it apparently reveals something about the essential nature of people before they can be admitted to occupational positions involving trust. If given access to, or knowledge about criminal records, others will relate to the current self on the basis of a residual self – one

which is retrospectively (re-) constructed from official records. Having a disreputable self, especially if it is officially recorded, carries with it a number of potentially awkward and stigmatizing social encounters.⁴⁷

Society creates a residual self for ex-offenders because information contained on those records makes the past self durable into the present. Aside from the existence of the records, several ex-offenders experienced the adhesive qualities of conviction when they explored the process of seeking a pardon. Jack explains how difficult it was for him to obtain a pardon in 1999, regardless of the “clean time” he had accumulated before he made application.

Jack: Because I had a hundred dollars fine that I didn't pay in 1981, that was written off in 1983 by the [provincial] government, as far as they are concerned, *I am still a criminal* until I pay that fine and then I have to wait five MORE YEARS after that fine is paid which really - I almost took all this stuff and burned it that day. I went home, I was going to get the burn barrel out and burn ALL THIS shit [holding out a stack of correspondence] and I said no, no, that's a stupid thing to do (Jack at 242).

The rules, strictly interpreted, do not allow Jack to define himself with the important symbolic credentials of a pardon and thus constitute a structural barrier for transcending a disreputable past in the memories of humans and electronic data retrieval systems. A number of bureaucratic hurdles must be overcome, including that the applicant have a certain level of literacy to complete the necessary forms, a lengthy and time-consuming application process, a \$50.00 non-refundable processing fee, and a wait of up to 18 to 24 months for a decision from the National Parole Board (NPB).

Official records may surface during “routine stops” conducted by police for provincial motor vehicle infractions. Yvonne recalls an incident after her decision to leave street life where she became the “designated driver” for a group of friends. She had

committed no crime but when queried by the RCMP during a traffic stop, she recalls: “So he looked at my driver’s license and he pulled up the record and he said, *you’ve been a bad girl haven’t you?*” (Yvonne at 1072). Darryl reported similar treatment: “The police mostly ah, ah I’ve been ah, arrested ah, not arrested me, they stopped me a couple of times, and they run my record, like oh - whew, okay, *well we know who you are*” (Darryl at 665).

These brief encounters, especially in small municipalities or towns, alert the police to the presence of ex-offenders who may later receive an inordinate amount of police attention, especially if the former are suspected of crimes which appear to fit their previous *modus operandi*⁴⁸. A similar discrediting consequence for ex-offenders occurs when they try to travel abroad, especially to the United States, which does not recognize Canadian pardons. Many ex-offenders have been turned back at the border, or ordered to return to Canada when disclosure of their pasts came to the attention of U.S. authorities.

Official records are consequential to ex-offenders not only in and of themselves, but also for the *potential threat* they pose to their claims of *who I am*. Dwight believes he faces the same type of exclusion from participation in the workforce because of some old charges on his criminal record.

Dwight: Now, like I say, these days they have the criminal records checks and you bring it up, somebody sees a slip of paper with ah, a set of offences on it, they don’t look at the date you know, it’s two decades, three decades ago, *they don’t consider that*. There’s a guy that stole, smashed, did all kinds of weird things - *I want him working for me?* (Dwight at 302).

Even if one is honest about a criminal past, it is still possible to be disqualified from some types of employment. Peter, for example, was not admitted to the Canadian Armed

Forces because he was frank about his involvement in drugs, even though he had no criminal convictions.

JFA: Did they tell you at some time in the application phase that that's why you weren't accepted?

Peter: That's what he [the recruiting officer] told me, and he sent me out of the room for about two minutes, called me back in and pulled out his little book, I mean they've got to cut people off somewhere, even if it's, you know, the typical army guy. They gotta cut, gotta cut, gotta cut people somewhere and he said here's the book and this is what it states and *we can't let you in for two years* because of hallucinative - how you say it, ah, like acid [LSD] or mushrooms, right. And I told the guy, and this was the honest truth, that I drank this much mushroom tea once [fingers held apart about two inches] and he said ah, *we can't let you in for least two years*. So I said, all right and he says, *I was choked because I was being honest*, right, and *I thought that was the way to go...* (Peter at 1097).

Claiming a new or reformed self may be difficult in the face of discrediting information available to criminal justice officials, regardless of the credentials presented. I was denied a job as a correctional officer at the Oakalla Prison in British Columbia in 1982 because I had a (pardoned) criminal record – freely admitted during the course of the interview. It was explained that although I was a desirable candidate for the position because I had a university education, “other correctional officers might learn of your past and feel they couldn't work with you”. I was later hired by B.C. Corrections in 1983 to work at the new Vancouver Remand Centre as a correctional officer. The screening interview only asked if I had a criminal record *for which I had not been pardoned*, to which I replied “no”.

Rob's situation as a former sex offender speaks to a no-win situation where *anything* he claims about himself is discredited by officials who select information from official records to construct dangerousness. During one interview before National Parole Board (NPB) members in an application for day parole, he referred to the expert testimony and

other documentary evidence which attested to his progress in treatment and his perceived low risk to the public. The NPB later, in their written decision to deny him day parole, accused him of “being manipulative” with treatment specialists. When he protested the Board’s interpretation of events, he was found by them to be “immature”. At the time, the Board was not going to change their mind, regardless of the information before them. Apparently, his “dangerous”, residual self loomed large in their decision to deny his request for conditional release. Related to the consequences of having a criminal history, ex-offenders sometimes need to account for “lost time” - missing years spent in jails, on the street, or in residential treatment centres, or make efforts to conceal their past through selective disclosure to friends and associates. Explaining these things drags the past into the present shape the expectations of others. Ex-offenders are well aware of the stigma they will face if others know that, for example, they sold sex to obtain money for drugs, assaulted strangers. The temporal gaps in personal histories which are filled with things they would sooner not discuss constitutes another manifestation of a problem which requires resolution.

The stigmatic properties of being an ex-offender has been captured in several studies (e.g., see Sampson and Laub, 2001: 157-159). Prisoners are precluded from some types of jobs (Glaser, 1969) and employers are reluctant to hire those with criminal pasts (Albright and Denq, 1996; Boshier and Dale, 1976; Finn and Fontaine, 1985; Johnson, 1974; Maxwell 1997), especially for positions which are “bonded” by insurance companies, making entry to low-skilled positions in the service sector problematic (Dale, 1976: 324). Sampson and Laub (2001b) consider the institutional response to law-breaking as one form of structural disadvantage for ex-offenders which “appears to cut

off opportunities and prospects for stable employment later in life” (p. 159). Employment is one form of social capital which has the potential to increase investment in conventional lifestyles. Imprisonment has indirect, criminogenic effects which isolate and stigmatize offenders long after their sentences are completed, leaving open the question as to whether they *ever* “pay back” society for their crimes. Some qualitative studies recount the difficulties for ex-offenders in finding legitimate employment, and the steps taken to avoid detection in order to get a job.

Many of those interviewed told of fruitless attempts to find employment; of solid prospects turning sour when employers learned of their convictions; of rejection following honest disclosure (which sometimes lead to later applications *being more economical with the truth*) (Devlin and Turney, 1999:28-29; my emphasis).

2. Shaming Information

The second form of discrediting information comes from the ability of others who have knowledge which emerges through interpersonal relationships to shame those with a disreputable past, should they feel compelled to do so. The grounded theory method shows specifically how stigma is manifest in these novel ways. Ex-offenders without official criminal records may experience much the same fear of disclosure. Former drug users, drug traffickers, sex offenders and prostitutes may be known to others such as deviant peers, former intimates or victims - even if they have escaped processing by agents of social control. These research participants without criminal records also experience a residual self if others reveal things about their past.

Shaming information is different from that held within criminal records because it is *unofficial* and not subject to the controls associated with official data. The past is used to draw stigmatizing moral inferences on ex-offenders and is “shaming” in the sense that it

constitutes a harmful cache of information to hurt or discredit what they claim about *who I am*. This information is used in the course of human relationships where one party discredits the other on the basis of his or her past life. Many ex-offenders live with the possibility that information shared in moments of trust may resurface later to reconstruct *who they are* in light of *who they were*. This situation leaves women especially vulnerable if their crimes violated sexual norms, so they must guard against revealing too much about their lives. Even in intimate relationships, the potential exists for others to see the discreditable self if the relationship sours. Priscilla talks about how her past life as a prostitute haunted her in different relationships with men.

Priscilla: I was dating this guy last summer and he was a bit of a psycho. Like he did some really twisted things and so through that ah, I don't know, he had threatened me and stuff that, *you're nothing but a whore, like he was re-living my past for me which he found out through other people* (Priscilla at 1075).

She encountered the same stigma based on her previous involvement in drugs when her father implied that she would never transcend what he believed to be “her element” (that is, living in a run down area of a Canadian city with other drug users): “And he said, you’ll be living in the [Rundown Estates] and *your kid will be 16 and dealing drugs* and you won’t have any control over him” (Priscilla at 1192). Even when she began to clean up her life and studied at university, Priscilla’s actions were challenged, this time by her step-father: “I notice that every once and awhile my step-dad will take punches at me, you know like, but *just to demean my character* because *I’m becoming a different person* and I’m taking on a new role (Priscilla at 1152). It seems that the men in her life refused to accept that she was capable of an identity change.

This devaluation by intimates is hurtful for those with experiences like Priscilla, especially if their own subjective thoughts sometimes echo with what others are saying. Struggling with addiction, a proneness to anger or some other feature of their residual self which they wish to transcend, a reminder from others that they are essentially unchanged challenges the project of becoming reputable. It draws attention to *who I was* during a time when they are redefining *who I am*. Priscilla's reaction to this treatment by others was to withdraw into secrecy about her past: "I don't divulge anything to people unless they're really close and I haven't found people that close yet" (Priscilla at 1226). This strategy of selective disclosure protects ex-offenders from others who might use their past to shame them and thus addresses their main concern.

Potentially shaming information may be *selectively disclosed* to others outside an intimate relationship (couples or within a family) to preserve the identity which they struggle to occupy. As ex-offenders, what children tell their parents, or parents tell their children about their disreputable past, is judiciously selected to preserve a self-image they wish to project. Dayna reports that her mother's knowledge concerning her past involvement in the drug underworld was based on what she chose to tell her.

Dayna: - Well a lot of it you can chalk it up to denial [laughs], like she [my mother] denies the fact that I have ever done cocaine, she just thinks that I'm an alcoholic and smoked a lot of pot, but *it's easier for her to deal with it that way*. And that's bad enough for her, y'know... she doesn't know about me goin' down to Metroville in a stolen car with crackheads (Dayna at 1322).

Information selectively disclosed in this manner allows ex-offenders to avoid shaming information and maintain the new self. Edward shields his history as a drug user, trafficker and prison inmate from his teenage children. He is concerned that his past would discredit him, and possibly allow them to justify their own deviant behaviour.

Edward: I also have, I also have a real PROBLEM with a whole thing because, not with not telling them but because of learning, and my understanding of learning. I think that if I told my kids that I had, that I had been busted, that I had been in jail, then in some ways I may be ah, acknowledging, that it's *maybe giving them tacit approval for them to be involved in it because, 'look at how dad's doing. I mean my dad was involved in it. He sold drugs and look what he's doing'* (Edward at 775).

There is also a “halo effect” around deviance if one party in an intimate relationship has a disreputable past⁴⁹. An ex-offender may be protected by others who want to ensure, through secrecy or selective disclosure, that potentially hostile parties do not use this shaming information. Francis recalls her boyfriend's reaction when she told him that she was participating in the present study.

Francis: When it comes to the [nude] dancing, you know it's funny because Calvin [her boyfriend] used to get mad at me for saying that to people, like when I talked to you on the phone the first time last semester, he was sittin' there and he had a look on his face like, 'you just told a teacher at the university about your past, are you completely insane?' And I said he's a criminology teacher but I'm like you know, it's because it's him. I wouldn't just go up to my English teacher and say something like that. It's different. *I know who to tell and who not to tell* and he said you better be careful because sometimes you'll tell someone you think you should and *it won't be the right person to tell* (Francis at 934).

Calvin's concern that others not know about Francis' discreditable past as a nude dancer may derive from his desire to protect her reputation from being sullied - or perhaps his own (e.g., to avoid comments from others such as, “How can you date a woman who used to be a stripper?”). Deviance has a halo effect when associates of known deviants are assumed to have the same qualities as the deviant, or in some instances, be sympathetic to them (for example, as in the case of heterosexual men who are friends with known homosexuals). It is reasonable to infer that Calvin's concern about Francis's disclosure of her past has to do with the potential for shaming information to be used against either of them.

Another social locale where the past is used as shaming information concerns former criminal friends who communicate their incredulity towards someone's project of self-change. Criminal peers may express doubt concerning the possibilities for meaningful change if their own attempts to leave crime or addiction were unsuccessful. In her decision to go straight, Cheryl left her drug-consuming peer group abruptly. She occasionally met former "druggy friends" who doubted her ability to remain straight. Criminal justice agents may convey a similar message, as when Edward heard "you'll be back" from prison guards who saw him as "no different from all the rest" (Edward at 166). Hector was continually reminded by some prison employees that his pedophilia was "incurable", and that he would re-offend if he were released⁵⁰.

The stigma associated with how others relate to the residual self creates problems which are differentially resolved in a number of methods, but attempt to achieve the same outcome: neutralizing or attenuating the effects of other people's judgmental reactions. All research participants recognized the saying, "once a con, always a con" or "once an addict, always an addict". Although they may feel differently about who they are, they believed that others would see them in light of their past and act against them accordingly⁵¹.

Some ex-offenders took pains to ensure that their participation in this research would be secret. They also told me that there were a few people who "knew everything" about their disreputable past. Selective disclosure is a means of avoiding the consequences of social exclusion. Edward had much to lose from what others might know about his past, and took pains to keep it secret except from his wife, Jane.

Edward: *I work really hard to make sure that people don't know and I, I protect that, that part of my life... so ah, in fact, you know, my wife's parents don't know and most of ah, most of ah... no all of Jane's family I know doesn't know, my wife's family doesn't know ah... my brothers of course ah know and, and I have a couple of, I have some cousins in [Cityville] but they see who I've become and they've ACCEPTED, they've ACCEPTED where I am today and because I screwed up in the past, SO WHAT. That's all that counts (Edward at 463).*

Allison also kept her disreputable past in secrecy, as well as her involvement in a Twelve Step group. Asked if other people knew about her past, she responds:

Allison: Yes, there are. The people that I have close to me, *my close friends* know who I am and where I come from. But I don't have - some of my close friends go to [post-secondary institution] but the people that I associate with at [post-secondary institution] ah don't know where I come from and I WOULDN'T tell them where I come from here because *I don't think that they would understand* (Allison at 58).

The information that one attends a regular meeting to deal with alcohol or addiction may be held from others, given that membership in a Twelve Step group is often reason enough for stigmatic treatment.

As a final illustration of how damaging even seemingly innocuous but “tainted” information about one’s self may be interpreted negatively by others, Francis tells a story about being fired from a domestic job because she told her employer that her father had lost a fortune through drug addiction.

Francis: So I said [to my employer] well my dad was worth about a million dollars and I said he lost it all because he did cocaine. Now, him [earlier] saying to me that “you shouldn't be embarrassed” obviously means that I'm ashamed of my father's actions but he took it as, “Oh my God your father probably was a cocaine addict - I don't want HER babysitting my children” and they fired me the next day. Now what is my - “I just TOLD you that I don't have contact with my father, telling you I hate my father” and now you're firing me BECAUSE of him? My God if you only knew what I used to do. You know, and right there I was like oh my God, how CAN you, you know, this wasn't even MY past, this was my FATHER'S past and they CONDEMNED ME for it. *So when it comes*

to your own past, it's unbelievable. People will give you, they'll meet me, they'll think I'm the most fabulous person in the world, they'll put their trust in me but as soon as they find that out, everything would leave (Francis at 1005).

Francis has no criminal record, and her past crimes did not result in her being identified by the police. Her experience as an exotic dancer and living on the periphery of organized crime may make her one of the research participants with the least degree of moral turpitude. However, it is instructive for us to understand just how devastating the judgements of others can be on *who I am* in the shadows of a disreputable past. Her narrative illustrates the objective properties of the residual self. Francis and others like her know the importance of keeping the disreputable past secret, and it can emerge through seemingly innocuous interactions with others.

This chapter has sketched the main concern of ex-offenders as they face the stigmatic social landscape attached to a residual self mirrored in the interactions of others. Those with little evidence of a disreputable past or any visible markers from a life of crime will pass for normal, but will still be harried by the prospect of being discovered and then having to negotiate *who I am*. Crime has left many of them with symbolic residuals which invite stigmatic valuations from others. Tattoos, speech and mannerisms, and health problems which cannot be concealed constitute an identity of *who I was* which loiters in the present and creates problems for declaring *who I am*. Discrediting information is another manifestation of the residual self - evident in their accounts of how criminal records and informally communicated knowledge of the past leaves moral hazards which must be negotiated. The extent and degree to which ex-offenders manifest evidence of a residual self accounts for the variation in processing the main concern. Others who are heavily tattooed, speak with jailhouse or street metaphors and suffer

health problems from drug addiction will be reminded continually of how past decisions leave stigmatic symbols in the present. Such is the residual self.

Thus far, I have written about the residual self inasmuch as it is visible. In a later chapter, I will attend to the subjective properties of the residual self which form a major part of the main concern for this stigmatized group. That discussion is better left until the process of leaving crime is more fully articulated.

5. Changing Me by Going Straight

I was still this same old being and I wanted to be different... I just wanted to change everything about me. (Cheryl at 105).

This chapter describes the process of going straight. The problems associated with leaving crime vary, depending upon how deeply committed ex-offenders were to a criminal identity. Leaving crime is made within the context of a crisis or crises. But calamity alone, no matter how severe, necessarily becomes the motivation for going straight. It is only *some types of crises* recounted by ex-offenders which begin the project of self-reformation. Crisis or “bottoming out” are followed by two types of exits: the clean break, or a longer process of internal, incremental change accompanied by a fading involvement in crime. The incremental, progressive nature of becoming non-deviant is captured in the phrase, *going straight*.

Ex-offenders draw on three main self-talks which attenuate stigma attached to being an ex-offender through three general types of “imported conversations”. They report a relationship to help which varies to the degree that it occupies a presence in their day-to-day consciousness. Coding the data also revealed three categories of relationships which ex-offenders have towards help: transitory, enveloping and autonomous. Structural help refers to institutional and agency assistance to leave crime, drugs or deal with anger problems. The help available varies by the resources available during the historical moment when ex-offenders made the decision to leave crime.

Going straight means changing one’s identity, and the nature of the change depends upon the degree of commitment to a former criminal identity. The former self, *who I was*, can be categorized as falling along a continuum between having transient criminal

identity (the not-so-bad) or one which features deep, enduring qualities (i.e., the hardcore).

A. The Not-So-Bad: Transient Criminal Identities

There are two types of selves or references to “who I was” which speak to the depth to which research participants say they were committed to a deviant identity. The first type is “transient”, meaning their participation in crime was temporary, mostly involving theft or low-level drug dealing. The second type of self discussed is one characterized by a “deep identity” with criminal values. It is often referred to as “hard core” by ex-offenders themselves (and police and prison staff). The distinction between transient and deep criminal identities becomes important in developing a theory because the problem of the residual self varies to the extent that ex-offenders were deviant in their own assessments (and those of others). It was also one of the first distinctions to be made among the study participants when coding the data.

Fourteen ex-offenders whom I have coded as having a transient criminal identity recount their involvement in crime with a fixed beginning and end, and a comparatively shallow immersion in criminal activities and values. Their value orientations were conventional in most respects until they entered a relatively brief period of criminal activity which nevertheless spanned a number of years. The legal seriousness of their crimes does not always distinguish them from those who were hardcore respondents, but their comparatively later start in crime and the absence of adult criminal records and imprisonment experiences are salient features. Crime was typically described as a “learning experience” or “a phase I went through” which left few visible markers or discrediting information. They have little need to maintain control over a self which they

view as having been transcended, and explain their entry into crime on situational contingencies which will not recur in the future. They recall themselves as initially law-abiding but became criminal as a result of peer associations, fleeting problems in late adolescence or young adulthood, drug use, or perhaps skirting on the margins of addiction. The residual self in their narratives takes on a different character from the others, where they see *who I was* as a wayward self which has since been transcended. Crime left no visible traces and is interpreted as “life experience”. The help they seek – if any – is tailored to meet specific needs, such as attending an occasional Twelve Step group, avoiding specific people or social contexts, or keeping in touch with a mentor. Official records are less likely to surface and remind them of their past, and former criminal associates are remote by choice or by geographical distance. Some see themselves as helpful to others, especially young people, because their historical self is interpreted as shareable. Others with transient criminal identities are secretive, but similarly feel that their brushes with crime have added quality to their lives.

Participants were concerned that others might possess shaming information about their former lives and remind ex-offenders that their reputations can be tarnished any time. Edward’s case is noteworthy because he had all the markers of upper middle-class respectability, but was worried that recent changes to the *Criminal Records Act* might threaten his occupational standing if others knew that he was convicted for trafficking cocaine. Even though he was pardoned two decades ago, a fear that this information might somehow be revealed affected his choices in the present. He feared how others might interact with him, including his children. All it takes is for someone to resurface

with old information, and/or interact with ex-offenders in a way that gives primacy to the dregs of their past.

For ex-offenders whose past was comparatively minor vis-à-vis the social disapproval they would invite from those possessing discrediting information, the former self reflects the purposes described here, but with a slight adjustment. The danger of the past lies not only in *who I was* but also in the imagined trajectory of *who I was becoming*. Loni, Francis and Peter, for example, describe *who I was* in terms of the deviant career which they were on the verge of entering. All three avoided what they predicted to be longer periods of addiction and deeper involvement in criminal underworlds (“If I hadn’t gotten out when I did...”). When I asked Loni how it was possible for her to leave a lifestyle of alcohol and drugs, she said:

Loni: I believe and for me... there was *only a very short time that I felt out of control with it* [her criminal lifestyle], and that was *about two years* and after that I was making the decision [to get out of crime], it wasn’t because I had to or forced into it or any of that and also for those two years *I was visualizing myself being away from it...* so it didn’t... that was, I guess I guess *that’s part of my constitution*, that’s part of how come I’m so strong is because I can see myself not doing it before I stop doing it.

JFA: So you were planning your exit while you were still in there?

Loni: Yeah, yeah (Loni at 1205).

Loni’s foray into crime is framed within her essential strength and “constitution”. She speaks of an intention to leave crime even while participating in it. Her understanding of *who I was* is very different from others with a more indelible criminal identity, as we shall see next.

B. The Hardcore: A Dangerous Past

Ex-offenders with a previously deep identity talk about a dangerous past and seemed the “worst criminals” of those interviewed, not only because of the seriousness of the crimes they committed, but also in their own self descriptions of *who I was*. Many report being “bad from the start”: they entered delinquency and crime in pre-teen or early teen years, had trouble conforming to normative expectations at home and in school, were more likely to have experienced opiate or alcohol addiction, engaged in longer cycles of serious crime, and had more frequent contact with criminal justice agents and social welfare bureaucracies. They were also more likely to report their own serious victimization experiences, and say they subscribed to a prison-street subculture and its attendant values (e.g., hatred or disdain for authority, the gratuitous use of violence when provoked, and a hedonistic lifestyle revolving around crime and drug use). This group traces the origin of what is now referred to as *who I was* to unpleasant experiences in childhood or early adolescence. Histories of childhood abuse, parental neglect, family conflict, and living with adoptive or transient families figure prominently in their accounts. The hardcore ex-offenders were more likely to have visible, stigmatic body markers and possess discrediting information, especially long criminal records.

A deep identification with criminal values during the offending stage shapes the contours of a self which later in time becomes residual. This group has a much more difficult time becoming reputable because the public manifestations of *who I was* are more obvious, the moral turpitude of past crimes is more extreme, and the residuals from abusive childhoods, addiction and prisonization continue to stigmatize the selves they present today. Several were forthright about the depth of their deviant commitment. Larry

described himself as a “habitual criminal” (Larry at 27) and Bill speaks of a criminal identity which he fully embraced.

Bill: I was *always committed to being a criminal* for years, eh. I never applied for a parole, I never, never applied for any sort of early release, ah, I always *did all my time* so nobody ever had any control on me when I got out because right away when I got out, *I planned on re-offending* and I made no bones about telling you that, eh, like *I’ve wanted to get out and reoffend*, right away and catch me if you can and when you caught me, I never fought a charge (Bill at 347).

Bill’s decision not to apply for parole places him higher in the prison hierarchy of “solid cons” who do not subscribe to the authoritative schemes of conditional release such as parole. Similarly, the decision to plead guilty as charged reflects the adage, “if you do the crime, do the time” (don’t make excuses for your behaviour, just face the consequences). Lance also talks about his commitment to the street and prison culture when he talks about his previous street reputation, that is, being a “solid con” who was “game to do things” (Lance at 193).

Beverly tells about a past where she violated the normative constraints of being a “good girl” and identified with members of a peer network who were ruthless in their pursuit of criminal goals. “If anybody wanted to fight with me, I’d be in their face about it. I wasn’t scared of anything, I didn’t give a shit about anything (Beverly at 251). In her opinion, “that’s where I felt that that’s where I belonged (Beverly at 285). For many of the hardcore, their disreputable self went beyond just doing bad things. Several felt that there was something essentially bad about who they were.

Harry: My two uncles were known to the police, my mother’s cousin was well known to the police, ah, my older brother had been locked up and that became known to them and ah, *I was delinquent. I was delinquent*” (Harry at 186)... *I’m going to be a career criminal* and I know it and *I want to be*. And I want to be (Harry at 550).

Kirk: *I was a drug addict and I was a fuckin', just an asshole, you know. If that was in the dictionary, that's me. I was out to be somebody that everybody could look at and go, holy cow* (Kirk at 1325).

Jerry: I got out of there [a provincial prison] and *I just - didn't like authority*, not at all. How could they dare put me in jail and, *I had a real grudge against authority figures*, RCMP in particular (Jerry at 75).

Darryl talks about how he was put on a “lifer’s tier” which means that prison authorities classified him as a high-security risk, and lived in prison where other inmates would respect him for his anti-authority values.

Darryl: ...they put me on a lifer’s tier... by the time I got to [federal prison], *I ah was full of hate, full of anger*, I was scamming the joint for medication, ah, *doin' schitzo stuff*, smashin' up my cell. I had a psychiatrist ah, every time I smashed my cell up he'd give me more medication. Ah, I told him I liked music and that kept me calm so he gave me a tape recorder with music tapes. I told him I couldn't sleep out of bed so he gave me a bed board, all these little perks, eh, and I'd save up all my medication for the weekend, just get [inaudible]... ah, I went in 19--, I got out 19--, I was involved in two riots, [inaudible] hunger strike, I was stabbed and *I stabbed somebody else... I was charged with murder* (Darryl at 244).

The deep identity was evident in the stories told during the interviews (“stories within stories”). When Kirk recounts being arrested for a string of property crimes, and the subsequent processing for fingerprints by the police, he forcefully underscores his previous commitment to deviant values (every consonant in his speech was firmly pronounced).

Kirk: ‘Give us your hands’ [said the police], ‘fuckin’ rights man, here you go’ [I replied]. I had the whole thing, they [fingerprints] didn’t match. I was looking, he [police officer] goes well, ‘you had a friend’, [and I replied] ‘I got no fuckin’ friends’. If I did, [the police said] ‘well give us their names’. I said ‘no fuck you I’m not giving a thing’. Ah to get away with something like that [a break and enter] was what like wow, right, I think this is cool [Kirk at 275].

This short passage above reveals Kirk’s previous criminal identification in more than one

way. The profanity he uses in recounting his conversation with the police shows his (past) disdain for authority. He reports being socially isolated, adopts the “no-ratting” stance typical of the criminal subculture, and draws attention to the seductive qualities of crime and getting away with it.

The differences between those with transient and those with deep criminal identities are important for developing a theory of leaving crime. Depending on the depth of a criminal identity to which ex-offenders previously subscribed, the project of creating a new self presents greater difficulties. However, the outcome of their self-work helps to resolve their main concern: to lessen the social disapprobation from those who know or may learn about their past lives. Indeed, there is likely to be the same congratulatory response from a social audience which hears that a wicked life of crime was abandoned, or that deeper penetration into deviance was avoided.

Regardless of the degree to which ex-offenders felt they were criminal or deviant, all report a crisis experience which became a turning point in their lives.

C. Bottoming Out

Ex-offenders vary according to how their disreputable backgrounds present problems when they decide to leave crime. Types of exits can be expected to be different as well. It is also true that despite the divergent backgrounds, exits from crime are described as having two general preconditions: crisis and new awareness. Crises are interpreted as dramatic events for leaving a discreditable self when they lead to a new awareness about self, generally with internal conversations that revolve around “who I *really* am”.

All the respondents reported crises during their period of criminal activity but did not then attempt to leave crime. Severe drug withdrawal, being charged with crimes by the police, imprisonment, near-death experiences, and rejection by family and other loved ones figured prominently in the crises preceding decisions to abandon destructive lifestyles. Some traumas were not immediately influential at the moment they occurred because they told me “I wasn’t ready” or “I hadn’t bottomed out yet”. Ex-offenders tell us that there must be sufficient crises to make them aware of a self which requires change. This moment of self-realization which stands out against other calamitous events throughout their lives. Bottoming out means feeling a sense of dissatisfaction, unease or even hate for who or what they saw themselves becoming. They talk about “feeling phoney” in the self and lifestyle which they were living, feelings which were often exacerbated by what they saw happening to criminal peers around them (“I don’t want to be like them”), or realizing that the camaraderie with these same peers was superficial and based upon instrumental needs, often for obtaining drugs. They report experiencing *incongruent selves*, or a disjuncture between the public presentation of self (who they say or believe they are), and the private experience of self, the “who I really am”. This new awareness could mean realizing that they were somehow different from the criminal associates who constituted many of their friendships. Among these people, they forecast their own futures and began to differentiate themselves from those with criminal identities.

Given that the interview questions focused on accounting for the decision to leave crime, answers almost invariably referred to a “right moment” to get out of a lifestyle that was destroying them or others. Ex-offenders reported that they reached a depth of

personal and physical crisis which preceded going straight. A close reading of the interview transcripts suggests that it takes more than crises *per se*, rather what can be categorized as *transformative crisis* which generates the requisite motivation to change. Although the bottoming out experience varies in terms of how severely it affected their social functioning and physical health, the key feature is that it leads them to become despondent with the self they occupy.

Most offenders, especially those with a deep criminal identity, experienced several life events which could have been classified – by any objective reading – as crises. The problem for theoretically coding the data was discovering the differences between crises which ex-offenders saw as having no transformative value (“I wasn’t ready”), and those which ultimately initiated the journey out of crime (“I bottomed out”). Why did major, life-threatening episodes or calamities fail to provide the motivation to leave crime? Sometimes the catalyst for change was a comparatively minor event. The differences between these types of crises surface in the narratives of ex-offenders.

1. Cumulative Crises: I Wasn’t Ready

Cumulative crises are calamities during periods of active crime that are insufficient to motivate offenders to go straight. Offenders can undergo treatment interventions provided by services within the community or criminal justice system without experiencing them as a turning point. Making sense of leaving crime, ex-offenders recalled experiences with anger management or drug treatment programs which were not then interpreted as significant. However, they now recount them as incremental steps towards an exit from crime. In their view, the experiences contributed to who they are today. Offenders who had been incarcerated conceded that some correctional programs

“got their attention”, but the supposed specific deterrent aspects of imprisonment or community sentences were missing. Harry’s case is typical as he describes what happened after he was sent to prison for a charge of aggravated assault for beating a policeman.

Harry: So I get sent down to [a maximum security treatment facility] and I get put in their drug and alcohol rehabilitation program and this is when - to me it’s just a... it’s better to be here than be doing jail time. *I’m not really interested in in ah... in making too big of a change in my lifestyle;* however I’m really concerned about, I’m starting to think *there’s something wrong with me*. Like there’s something wrong here [points to head.] (Harry at 614).

Harry explained that the timing of expert treatment intervention was not right because he was becoming a “somebody” in an OCG, and the loyalty which members of that organization showed him was more rewarding than anything which treatment staff could offer. However, in the treatment program mentioned above, he considered that there was something fundamentally wrong in how he was processing anger, and that others were aware of it. Similarly, Priscilla also ventures an explanation for her temporary involvement in a treatment program before she went straight.

JFA: Now you were in a circle of people who were pretty heavy drug users. Was drug use almost a daily thing at this point in your life?

Priscilla: Yeah, ah, well for about the first four months of the pregnancy it was. And then I started to show and I could feel the baby move and I started to freak out so I went to the alcohol and drug program, down in [Cityville] and hooked up with this woman and I remained abstinent for the rest of my pregnancy.

JFA: Was she influential and helping you stay clean for those months?

Priscilla: Yeah, it became a thing where, it was like a calendar. And it’s like, due dates here, you know, *it was almost like I knew I was going to use after, but I needed to stay clean for those, for those times, just for the baby* (Priscilla at 207).

For Priscilla, staying clean during the pregnancy was a temporary respite in a lifestyle of drugs, property crime and prostitution. From the outside, it may have looked as though she had made a commitment to leave addiction and crime, but for her, the experience had a different meaning entirely. Priscilla now says she had not yet reached the personal crisis which led eventually lead her to go straight.

Crises due to by the adverse effects of alcohol and opiate abuse figure prominently in ex-offender accounts, especially a rapid deterioration in physical and mental health, a fractured family and social life, and a general inability to meet social obligations. These conditions overlap and vary in degree. Lesser crises include being discovered as manipulative or deceitful by family members when attempting to get money for drugs, not being able to eat or sleep, losing weight and experiencing other changes in physical appearances, and not being trusted by anyone. These crises became especially significant when others drew attention to the disreputable person they saw them becoming - and took action to protect their own interests.

More severe crises included overdoses requiring hospitalization (sometimes a near-death experience), severe withdrawal, being arrested and imprisoned, having to give up a child for adoption, being given an ultimatum by a loved one ("get your act together or get out"), going bankrupt, leaving school, being victimized by other criminals, being beaten or abused by police or correctional officers, and becoming involved in increasingly serious offences or increased rates of offending. During their active criminal period, some drug abusers report drug-related crises such as feeling numb or anaesthetized to their own emotions, distrustful of others ("paranoid"), becoming suicidal or doubting their own sanity. Wayne, for example, experienced heart and breathing problems and what he

called “cocaine psychosis and paranoia”. He became concerned that his daughter might be killed with a firearm he kept in his residence. These conditions left him feeling powerless over his drug addiction and constituted part of the cumulative crises which he experienced. Former addicts sometimes recount the denigrating or abusive treatment they received at the hands of criminal justice officials, social workers and health care employees - treatment from others which underscores the marginal social position which they once occupied.

Harry’s narrative illustrates a life-long series of cumulative crises and change. He pointed to several steps in his journey out of addiction, crime and ultimately, confronting how he expressed anger. His crises included having to flee – as *persona non grata* – the influence of an OCG which had claimed much of his identity, being told by mental health officials (through a court-ordered psychiatric assessment) that there was something pathological about his anger, and finally, the incident described below which occurred 10 years after he decided to go straight. Shortly after the death of a close family member, Harry recalls this violent outburst.

Harry: I was real sick and *got violent again*. Got violent again. Punched my old lady out. For no reason. Ah she came home one day from work at noon wanting to talk to meet me about my attitude and what not and I’m thinking, you know I’m NOT drinking, I’m NOT doing drugs, I’m NOT carrying guns, I’m doing the best I can. What the FUCK is your problem? You know, what the fuck is your problem? And I don’t know what she did, she threw an ash tray or kicked the coffee table or what ever she did, I got up and ah I just stepped into her. And like it wasn’t my first violent act with this woman ah, but I backed her into a corner and just teed off on her. Like I hit her like a man, eh. I’d never done that. And when she put her hands up, I went to work on her ribs and I only hit her four or five times but HOLY SHIT I did a lot of damage eh. But more than that, I hurt her SOUL, hurt my OWN soul, never mind the physical shit, well not to negate it, but this was very different and NO EXCUSE. I wasn’t drunk. You know what I’m saying?... Can’t explain it other than, *we’re back to*

this again. Years later, we're back to well, there's something wrong with me (Harry at 1795).

Such crises are recounted by some ex-offenders as helping create an awareness about an essential, residual self - one that occasionally surfaces in disturbing ways. Harry took this incident as indicating that he needed specific help with anger management - and did so with the help of one-to-one counselling from a trusted ex-offender and mentor, a stay in a residential treatment centre, and "getting focused" by enrolling in a self-help course and taking college classes.

Crises are preconditions to leaving crime, but two questions remain. First, why are certain crises transformative? Second, how do crises help to resolve the central concern of ex-offenders?

Cumulative crises are traumatic life events which occur over a period of months or decades but do not lead to a reconstruction of self at the time when they are experienced. However, these crises later emerge *in the telling of what life in crime was like* before the decision to go straight. These vignettes illustrate to others the extent to which a former self was disreputable. The message about *how bad I was* or the *traumas I experienced* mean that past crises become a relief against which to describe *who I am* now, lending credentials to the inner changes they report. Self changes are meaningful to the extent that they show a moral expanse between *who I was* and *who I am*.

Cumulative crises further help resolve the central concern of ex-offenders when they provide a response for what might be interpreted by others as a failure to meet the age-expected status and financial well-being which normally accompany a middle-class lifestyle. Despite low earnings, working at temporary or unskilled jobs, or starting late at

university, past crises illustrate that they are “miles from where I used to be”. Previous crises signify how far they have come in life, compared to others of a similar age and gender. Thus, their progress will be favourably assessed for the distance between *who I was* and *who I am*, easing the stigma associated with having a disreputable self.

2. Transformative Crises: Hitting Rock Bottom

The discrete events which comprise cumulative crises are recalled as “not enough” to inspire offenders to change. The requisite motivation occurs within what they recall as “bottoming out” - an existential crisis where the self which they occupy becomes repulsive. The relationship to crime for ex-offenders loses its appeal. Transformative crises and new awareness of self are difficult to capture in a single word but some key phrases speak to the essence of what research participants are saying at this moment: “I hate who I am”, “I’m not who I think or say I am” or “I don’t want to be who I am”. New awareness of self is a deeply unpleasant experience, and leads offenders to seek help from others to become a new self, to begin a new internal conversation about who they are.

The presence of crises constitutes a necessary but not sufficient motive to change, as demonstrated by several offenders who experienced catastrophic experiences as a result of their disreputable lifestyles, but did not interpret these as a moment for change. Jack, for example, nearly bled to death after being stabbed outside a bar during his period of heroin addiction, but that misfortune did not affect his use of heroin and continuing involvement in the drug underworld. It took a seemingly minor conflict with a family member, combined with a moment of critical self awareness to finally motivate him to change. (Eight, or one third of the research participants mentioned a near death

experience during the course of their criminally active lives). Yvonne endured several drug overdoses requiring hospitalization, spent three weeks in a coma: “the nurses told me they thought they were going to have to ‘pull the plug’ [on her life support apparatus]” (Yvonne at 1131). This third overdose became meaningful when it coincided with how she saw herself within the criminal subculture of a large, heroin-using community.

Yvonne: When I was released from the hospital and I went back and there was a big party going on back at my place, like they didn’t care that I was in a coma, like they were still goin’ like, life goes on. And *that’s what really hit me* too, like life goes on, *there’s another junkie dead, so what if it’s my girlfriend, life goes on, let’s party*. So I decided ok, at that time I was getting help... (Yvonne at 342).

Transformative crises are identified as distinct turning points, or the moment when research participants realized they wanted to change. They are mentioned along with accompanying new insights into self, which is what differentiates them from cumulative crises.

Loni’s journey from alcoholism, street life and crime began when she interpreted two crises of a loss of personal control. These events defied the self-opinion and internal conversation which she developed from an early age. A gang-rape (while under the influence of illicit drugs by men whom she thought were her friends), and being held hostage for 36 hours by an associate of an OCG led her to reassess her ability to control her life. Previous encounters with both criminal associates from an OCG and the police did not constitute the sufficient crises to motivate her to change.

Loni: ... I was cock-sure walking through life. I was infallible. Nothing could hurt me or harm me, until this incident where, or these couple of incidents actually, fairly close together, of being raped by so many people and also being kept hostage in my own house for 36 hours. Those two

incidents, very close together, were ah, *they challenged my belief system and I didn't like that because all of a sudden what I had always believed wasn't true anymore* and I really felt it was a matter of survival and I needed to get back to that other place [of being in control] (Loni at 737).

Darryl's violent criminal past was also littered with traumatic experiences, including being shot, stabbed, beaten by correctional officers, suffering a head injury in an accident while impaired, witnessing and being charged as an accomplice to a brutal murder in prison, and being hospitalized for several drug overdoses. None of these events were meaningful catalysts for change until he tried to commit suicide. This experience led him to realize that he was not the autonomous, "solid con" he had always considered himself to be. Years of incarceration in federal prisons and time on the streets (sometimes involved with an OCG) led him to adopt a view that suicide was the ultimate sign of weakness⁵².

Cheryl's break from a middle-class lifestyle included being on the periphery of a powerful and violent OCG, drug trafficking and marijuana cultivation, and cocaine "runs" that lasted for up to five days with no sleep. Even though she did not experience a crisis, her moment of truth came when she found herself contemplating suicide after a drug binge, exasperated by wanting to change herself but not knowing how. That suicidal moment made her afraid of "where her head was at" and she began making immediate arrangements to leave her criminal associates (including a boyfriend) and get help for her cocaine addiction. I asked Cheryl about the significance of people who have suicidal thoughts.

Cheryl: My opinion of them... ah, that they can't handle it, that they're weak, ah, and I guess that's what freaked me out, is that *I didn't want to be weak*, you know, *even though I totally was*, you know, but yeah, I think that's what it is. (Cheryl at 694).

Cheryl's project of self-reformation focused on becoming an independent, strong person with no need for destructive interpersonal relationships or addictive drugs.

Similarly, Francis "turned her life around" after realizing the depths to which her cocaine addiction led her to commit crimes and surround herself with criminal associates, including a boyfriend who convinced her to help steal an expensive sports car and several restricted weapons. The defining crisis for her was when she became aware of how her secret, deviant lifestyle was damaging an otherwise close relationship with her mother. She talks about having to confess to her mother over some stolen money and how it lead to a highly emotional moment for her.

Francis: I looked really like hell and *I had to face my mom and it scared the hell out of me*. I think it was because I had to face my mom that morning 'cause I had been out all night partying my butt off again but with different people but same routine you know and I know I had to face my mom and she hadn't seen me in a long time and her seeing me 20 pounds lighter and like this and then telling her, 'oh mom by the way there's 500 bucks missing from your account'. How are you going to face that? You know, what do you do? So that's when I broke down. I started crying and crying and crying and crying and crying and went and I closed myself off in my bedroom but my mom could hear me crying so she came in and I told her everything. I said 'yeah and I tried to pay you back the money by going [nude] dancing but it was a horrible bar... just horrid. They guys were really rude and they would throw beer at you and stuff like that'. I think being exposed to that too I think was another reality check on my part and the fact that we were getting free drugs all the time. It was like oh my God, *'do you know I'm doing this to pay back money that I stole to do drugs, and that these people are giving me drugs'?* (Francis at 529).

Francis' transformative crisis is described as the moment preceding a firm decision to change her life, with no subsequent backsliding. Throughout her period of crime, Francis was employed in a public safety position, a situation which she says exacerbated the hypocrisy she was experiencing.

Dayna's crisis of self happened when she woke up one morning in a lifestyle of drug trafficking, partying, property crime and tolerating physical and psychological abuse from an intimate partner. She found a cockroach on her leg and recounts feeling suddenly out of place and incongruent with what others around her were doing. She felt morally wrong to be where she was at that point in her life. She immediately began making plans to get help from a woman's shelter.

Dayna: That night we ah had mushrooms... and y'know we're up all night and I went to bed at like 8:00 in the morning or something like that and I woke around noon and I, 'cause I felt somethin' on my leg and there's a cockroach about that big crawling up my leg, and I was still kind of, like high from the mushrooms and flicked it off like that and I looked around my room and I thought *what am I doing here, like this isn't how I was raised, I'm not*, I wasn't raised to be in a cockroach invested hell hole above a bar, fried out my skull, like.... *I thought this isn't right, just not right...* (Dayna at 804).

Dayna's reference point was "how she was raised", pointing to a contradiction between the criminal lifestyle she occupied, and her upper-middle class family headed by professional parents. The contradiction between the deviant self and the "self I really am" forms the dilemma which is characteristic of events which are recalled as transformative crises.

Edward suffered the same type of crisis when he was forced to make a decision about the person he intended to be. An arrest for trafficking in cocaine was not the first time that his involvement in the drug world became public knowledge. It became a crisis during the subsequent term of imprisonment which exposed him to sadistic treatment by other inmates. These experiences are interpreted by Edward for their value in creating new awareness about what he saw himself becoming. He woke up early one morning to

find that during his sleep, another inmate had smeared “shit” all over his pillow. He recounts this experience which helped him understand where his lifestyle was leading.

Edward: I , it was like 3 o’clock in the morning and I went to the washroom and this ASSHOLE had gone and shit on the floor and had taken it and put it on my pillow and I don’t know HOW LONG I had been sleeping in it and how long I laid in it but it made me understand ah, *who I was*, you know, or *who other people saw me as while I was in jail there*. It helped me to understand that in some respects that’s *what I was*, that’s what my life indeed was, *that I WAS SHIT*. That was the interpretation, that was the way that some people saw me (Edward at 896).

Hector’s conversion to a disreputable self began with the emotional and cognitive crises of being found guilty of sexual offences against children. In a single arrest, he fell from being a respected authority in his community to a member of one of society’s most hated groups. Although a similar crisis occurred when his pedophilia came to official attention earlier, these prior events did not involve police intervention or wider public knowledge. His more recent crimes were discovered at a moment when society’s reaction to sexual offences against children was becoming more punitive, a sentiment which was reflected in the decision of the Crown prosecutor to seek the maximum penalty. Over the next few years, he realized - through prison treatment interventions and the self-awareness created in that context - that there was something deeply wrong with the way he had been relating to children, whether he sexually abused them or not. The crises he describes concern realizing the depths of the “cognitive distortions” which he held regarding his sexuality and insensitivity of his behaviour on victims. Thus, while he had other crises relating to his sexual attraction to children, the transformative one was in realizing the denial and stories which he had told himself about the “consensual nature” of sexual activity with child victims.

Self awareness emerging from transformative crises can be subtle. Crime spree and drug binges sent Bill to federal prison for a string of robberies where he was diagnosed as a “sociopath” by the prison psychiatrist. Only 18 years old and sentenced to five years, he recalls listening to inmates’ casual discussions about killing an informant during a previous prison riot. Their conversation left him with a new awareness that he did not belong among this type of people. Despite his occasional tendency for violent outbursts when drinking, the self reflected back through his interactions with inmates in a federal prison contradicted who he understood himself to be.

Bill: Richard and a fellow named Greg R. and they were both lifers and we were sitting having coffee in the morning and there was about 11 of us and they were talking about the riots in [federal prison], back in the seventies, eh. Richard, he says to Greg R., and they have a fair bit of time in, probably 18 years on 25 each or more, eh. And he says, remember back in such and such when we were up, that riot was going on in [federal prison] and he says oh yeah and he goes, remember when I got a hold of that fuckin’ rat up on the second-tier he says. I stabbed this guy seven times through the neck with a welding rod, he says: “Would he die? No!” and then they’d both just like, ha ha ha and I was having my coffee just like this and I just thought, fuck, *I’m in the wrong fuckin’ place here*. I really am, eh, *I was way out of my element*, eh, and I realized - I fought when I was a kid, eh. I could fight anybody. I’d defend myself, if I had to grab a hammer, if the guy was too big and go at it, but killing people, like for fuck all, eh and *I realized that I was way out of my own*, you know, like *that was one of the times where I just really thought that*, eh (Bill at 565).

Almost all of the ex-offenders interviewed for this study reported much the same process of “hitting bottom” and experiencing a moment of new self awareness following a crisis.

D. Types of Exits

Having experienced crises, ex-offenders say they make choices to leave crime through one of two ways which characterize the decision. An abrupt cessation of criminal behaviour is reported by only three interviewees, but the general pattern is change

through an incremental series of decisions over time. The types of exits reported by ex-offenders consists of either a *clean break* and an ongoing process of *going straight*. A clean break means that once a decision is made to leave crime, offenders abruptly end their criminal behaviour, becoming ex-offenders in a single decision. This type of exit was far less likely to be reported, but remains significant because these clean breaks still leave residuals of a disreputable self which constitutes the main concern of ex-offenders. A process of “going straight” is more likely to be the type of exit reported and resolves the main concern in a step-by-step process over time. Both are described below.

1. The Clean Break from Crime

This type of “one-shot” exit significantly addresses the main concern of ex-offenders because there are no subsequent failed efforts to exit crime. Alternatively, if attempts at leaving crime are followed by relapses, these may reinforce the opinions of evaluative audiences who believe that there is something fundamentally deviant about an individual, reform is unlikely, and he/she cannot be trusted. Two of the three research participants reporting a clean break occasionally wrestled with their decision to remain crime-free. However, they sometimes experienced stigmatizing interactions from others who learned of their disreputable pasts, and were subsequently careful about revealing information. The struggle they report constitutes a grounded referent for the residual self, and tells us that there is more to becoming an ex-offender than a firm decision to go straight followed by immediate and permanent behavioural changes.

Hector was convicted of several sexual offences against children and reported a clean break from crime. Being jailed removed him from criminal opportunities, but did nothing to change his sexual preferences. Once arrested, he began an intense treatment

regime to control his pedophilia which lasted several years. He provided me with a history of reports completed by psychologists, treatment experts, community agencies and correctional officials who testified to his promising response to therapy and success on conditional releases in the community. In a behavioural sense, his break from crime was clean, but his self-reformation and identity work continues to this day, much of which involves monitoring his internal emotional and cognitive states to keep watch over *who I was*. Treatment experts told him that he must continually be engaged in “relapse prevention”. For him, a “relapse” does not necessarily mean a return to crime. If Hector begins to have sexual fantasies about children, he would consider that a major setback, and make a renewed commitment to managing his sexual preferences. Thus, the behaviour may abate, but the troublesome residual self continues to pose challenges, either as subjectively experienced, in the treatment they receive from others, or both.

Francis also reported a clean break from crime. After a personal and legal crisis, she immediately stopped seeing her partner and his criminal associates, and quit using and trafficking cocaine after undergoing a “cold turkey” experience. Warren also speaks of a similar “clean break” after serving time in a federal penitentiary for drug trafficking. Despite the apparent clean break from crime where backsliding was not an issue, research participants still indicated a subjectively experienced residual self, notably the concern that others might raise about their formerly disreputable self. Although Francis and Warren report a clean break and thus consider themselves ex-offenders, others may not see them as such, for reasons which I discuss in Chapter 8.

Ex-offenders relate their experience as *becoming a different self*, as opposed to only changing their behaviour. The rarity of a truly clean break from crime tells us that

becoming a different self is seen as necessary by virtually all of the offenders interviewed. (The one exception is Warren, who held the that government's "draconian drug laws" were responsible for his incarceration, not any disreputable aspect of himself). Desistence is an ongoing dynamic process, where steps are taken over time to shed criminal behaviour patterns, change thinking and emotional patterns, and leaving (or spending less time with) associates who affirmed one's deviant status in the past. The more likely scenario for leaving crime is to shed a criminal identity incrementally, or "going straight".

2. The "Going" in Going Straight

Going straight is a process of "phasing out" crime which progresses at different intervals with success and failure, depending on the degree to which respondents embraced a criminal identity which lingers into the present. Going straight may be wrought with failed attempts, trying again and ultimately creating genuinely changed self. The typical exit pattern for offenders is to increasingly abandon social contexts which converge around drug or alcohol consumption, simultaneously receiving varying degrees of help from others, and incrementally distancing themselves from criminal peers. An internal conversation develops which distinguishes *who I was* in the process of becoming *who I am*.

Although there is a transformative crisis to initiate personal change, ex-offenders find they are still left with the same self they occupied prior to the decision to go straight. Others who know them continue to interact in a pattern which affirms the discreditable self which they are trying to abandon. Visible markers are certainly a symbolic and often public link to a bad self, but there are subjective obstacles to overcome as well. Darryl's

comments are illustrative and typical of many ex-offenders whose past selves were enmeshed in crime and addiction.

Darryl: It's [going straight] not been easy, for the first three months [after the decision to change] that I was in Cityville, I cased a bank, every day, I don't know why, I just, *I just checked it out every day*, watched all the comings and goings and got the times down and all the rest of the stuff, I had all the night deposits down. (Darryl at 381).

Part of Darryl was still flirting with the prospect of returning to crime, and this pattern of thinking continued until he had reconstituted his main identity as a drug-addict-turned-addiction-counsellor. He initially went to Twelve Step meetings under the influence of drugs or alcohol. He reports that he "fell off the wagon" and returned to where he thought he fit in: the bar scene in a lower socio-economic area of a mid-sized city.

The commitment to go straight will be made more than once when ex-offenders experience a temporary reconnaissance to drinking, illicit drugs or some emotional or cognitive state which preceded deviant behaviour in the past. Falling back into old ways is a struggle and may involve only temptations, or a temporary return to deviant behaviour, usually for relatively minor crimes (e.g., selling small amounts of marijuana or driving while impaired). The conflict with the residual self is reflected through the incremental gains made in shedding behaviours which ex-offenders now hold to be related to a self which they now disavow.

Dwight, like most of the others, reports a sequence of commitments to leave crime and other problem behaviours, accompanied by new insights and awareness about why he engaged in crime. The process of aging brought with it a vantage point to compare his own upbringing with that in other families, giving him a distinction to see that his own family was, in his words, "dysfunctional". He now holds his parents largely responsible

for inadequacy and insecurity which he experienced in his childhood years, feelings he says underlie his crime spree as a teenager and becoming a “chronic alcoholic” as an adult (Dwight at 90). He captures the struggle with his residual self through a time period where he had put some time between his last offence and another moment in time.

Dwight: *There was always that background, that, you know, temptation here, temptation there but never a full-blown crime ah, I had one conviction in the fall of '74, fall of '73 ah, was a minor hit and run thing, ah fine that was it. You see, that was also a falling down period and I could have easily gone back in [to jail] (Dwight at 170).*

Like most others, Dwight describes the task of leaving crime as struggling with the demands of normal life or *being* normal. It is not just leaving crime, it is becoming a reputable person with the qualifications of middle-class status. Going straight may take ex-offenders into reformatory terrain which they never anticipated in the beginning. For example, Cheryl did not plan to quit smoking when she reached a crisis with her cocaine addiction, but she later came to see them as related.

Cheryl: *Ah, I work out every day at the gym. And I think that all has to do with changing who I was. Like ah, for me, when I decided to stop using crack, I also had to also stop using marijuana, alcohol, ah, CIGARETTES was a huge thing. I had to stop because it reminded me, it was, I was still this same old being and I wanted to be different, ah, I don't eat ah, I don't drink coffee any more and I think that's all part of an addiction process and just ah, I just wanted to change everything about me... (Cheryl at 105).*

Cheryl's account speaks to the perceived need for an identity transformation in order to go straight and stay that way. In one way or another, ex-offenders expressed the desire to become a fundamentally different self.

Jack recounts an amusing story which demonstrates how he had to gradually forsake his past “natural” responses to having no money because it typically went to support a heroin addiction.

JFA: When you decided to go straight, that whole process, were there some changes that you had to make?

Jack: Oh definitely, there's like the first time I went shopping when I got out of [a residential treatment centre]. I pulled into [the supermarket] and I got my little cart and I'm going around I grabbed the large eggs and small eggs and started changing the large egg cartons into the small egg cartons. *That's what I used to do* [when I was an addict] and I stopped, and *I said no, no, no, I am supposed to start totally honest on this program so I put them back, I had to start with little things like that.* Those are things that *just become second nature to you, you know lying and cheating, it's something that you have to do* [as an addict]. And you have to start with the little things...(Jack at 995).

For the ex-offenders, leaving a disreputable self means doing the inner work (or self-talk) to manage the antecedent cognitive states which they believe precede criminal behaviour. Given the lingering nature of the residual self, going straight is predicated as much on living a non-deviant life as it is on having the internal resources to address the social and personal consequences of failing to do so after one has made a commitment. Ex-offenders report that the remnants of *who I was* (or the residual self) dissipates with the support of help and the passage of time.

Another emergent aspect of going straight concerns the influence of criminal peers - which is not present with the clean break described earlier. Interactions with criminal peers may invoke a response from an identity now seen as *who I was*. Former peers have the potential to resurrect a self which previously found expression through interaction within a criminal subculture. Sometimes peers bring with them the means by which to re-enter that place of being, such as alcohol or drugs. For example, one of the most important struggles in severing his life from a criminal past for Edward was a rejection of criminal peers, the meaning of which did not immediately become apparent.

Edward: I was living in the basement suite right on [street intersection] and ah.. a friend came over, he had broken into a drugstore, he had come

over and he knew he was being chased and he needed to DO something with this dope and besides, I WOULDN'T let him in the house. I just said, 'I CAN'T', Ray, I CAN'T let you in'. And he said, 'come on bud, you know, you gotta do this, gotta do that, you know, you gotta help me' and I said 'I CAN'T, I CAN'T, I CAN'T'. And I can remember, right at that door, him doin' that and that was, *I think was the signal for me*, it was a year later, it was a year after this incident, maybe even a little longer and that too kind of said to me, all right, you know, *if you can say NO to these people who you've been so involved with for such a long time then things are okay...* (Edward at 321).

Going straight for Edward meant that he make a decision about his peers and the criminal identity reflected back by them. Shedding old associates in the criminal and drug underworld is part of going straight, and resolve part of the main concern of ex-offenders. Identities of ex-offenders gradually become connected to conventional associates and pursuits. *Who I was* is abandoned through the communicative interactions with non-criminals. (Even the sex-offender in the sample had a criminal peer group which he avoided: other incarcerated sex offenders whom he described as "in denial" regarding the harms they had inflicted on child victims). For those who were addicted to alcohol, heroin, cocaine or amphetamines, the struggle was pronounced and recurring throughout their lives. Three ex-offenders with long periods of abstinence told me about recurring dreams where they were on drugs, but the struggle with the residual self for these people was more typically like the one articulated by Beverly.

JFA: Was it, was it a struggle, or was it a nice clean break?

Beverly: Well I'd like to believe it was a nice clean break but it wasn't. *Emotionally and mentally it was, it was a struggle*, it was because I had no anesthetic, right. I had no anesthetic. I was in pain. That's like - and there was nothin' that I could take that would fix that pain. (Beverly at 786).

Beverly's comments here also reflect the help she has received to understand her use of addictive drugs as a "pain killer", rather than for their euphoric effects or a lack of self-

control. She went on to describe the process of staying clean as something that required daily effort and monitoring her thought processes from an objective standpoint. It was this internal monitoring which allowed her to go straight “in small steps, one day at a time”.

Lance recounts the inner changes he experienced while attending First Nations ceremonial sweat-lodges while serving a federal prison sentence. He became convinced that to really benefit spiritually, he had to change things not directly related to his criminal past, such as smoking marijuana. This was his own initiative because there was no moral obligation from his spiritual mentor about the propriety of using cannabis.

Lance: So now I had to decide, okay, what do I want to do? Do I want to stay with this [ceremonial sweats] or do I want to learn with this [holding fingers as though he were smoking marijuana]? And ah finally I decided well I want to learn because I've tried this one [drugs] before and it didn't take me anywhere else but here [prison] so... but eventually ah, he [the spiritual advisor] started coming more regular, that was like, first he started coming once a month then it was every two weeks, and by the time I left there he was sweating with us every two weeks.... *I wasn't [abstaining from smoking cannabis] but I cut down a lot, it was like ah, and for me now it was like, I was living this lie, right. And I didn't like that feeling and I was getting a conscience and that bothered me too 'cause I never had one before* (Lance at 537).

Lance eventually quit using marijuana after he left prison and continued his involvement in First Nations' spiritual ceremonies and lifestyle.

Crises, struggle (including backsliding), self-awareness and incremental change are integral parts of the self-transformation reported by ex-offenders. Changes are gradual because managing the residual self is a step-by-step process of redefining, resisting or avoiding a deviant identity by not interacting with criminal peers, trying to remain

abstinent from drugs or alcohol, addressing the root causes of their addiction or violence, and making behavioural changes on the basis of a new self.

The time needed to leave crime varied considerably, from a several weeks to well over a decade. The longer periods are notable among those with a deep criminal identity; the process of leaving the impression that for them, going straight is never a finite project. The longer time frames are characteristic of older offenders who tried repeatedly to leave crime or addiction. Harry illustrates this process when he mentions several key junctures in his life which were pivotal in leaving crime: becoming a “hunted man” by an OCG (which immediately caused him to leave behind his criminal associates); being arrested for violent offences and entering treatment for anger management; experiencing a self-crisis after assaulting his spouse; moving to a different province and quitting drinking. These events span more than 20 years.

Leaving crime is not simply the end of criminal behaviour brought on by the biological processes of aging, but an ongoing process of transcending an obstinate, residual self. Offenders who had a deep criminal identity such Yvonne, Larry, Wayne, Brad and Darryl share a similar long-term process in an open-ended journey of self-awareness and conformity to wider social norms and expectations. Offenders who were addicts described themselves as “in recovery” on an continual basis (as does the man interviewed for this study who was convicted of offences against children). The “therapeutic conversation” is to recognize and avoid the antecedent social contexts, emotional states and “stories I tell myself” which facilitated criminal behaviour in the past.

There is an additional property of exits which will be elaborated in the next section. Ex-offenders tell us that new awareness of self follows a transformative crisis leading to going straight. Conventional behaviours and ways of thinking dominate or replace what is described in the present moment as *who I was*. Both this new awareness and the actions associated with going straight are facilitated by forms of *help* which are conveyed in ex-offenders' accounts as being credentials for the new, reputable self. The next chapter discusses this help, and how it resolves the main concern of ex-offenders.

6. From *Who I Was* to *Who I Am*: Help Along the Way

In this chapter I describe the heterogeneous nature of help, including where it occurs, who delivers it, and what it involves. The residual self is an anchor for a discreditable status which cannot entirely be freed from its social and subjective moorings. The problematic conditions created by the residual self vary, as do the solutions chosen by offenders. A woman with a single, past charge for impaired driving is, strictly speaking, an ex-offender. She may experience problems stemming from *who I was* “to do such a thing” from those in possession of shaming information, or those who disqualify her for certain jobs. The help she might seek could come from friends and family members. On the other hand, a qualitatively different residual self exists for a man with a criminal record for assaults, anger management problems stemming from childhood abuse, and a preference for amphetamines. What distinguishes these hypothetical cases is how the residual self is problematic, and what resources can be invoked to resolve the problems created by it. Those with years of addiction or deviant sexual interests, or those whose proclivities for aggression which originate in early childhood will experience more difficulties in supplying credentials about *who I am*. The latter group will use forms of help which are enduring, forgiving, transformative and likely to come from strangers.

All help has an emergent quality which helps resolve the problems of stigma inherent in being an ex-offender. The main concern of ex-offenders is partially or wholly resolved by having credible narratives of change which are genuine to themselves and, for the most part, evaluative audiences such as spouses, friends, acquaintances, employers and the “generalized other” of society (Mead, 1934). The question for a grounded theory of

desistence concerns the issue of what help actually *does*. What features of help make it possible to transcend the stigmatic, residual self?

More than anything else, help establishes the new self. Recall that the basic social process described here is one of becoming reputable by maintaining the discreditable self in such a way that its stigmatic properties are transcended, attenuated or neutralized. These residuals of a past, discreditable self are sublimated or changed in and through the day-to-day, face-to-face interactions with helping others who express through their everyday treatment of ex-offenders that they are no different from the rest. Whatever may have transpired in the past is now overtaken by a trustworthy, genuine self which is no more or less honourable than most others. The sins of the past can be all but forgotten or left untraceable (and thus unknown), and others may be surprised to learn that a disreputable self was ever part of their personal history. The master status becomes the normal person. The intrinsic payoff for leaving a disreputable self is more than transcending crises associated with lives of crime: it means being treated no differently than others, as an entirely acceptable member of society. Thus, ex-offenders will not be subject to any of the disqualifications which have been mentioned previously (i.e., from any employment position where trust is necessary, or travelling abroad). Subjectively, they are freed from the temptations of theft, drugs, alcohol, impulsive violence, or inappropriate sexual expression.

The category of help emerged quickly from the interview data, but one of the analytical problems concerns the heterogeneity of helpers and help experiences. Initially, it seemed difficult to go beyond much more than a thick description to capture features of help. It comes from people within informal social networks such as associates, friends

and family who have varying degrees of involvement in ex-offenders' lives. Help is also provided by those who occupy salaried government positions, employers who knowingly hire ex-offenders, and volunteers and staff from religious and non-profit societies. The latter are often specifically organized to provide services to drug addicts, inmates, ex-convicts, men with anger-management problems, the illiterate, or abused women and prostitutes. Help may come from people who play a role in the crises mentioned earlier, such as paramedics, police, judges, correctional officers and lawyers. Occasionally offenders report first signs of help from criminal peers when their own lifestyles violated deviant subcultural norms (i.e., they "went over the edge"⁵³). Help also varies to the degree to which helping people are formally organized, the relational distance between ex-offenders and the helper(s), and the duration, timing and intensiveness of the help provided.

The physical context where help was found varied considerably. Some ex-offenders reported intensive, residential environments where treatment programs were administered. Correctional interventions were cited for opportunities leading to social integration and sometimes the members who helped facilitate educational or job prospects. Line officers were sometimes described as treating offenders with respect, as different from other inmates, or identifying some positive, pro-social quality. Help is occasionally mentioned as being delivered in small groups (especially Twelve Step groups), but the more likely context was through a one-on-one relationship with a helper. Help for some people came from family members⁵⁴ who remained steadfast in their belief that there was always something essentially good about their son or daughter, and that outside forces had contributed to their time spent in criminal activities.

Ex-offenders report a number of conditions and states of being (*who I was*) which capture the external and inner precursors to change. I mentioned earlier that these conditions prior to the turning point can be described as ones which leave an internal feeling of disgust or “I don’t like what I am” (which in the present becomes *who I was*). The problem at that point is becoming someone else, or not knowing how to change.

Lance: And that’s when I made a choice I guess to make some change in my life. And I did. And *I didn’t know how I was going to change* when I knew I wanted to... (Lance at 405).

Kirk: I felt I was being ah put down or ridiculed or humiliated by somebody. I couldn’t take it and fuck, ah... *but I wanted to become somebody else*, I did (Kirk at 1047).

Beverly: There’s a lot of times that I don’t know WHAT’S NORMAL. I had no idea what normal is (Beverly at 963).

Cheryl: I mean *how do you change your life?* And you know, GOD it was, I just thought, how am I ever going to do this? I mean how DO you change your life? And you know, GOD it was, *I just thought, how am I ever going to do this?* (Cheryl at 480).

Once having reached a point where they bottomed out and were in a position to receive help, ex-offenders say they will take advantage of it.

Help is relevant to a grounded, substantive theory of leaving crime not so much because helpers provide much of the tangible assistance where necessary, rather because they became an indispensable part of *who I am*. The residual self is transcended with help from others, and the intensity of it varies to the extent that the residual self is problematic. Thus, offenders with visible markers and discrediting information will often seek a different form of help than those whose involvement in crime was transient, or can keep their past hidden from public knowledge. Many helpers were people who are experienced in dealing with their own residual selves and become trusted friends and advisors.

resonate with all things good and wholesome: attitudes of contrition and humility, forgiveness, acknowledging a Higher Power, performing amends to others, doing good works, and the triumph of the will over criminal temptation. People who have adopted these meanings are sometimes easy to identify because of their use of common metaphors used in everyday conversation.

The intensity and duration of helping, transformative work varies to the extent to which the residual self is problematic. On the one hand, there are ex-offenders who are covered with tattoos, communicate in a language sprinkled with street or prison argot, manage a narcotics addiction and end up in mid-life with few marketable job skills to signify a middle-class status. These ex-offenders become reputable by adopting an inner conversation which accounts for their residual leftovers from a life in crime. Alternatively, ex-offenders who made a temporary foray into crime and emerged without discrediting information or visible stigmata will reflect a less intensive relationship to help because their residual self is much less problematic.

Who I was is moderated through an internalized conversation which lessens the guilt which arises from feeling that one is a bad person. Imported conversations convey a message of “shared responsibility” for past evils, split between the offender’s deliberative choices and external forces over which she/he had little or no control. Thus, imported conversations have two main properties: sharing the locus of responsibility for one’s past deviance, and the intensity of the commitment which ex-offenders have to helping others. The locus of responsibility can be further categorized as 1) the disease model of addiction, 2) the effect of early childhood experiences on later adult behaviour and 3) metaphysical interventions in the form of God or good fortune. The other main property

of help is the relation which ex-offenders have to it. These help-action configurations can be categorized as transitory, enveloping or having the theme of self-help. It is also evident that some ex-offenders began with enveloping help and progressed to self-help as the problems of the residual self receded. Help also emerges as being available through agencies which are structured to offer help needed by ex-offenders, the availability of which depends on the historical moment in which ex-offenders were in a position to seek or receive it.

For help to be effective, it must have the capacity to be continually present to deal with the temptation to revert to illicit drug use, associate with criminal peers, or lapse into in thinking patterns which ex-offenders see as related to deviant behaviour in which they previously engaged. Help is not primarily about programs, interventions, treatment or therapy, even if it might be offered within those contexts. Successful maintenance of the residual self means that offenders become reputable to others and in their own self-assessments, regardless of their past.

The attractive feature of help concerns the compassionate moral evaluation they receive from others who are in a helping role. Help comes from people whom they describe as “non-judgmental”, meaning that the stigma associated with being a career criminal or drug addict is absent or minimized in their interactions with helping others. The morally attractive position conveyed by helpers is to distinguish the “bad things which you may have done” from the “basically good person you are”. The separation between good people and bad deeds is achieved by invoking themes which convey exculpatory explanations for deviant or criminal behaviour. It matters *who* delivers this message, and the emergent qualities of helpers comes from their ability to relate from

their own residual self to that of others. Most helpers described by ex-offenders have their own histories of crime, street life and drug abuse, but have successfully transcended their residual selves and are now seen as being in a position to advise others. The help from these key individuals was often reported as starting with a professional or therapeutic relationship which changed over time to a personal friendship. The durability of help, and the helper's ability to have flexible expectations about an offender's progress out of crime and addiction, coupled with the non-judgmental evaluation of *who I was* are the salient properties of helpers. They value the experiences which ex-offenders have endured, and helpers encourage them to see their own residual selves as resources for vulnerable others who may benefit from their narratives about the evils of drugs and crime.

The physical evidence which may appear on the bodies of ex-offenders is reconstructed through shared narratives which embrace broad cultural themes of reformation. Thus, it is not tattoos or other visible markers which create dilemmas for ex-offenders *per se*. Rather the task is in creating an internal conversation of reform which eclipses the negative value which these markers might convey to others.

A recurring theme among self-help groups (and many Christian organizations) is that help or love for others cannot begin until one begins to love oneself. But self-love cannot be accomplished in a social vacuum. The old self must first be exonerated for past sins before the acceptance of self can succeed. Instead of seeing themselves as inherently bad, ex-offenders see their actions through a conversation which invokes causal forces such as the disease of addiction, early childhood mistreatment and neglect, sexual abuse as children or teens, learning disorders, and brain injuries. (It is not my intention to take

issue with any of these explanations, only to note that they constitute general features of help). The most frequent type of imported conversation to emerge as a dominant form of help was the disease of addiction.

a) The Disease of Addiction

Ex-offenders (and most of those employed in the criminal justice system) acknowledge the relationship between addiction and crime, as do researchers who have explored this linkage between the two (Califano, 1998; Ouimet and Le Blanc, 1996; Zamble and Quinsey, 1997). Research participants affected by addiction explained their criminal behaviour as inseparable from their use of drugs and/or alcohol. The vocabulary of disease softens the blame which ex-offenders might otherwise endure if drug addiction were seen as a deliberate choice. Addiction is a malady from which the bearer will always suffer; they did not choose the disease, but they can choose to manage it through total abstinence. The twin themes of uncontrollable external forces and personal responsibility for managing the disease of addiction resonate with wider cultural sentiments about the danger of addictive drugs and the power of one's free will to surmount obstacles in life.

The disease model emphasizes personal responsibility and self-control, and the accumulation of deep change through incremental steps, especially for those who participate in Twelve Step and Native spiritual groups. The internal conversation which helpers have about themselves is shared and recreated with others with whom they interact on a therapeutic basis. Offenders who believed that there was something fundamentally wrong with themselves because of the evidence within and around them, hear a new conversation from helpers about why they became involved in crime. This is

not empty advice delivered by the usual moral sites in society, but a caring voice from those “who have been there”. Unlike most educated professionals, helpers may have faced the lure of drugs, street life, social exclusion, and thus have a deeper sense of how it feels to be alienated from the rest of society. Helpers promise to be there “for the long haul” and show, through their deeds, that they genuinely care for those with a disreputable self⁶⁵. One purpose of imported conversations is to overcome whatever cognitive barriers there might be to change. If the locus of fault, or the origin of *who I was*, lie beyond an individual’s control, the stultifying cycle of crime, shame and self-punishment can still be transcended.

As an illustration of an imported, helping conversation, a provincial chapter of Narcotics Anonymous notes that their characterization of addiction as a “disease” is based less on science than it is on its usefulness for recovering addicts.

The Narcotics Anonymous program uses a very simple, experience-oriented disease concept of addiction. Narcotics Anonymous does not qualify its use of the term “disease” in any medical or specialized therapeutic sense, nor does NA make any attempt to persuade others of the correctness of its view. The NA movement asserts only that *its members have found acceptance of addiction as a disease to be effective in helping them come to terms with their condition*. (Narcotics Anonymous - British Columbia Region, Facts About; emphasis added).

Helpers from Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and First Nations tell those seeking assistance that they can seek the help of a “higher power” to come to terms with their addiction. A belief in God or some level of spirituality provides help, especially in moments where human support may not be immediately available – like craving for drugs late at night. The question of whether the disease model of addiction is “true” is not the issue; what matters is that it can help make sense of experiences which many ex-offenders are likely to encounter. These conversations help transcend the residuals of a

past self in a pragmatic way.

Many former addicts made statements replete with axioms, wisdom, sayings and other references to the disease model of addiction⁵⁶. Beverly defined herself from the beginning of the interview in an identity forged from participation in a Twelve Step group, and saw her other activities as secondary.

Beverly: Well, I'm a grateful *recovering member* of Narcotics Anonymous and do say grateful. I've *been clean* for ah, almost nine years, it will be nine years in July, a little more than eight years I guess. And I work and I'm a student (Beverly at 5).

Beverly suggested that addiction was part of a residual self which extended into all aspects of her life: "I can get addicted to watching TV. I can get addicted to eating popcorn, right, it's that obsession, right" (Beverly at 954).

Jerry told me that "alcoholism is a progressive disease, gets worse and worse and worse if you're an alcoholic" (Jerry at 830). While looking at the sunrise one day, Jerry said to God, "Thanks for releasing that hold of drugs and alcohol had over me. You know, that bloody head lock I was in, and geez, you painted a beautiful picture too [laughs]" (Jerry at 872). Invoking the power of God to combat an addiction to alcoholism demonstrates the supernatural power which is seen necessary to free one's decision-making powers from forces over which one had little or no control. Living in the "here and now" or "one day at a time" is a message repeated by Twelve Step groups for their members, and reflected in Jerry's speech.

Jerry: Yeah, that's one thing I learned, is you can only live one day at a time, 'cause you ain't in tomorrow and you ain't in yesterday, only actual time your living is right now (Jerry at 1065).

The total abstinence message from AA was echoed by Harry and Gary. Harry told me that he couldn't go for "one beer" with someone because "it's not the caboose that kills you if you get hit by a train⁵⁷" (field notes). Being an alcoholic is a permanent condition, just like an incurable disease: "I can't do it...not because anything is stopping me, *it's just that I know that I'm an alcoholic* (Gary at 787). The prospect of controlling his drinking is something that neither he, nor other alcoholics in the sample, could imagine. Ambiguity about one's relationship to alcohol or drugs is not an option, nor will it be welcomed by helpers from Twelve Step groups.

Darryl told me that to become an ex-offender he had to "get rid of the clutter" of addiction and alcoholism so that the "real me" could emerge. His therapist told him "the drugs, alcohol and my lifestyle prevented the real Darryl from comin' out, now that all that stuff is gone, I'm startin' to surface (Darryl at 742). This line of thinking –common in many accounts – tells us that becoming an ex-offender has to do with getting in touch with a genuine self which is basically good, were it not for the poisonous influences of drugs and alcohol. "I am basically good – it's the drugs and alcohol which are bad" underlies the meaning of these imported conversations.

I asked Gary if there was any value to our conversation, given that he was overcome by emotion at one point. His response is informed by one of the teachings in Narcotics Anonymous which champions "the therapeutic value of one addict helping another, right, that's what we say in NA, and if this [interview] can help somebody else out, in the long run, it's the same as me goin' into the jail and tryin' to tell people what happened" (Gary at 674). In much the same way, Jack makes sense of his transient relations with women through the wisdom of Alcoholics Anonymous: "I thought I was gettin' all the weird

women in the world when I realized through the AA program that if you don't love yourself, you can't love anybody else and I didn't love myself and that life" (Jack at 132). Another illustration of this imported conversation is the symbolic value associated with abstinence time. Ex-offenders may recall the exact date of their last drink or drug binge. The date takes on significance because for members of AA or NA, life does not really begin until one has stopped using psychoactive substances, and each passing day is confirmation that one has claimed victory over addiction. When the moment comes to define *who I am*, this date can be invoked as a credential for the changes they report⁵⁸.

The conversation imported from helpers who follow a disease model of addiction partially resolves the main concern of ex-offenders. They become able to avoid the stigma of a past life which continues to live into the present. Other conversations can be adapted or combined to provide some measure of escape from evaluative audiences who might otherwise be less forgiving. One such conversation is the effects of early childhood experiences on later adult behaviour.

b) Early Childhood Experiences

Ex-offenders were invited to tell their story from the beginning. This invitation prompted most to begin from childhood, especially those whose lives were characterized by drug addiction and violent crime. Even though they were not specifically asked to begin their narratives from an early age, most did (for a similar pattern of accounts into crime which begin with childhood memories, see Devlin and Turney, 1999). Those who trace the origins of their deviance to early childhood or teenage years narrate a partially exculpatory, self-conversation which features a culturally acceptable account for being a criminal. The discourse they provide concerning the determining influences on their

behaviour may be imprecise, but resonates with cultural knowledge about the relationship between early developmental experiences and later, deviant adult behaviour (i.e., a lay version of sociological or psychological determinism). Beverly, for example, makes the connection between her early teen drinking binges and how it provided a respite from abuse she home.

Beverly: Yeah, ah it was a problem from the very first time I drank, like I was totally out of control. I went out and I guess it was the first day of summer vacation, the first weekend of summer vacation, whatever, and I went out and I got drunk and I got home at 4:00 in the morning so I got grounded for a month and as soon as I got out again, a month later, I went out and got drunk and got grounded for a month. I got I think a total of three days in the whole summer because I was totally out of control with it and it was like because it numbed me, right, *I was coming from a very abusive household like emotionally so I needed something that was going to stop that pain* right, and it worked for me for a long, long time and I guess from about the age of 14 on, *I used anything that I could get my hands on for awhile, as if anything would stop it* (Beverly at 99).

Darryl reports that his gratuitous, violent crime was “second nature” because he “radiated hate”, a condition which he attributes, with the help of a therapist, to his father’s attempt to kill him when he was 13 years old. He was only able to see the connection between his violent behaviour and addiction with the aid of a professional helper.

Darryl: My dad threatened to shoot me when I was about 13 years, 12 years of age, he was gonna shoot me, had the rifle, I was hidin’ in the grass and he was shootin’ over my head, ‘come over here you little fuck, I’m going to kill you’, and I went and seen my therapist and he said at that point in time *that’s when I closed the door, you didn’t feel anything else from that point of time on, all your feelings were anger... survival....* so we had to go all the way back to that - to where *we unleashed that, opened that door* (Darryl at 1452).

Loni reported a background of alcohol abuse, drug trafficking and criminal associations with an OCG. As part of her explanation for why she became a criminal, she

traces her fierce independence and rebellion back to early childhood events with a sexually abusive, violent and unpredictable father. The following episode is one she remembers as a five-year old:

JFA: Can we back up, say to the time that you were living at home with your parents?

Loni: Oh sure, I was a rebellious child. Very, very rebellious. My father ah, *when I was very young, my father used to beat my mother all the time and he used to beat me all the time and turn over my beds on top of me and lock me in rooms for days at a time (...)* He would fly off the handle and ah, my job at that point was to, to tell my mother. Her job was to get all the sharp things and put them away, all the knives and the ash trays and anything that could be used as, as something to be thrown or to hurt her and my job was to gather the other three children together and take them next door to the neighbour's house who would phone the police (Loni at 98 and 116).

During his criminal years, Bill describes incidents where he became angry and "blacked out" while assaulting a victim, sometimes for no better reason than they "happened to be there". In making sense of his violent temper, Bill recounted a very difficult childhood of sexual abuse and neglect when he was made a ward of the state:.

JFA: And how old were you when you were made a ward?

Bill: Ah, seven. Was I seven? Eight. Eight when I was an actual ward. We started doing foster care when I was seven ah and then I was in a foster home with a police officer and his family and when I lived there, it was very abusive there and the fellow was a pedophile and a whole bunch of bad stuff happened.

JFA: The father was a pedophile?

Bill: Yeah, the foster father, the policeman was. Yeah, so I'd keep running away and then I'd get caught sometimes two or three days I'd be out but I'd be breaking into places at night to get food and clothing. I'd steal clothes everyday and this was at about eight and half years old. I stayed there for while first at the home, probably about five or six months before I started running away and then once I started, I kept running away. Like I'd get brought home after two or three days, I'd usually get a really good beating. I'd be gone that night again (Bill at 64).

Although not a violent criminal, Dwight associates his participation in property crime and alcoholism to conflicts with his mother and older siblings, and a father who “was never there”. Lance was too young to remember the events of being separated from his parents, but he still draws the linkages between his criminal self and experiences in years past.

Lance: When I was about a year old, ah, I think this was, you know, *has been a big part of why I started or why I felt like I needed, ah, to get into crime* and I was like a year old and my mother was going to sell me to some gypsies that were roaming through that area and they were buying babies for their ah, you know for their own family, new blood kinda thing. So I was gonna be for sale, right. And I didn't know this then but my grandfather went to me and ah, took me out of my mother's house and he said you're not giving this baby away and he brought me to his home and raised me, and you know, my grandparents raised me (Lance at 16).

In the latter part of my interview with Priscilla, I asked her if there was anything else which she wanted to add. Priscilla's narrative of entering and leaving crime was different from many of the others because she took a high level of personal responsibility for both entry and exit. But she adds, almost as an afterthought, the following explanation for her attraction to addictive drugs.

JFA: Is there anything that we've missed in that story of your life?

Priscilla: Oh, I don't know.

JFA: That you think is important.

Priscilla: When I was five, I was sexually abused. I doubt if that would help.

JFA: Was that by a relative?

Priscilla: No, we went to, my mom was like my dad but I was five and so we started going to baby sitters and it was a baby sitter.

JFA: A male?

Priscilla: Yeah.

JFA: How would you see that experience as shaping or having an influence in your life?

Priscilla: Ah I think, *from what I think how it works, ah I think it's part of why I started using [drugs] and part of my theory around sexual abuse* is once you start going through puberty, you start to feel different things and you feel sexual things and you don't know if they're okay and you don't know what's okay. And *so a lot of that feeling stuff, I tried to numb which I think put me on a path to, and some form of addiction* (Priscilla at 1306).

My intention here is not to quarrel with the integrity of these accounts about why people enter crime, but only to draw attention to a recurring feature in the narratives. The presence of explanations which help to understand the residual self (“why I was they way I was”) is a feature in all but one of the interviews⁵⁹. Most offenders sought some form of professional help during or after they made the decision to go straight, and came to believe their problems originated in early childhood under conditions over which they had diminished or no control. Professional and therapeutic help of this sort ameliorates the moral culpability for *who I was* (“It’s no wonder you turned out the way you did”). However, there is a concurrent message in these imported conversations, especially of the Twelve Step variety. Help from these sources do not excuse ex-offenders for their past deeds. Instead, help encourages them to become accountable, to take responsibility and control of their lives and not to blame others. Ex-offenders are cautioned by helpers not to seek help to temporarily address a crisis. Help is something they must genuinely want, and should not be taken to satisfy the expectations of a third party such as a wife, mother or child. It was common to find more than one imported conversation in a single interview which traced a casual path from childhood abuse to drug addiction and crime.

Helpers provide a “vocabulary of explanation” for ex-offenders, one which can be used at both moments of the residual self: externally for those who get to know ex-

offenders, and subjectively to counter any guilt associated with having done bad things.

Self-worth and dignity can be restored once the external forces are identified which led to the deviant behaviour in the first place.

c) God and Good Fortune

Many offenders mentioned help which incorporated spiritual aspects, unexplainable coincidences, fate or luck which helped in the process of leaving crime and remaining crime-free. A common view among those who had the supports of self-help groups as a feature of their exit was the idea that their past was journey through crime and redemption and *was planned that way* for some greater good. More than anything else, imported conversations featuring metaphysical help address any suggestions by external audiences that years spent in addiction, on the street or in prison constituted a waste of one's life. If it was "planned that way" by a Greater Power to make an emissary for unfortunate others, the time spent in crime is not wasted, but valuable for a particular type of helping work. Darryl and Jack illustrate this imported conversation in the passages below.

Darryl: Well, I believe the concept, everything that I've done, and everything that's been done to me, had to be done exactly that way, or it wouldn't be sitting here in this chair talking to you today, *it's already been planned*, my life has been planned, and I'm not finished, I'm just startin', and I believe that very strongly, because anywhere in that important part of my life, if things would change, or something changed along the way, I wouldn't be here talkin' with you today (Darryl at 1863).

Jack: That's another thing that I believe is, you know, even my sponsor as well, ah, *he was given cancer for me*, but *I was put* into his situation to help me... *I was put* into that situation where it helped me stay [straight] because I was too busy takin' care of him and his wife to even have a chance to get out and screw up and I learned a lot from him so I still believe, that's another thing I believe is, *I was put in that situation for a reason*, he wasn't killed or written off for me, but *I was put in his situation to help me* and that's another thing. I, I really believe in a higher power,

that *this was all a plan*, this is, I was ah, everything was made easy for me (Jack at 854).

Just as God is understood to provide the help necessary for leaving crime, luck and good fortune are interpreted in a similar way. Gary remarks on the magical aspects of being “down and out” with no place to live when he had a house given to him by a Christian lady which became part of “too many coincidences” in his life at the time (Gary at 485).

Yvonne recalls the spiritual help she received from the Creator when she went “cold turkey” to overcome heroin addiction, and how her spiritual development with the First Nations community sustained her. She was “reborn” during a ceremony at a counselling centre. This experience allowed her to “take a deep breath and say wow, I don’t need to remember all that stuff that has gone... it’s something that I can’t change, it’s like the serenity prayer⁶⁰, I always remember that whenever I have a tough time” (Yvonne at 774). Two aboriginal men in the sample also spoke about their conversion in a way that draws from First Nation spiritual teachings⁶¹. Lance talks about his redefinition of what it means to be an Indian, based upon the teachings and wisdom of the Creator.

Lance: What I was told [by his First Nations spiritual leader] was, dope is not part of being an Indian, dope or alcohol, you know, or abusing any substance. *It’s not part of being an Indian.* Part of being an Indian is, is what you’re learning in this process which is learning about life, learning about living life in a good way and being kind in caring to all things, especially yourself and to be kind yourself means you don’t put that stuff into your body, right (Lance at 563).

A final illustration of the kind of sense-making conversations which ex-offenders adapt comes from Beverly. She moved across a province to be closer to two family members who had been supporting her dependent lifestyle, including their unwitting financing of a cocaine habit. Although she had no intention of leaving drugs and crime by

moving, things turned out differently when she met helping others who eventually provided the imported conversation she used to transform *who I was*.

Beverly: I was going to go there just to, you know, my mother was there so she had all the money right [laughs]. It was a good place to go and ah, interestingly, it was like, I don't know, *I believe in a higher power and I believe that you're sent to where you need to be* and ah, I got a job. When I first got there, soon as I got there I got a job working in a restaurant and every Friday night this gang of people would come in at the same time, about ten o'clock at night. There must have been 20 or 30 of them right, and they all sit around and drink coffee. They were having a great time and I thought, what a bunch of weird people [laughs] right. Well they were all clean, right, and *they were part of the reason I ended up cleaning up* because they were, they were recovering addicts that were in the Twelve Step programs, right and just kind of cart-wheeled, right.

The grounded theory method helps to discover the substantive qualities of help. But we might ask if *all* thinking expressed by ex-offenders about the process of help constitutes an "imported conversation", and that any good theory must state the conditions under which theoretical statements would not apply. Had the data reviewed for this study shown that ex-offenders simply *chose* to leave crime, without further elaboration, then the role of exculpatory discourses would neither be found nor become part of the explanation. To the contrary, leaving crime requires a culturally acceptable explanation for evaluative others, otherwise the main concern of ex-offenders could not be achieved. The accounts which are offered to people like myself are internally consistent with the lifeworlds of ex-offenders. They make sense to others who listen because the narratives resonate with popular discourse about human change experiences: a progression of events consisting of confession, taking responsibility, making amendments and achieving credentials to validate *who I am*. JFA

Help has other properties which emerged from the conversations with ex-offenders, specifically around the intensity of help which they engage to become reputable.

2. Relationships to Help

The second emergent feature of help concerns the *relationship* which ex-offenders have to helpers, time and effort spent in structured setting such as Twelve Step associations, native spirituality groups and religious organizations. There were three categories in these relationships to help: i) a transient or fleeting relationship, ii) enveloping, and iii) a relative absence of help where ex-offenders report a high degree of agency in going straight. A fourth aspect which shapes the possibilities for having a relationship to help concerns its structural supports, as reported by ex-offenders. Structural help refers to social welfare agents (or volunteers working under their direction) who are informed by an social welfare ideology as they go about helping clientele identified to be in need.

Many ex-offenders spoke about the intervention of social agency workers, mentors, family members, mental health professionals or a Higher Power, some or all of whom continue to exercise a helping presence in their lives on an ongoing basis. Others described help in more finite terms, having received it and moved on. Thus, relationships to help vary from transitory, which has an occasional or finite character, to help which is enveloping and permanent. Ex-offenders who sought transitory help are more likely to present themselves as having become reputable person and see it as a completed project (except for the fear of discovery, or the possibility that some failure will be traced by others back to some essential, disreputable quality of their past self). Alternatively, those whose relationship to help is enveloping have an ongoing commitment with helping others in a continuing project of self-reformation.

The third relationship to help which emerged, but to a lesser extent, is self help. This is where a higher degree of agency is evident in the decision and selection of assistance which was instrumental in going straight. The resources which they use to leave crime lie within their own will and decision-making.

a) Transitory Help for the Not-So-Bad

For some offenders, especially those whose residual selves are comparatively unproblematic (i.e., they are not addicts or violent offenders), the decision to change is influenced through, and is supported by, actively seeking out a network of friends and associates who support conventional values. Ex-offenders in these situations will incrementally create a composite picture of *who I was* and *who I am*, based on their interactions with others (including supportive family members) who help shape the self-image of a temporarily errant but otherwise good person. Transitory help has a defined end-point and has corrective rather than maintenance-like properties characteristic of the enveloping help discussed below. Transitory help can be a repertoire of imported conversations to be summoned at any time to explain one's involvement in crime, the moment of change, or how the past has worked to produce a better human being.

Peter's criminal lifestyle never came to the attention of the police, but he reports a downward slide into property crime and drug abuse before experiencing a self crisis which led to the decision to seek new friends, get a job and enter university. Peter describes a cycle of self-hate and guilt, where he would try to quit using drugs but always seemed to "fall off the wagon".

Peter: I was sick of letting myself down and, you know letting, you know, the people that care about me down as well but it was, but *I hated saying to myself*, you know, I'm not ah, I'm not that bad but I'd say, you know

like, I quit, whatever, I quit selling this. I'd quit doing this but two days later I'd fall off the wagon so it was just this guilt, unbelievable (Peter at 242).

The self-crisis was exacerbated by the realization that his criminal peers were “going nowhere”, despite their potential (Peter at 306). He recalls the change where he experienced a self which he now describes as “who I really could be” when he temporarily left his hometown and was treated with admiration and respect by a young woman with whom he had a brief relationship. For the first time in his adolescent years, he was away from the network of peer relations and influential adults who defined him as a “loser”. He began to see himself in a new way. He used this newer experience of new self to connect what high-school teachers had said to him, specifically that “he could be anything he wanted”, that he was “really a decent person with a lot of potential”, and his problems occurred because he was hanging around with the “wrong crowd”. The turning point for Peter occurred one evening when he was able to share his “real self” with a new friend after a soccer game. He saw his future in a capacity for helping others based on *who he was*, rather than using old self-images which had previously confirmed a deviant identity:

JFA: When you made that decision to disassociate yourself from other people [the criminal peers], did you talk about that, about what you wanted to do, to anyone else?

Peter: I did actually. We, my older friend of mine, that ah, you know, was kind of sitting on the fence, getting right in there and kind of being a, you know, going to school and keeping out of trouble.... We're sitting there and just me and him at the time and I just said, you know, ah, you know I expressed how I felt and he said, and then I, you know I, it came to me right at that point, that you know, I, it was almost like an instant transition, that ah, you know, I want to go from this to almost helping people that are into the same situation, kind of like a social worker... (Peter at 319).

Help for Peter involved interactions which were limited in duration and intensity: a generalized identification with conventional people, brought on by the “you-can-be-anything-you-want” self mirrored through the comments of teachers, friends, and an intimate acquaintance. When Peter’s older friend (mentioned above) moved away, he continued to associate with law-abiding people, apply for jobs and enrol in university. The residual self - *who I was* - still exists in the memories of a few others and their communication styles with Peter, and he still experiences the occasional urge to use cocaine. However, he has defined his past as a resource for helping others and no longer identifies with his past.

Dayna shows a similar pattern of dipping into help in a finite way. The crises wrought by her involvement with an abusive boyfriend, criminal peer associations and drug abuse were eased through a temporary stay in a woman’s shelter. She says her parents “who never gave up on me” rescued her from a network of criminal associates. The imported conversation she adopted to make sense of her past life of drug abuse and to no longer remain in the company of violent men came from helpers at the woman’s shelter. Dayna’s father drove half way across a province to retrieve her from this transition house and, once home, her whereabouts were concealed until her family could move her to another province, thereby protecting her from both the lure and retaliations of criminal peers. Helpers at the women’s shelter left her feeling as though she gained enough insight into her proclivity for abusive men so as to avoid “those kind of guys” in the future. The transitory nature of the help she now requires for going straight is reflected in her comments about how she uses a Twelve Step program.

Dayna: Yeah, like I can’t say I will NEVER ever do cocaine ever again, I would like not to... and ah, like I said that I mean you get a craving, I

guess it's like [inaudible] I used to drink an awful, I mean I still drink, but *I'm not an alcoholic*, ah at one time I had a problem with alcohol so now if I can, *if I see myself and I'm usually the first one to see myself slipping back into it, I go to AA meetings*, yeah and ah, or if someone else says Dayna I think you're drinking too much I stop right away.

JFA: Can you go to AA kind of like on a part-time, casual basis?

Dayna: They don't like that [laughs]. They want, yeah, like they don't want you to go out and have a beer which, which I'll do but it's not, see I can, *I see the difference in my self, wanting to have fun and needing to have fun so when I need to drink that's when I have to stop myself* (Dayna at 1364).

She has learned to distinguish, through the Twelve Step sessions which she attended, the difference between using alcohol to “have fun”, and using it out of a “need to drink”.

A remarkable story of change was told by Yvonne who had a five year immersion in the drug trade in a large Canadian city. She made initial steps to remove herself from the geographical context of drug trafficking, abandoning a highly abusive male partner, then actively seeking friends to support her through cold-turkey withdrawal. She took from helpers in various Twelve Step groups only what she needed to progress, ultimately choosing friendship and spiritual support from a Native organization. She shows a pattern more typical to female respondents, that is, selecting degrees of help to meet the instrumental requirements of leaving crime, gradually adopting more transitory and fleeting forms of help. Thus, even for some ex-offenders whose identity was immersed in criminal drug subcultures, help could be enveloping at first and later move to more transitory patterns of occasional help. Once they were able to learn from helping others about their internal precursors to alcohol and drug abuse, they attended fewer Twelve Step meetings and remained abstinent.

Those who used transitory help were also likely to report avoiding certain social contexts where they might become tempted to drink or use drugs. Contact with a sponsor would become less frequent, and they often took on roles where they helped others. The act of talking about the means to become abstinent and crime-free also meant committing themselves to abstinence in the eyes of others.

b) Enveloping Help for the Hardcore

The emergent category of help discussed here concerns its concentration, or the degree to which helping *envelopes* the ex-offender in terms of how they use their time, and the discourse about self reflected in the interview. Those who use the resources of enveloping help demonstrate this property in their weekly or daily activities. This typically means a continual monitoring of “what’s going on inside me”, having social networks which include a sponsor and other Twelve Step members, and an ever-present, imported conversation. Enveloping help has no end-point, and is seen as necessary for the duration of the ex-offender’s life in order for them to remain crime-free. This help exposes ex-offenders to partners who are always available, and small group forums to share insights and strategies for resolving problems left over from years of crime, addiction and alcoholism. For a few, their social lives completely revolve around Twelve Step groups and friends who are similarly committed to reform.

From what I can gather from the interviews, a typical day for an ex-offender with an enveloping relationship to help begins with reflective meditation and self-care. They call a sponsor to ‘check in’ and remain as transparent as possible to others about “what’s going on in my head”. (Sponsors are always available for help). The cravings for illicit drugs or alcohol, or the emotions and cognitive thinking styles which have characterized

the past self are constantly identified and overcome through speaking with others who “have been there”, such as a sponsor.

As an illustration of enveloping help, Jerry’s case is characteristic of ex-offenders who have imported a conversation of early childhood experiences to make sense of their involvement in crime. His exit from a prolific criminal past involving drug trafficking and violence was facilitated by several sources of help: a free employee assistance plan for counselling services, paid leaves for addiction treatment, a tolerant corporate employer, a Twelve Step group and daily contact with a sponsor, a sympathetic physician who prescribed non-narcotic pain medications, a supportive spouse who “never gave up” – even when he was abusive towards her, and new responsibilities given to him by a trade-union executive to work with others who also experienced addiction problems. Friends and neighbours had been told that he was going to Twelve Step groups, and they were discouraged from offering him a beer (by his abstinent wife). Help was enveloping from several different groups and structured resources.

Enveloping help may begin with an intensive, residential intervention, or moving from the area of criminal involvement to another province for treatment. Allison and others showed this pattern of conversion, beginning with intensive residential treatment for drug addiction and then continuing to redefine themselves with the support of a Twelve Step group.

Hector, diagnosed as a pedophile, experienced an intense treatment regime to alter his sexual urges. He was encouraged to understand his own emotional manipulation and thinking patterns which permitted the victimization of children. He became aware of the stories he told himself to rationalize his crimes (i.e., “cognitive distortions”), the internal

and external cues which preceded offending. Help meant exposing and becoming conscious of the first precursors to his 'offence cycle' and actively preventing a relapse to crime through a number of psychological and social strategies. Once back in the community, a group of knowledgeable and supportive people in close proximity to him monitor his social life to ensure he remains committed to his treatment regime (e.g., "relapse prevention").

Help is more than just the words of someone else's conversation which ex-offenders have decided to believe. Help *becomes the self* as they actively re-create themselves in a symbolically rich, internal conversation. They become what they believe. Lance best describes this process of self-monitoring and the internalization of help.

JFA: Is that change something that you expect on a daily basis?

Lance: It's not about expecting it, it's, it's having faith that it's happening and knowing that it's happening and so your relationship which is constantly changing... you keep track of through that vision, looking inside. How am I feeling? What am I doing? How am I reacting? What are my thoughts around this? *And that becomes finally, an in-grown, it's like it's inside you and it's like constantly in motion and constantly happening all time, reading what's going on.* And I do that all the time and *it's now automatic, it's not a conscious thought anymore.* And that comes from practice, practice (Lance at 994).

c) Autonomous

The transcripts reveal different degrees of wilful decision-making in the decisions of ex-offenders to leave crime. Autonomous or self help constitutes a different relationship to oneself than the other two, as the self is objectified to be a helper. It is reflected in statements about "how and why I changed" which were coded for their declarations about being decisive, knowing what needed to be done, and doing it. A firm commitment to change was a notable feature for some, even within the presence of other helping agents.

This focus on the triumph of the will stood out and against forms of help which were enveloping features of imported conversations, discussed above. The coding process here captures elements of rational planning, such as moving away from the social context of crime, leaving a criminal boyfriend, or going “cold-turkey” without medical assistance.

Edward’s decision to get out of the drug world occurred after having experienced two “near misses” by undercover police for possessing narcotics. Believing that the first two brushes were due to luck (while on conditional release for a cocaine trafficking conviction), and that there would be no third chance, he severed his last remaining drug connections when a former criminal associate sought his assistance in hiding from the police:

Edward: I was a student as well and that night, man I just saw it all just go away and I was NOT PREPARED to allow that to happen and I was lucky and I could not see, John, I could not see a third time. I mean I knew... that I was lucky twice. I could not see it happening again. A third time... no, it just wouldn’t happen. So that was I think THE defining moment for me. (Edward at 691).

His exit from crime was occurred after he realized that his future in a chosen profession would be jeopardized. At this stage of his life, Edward had already made contacts in a Canadian post-secondary institution and had mapped out an educational and career plan. It would have been highly irrational for him to jeopardize his future at that point in his life.

Four of the women (Yvonne, Loni, Priscilla and Cheryl) became immersed in crime and drug use through their association with men in intimate relationships. Once they decided to leave that way of life, they abandoned the relationships and made autonomous

decisions to leave crime. Priscilla talks about when she told her boyfriend (who was also her “pimp”) that she was cleaning up – with or without him.

Priscilla: I said, you know, we’ve got to clean up our lives or we’re, or you’re going to have to go [laughs].

JFA: You’re laying down the line to [your boyfriend]?

Priscilla: Yeah. Because there’s still incidents where he would be drunk or whatever and smack me around and stuff like that, so...

JFA: Was that one of the things that you wanted him to change?

Priscilla: Yeah. Yeah, so I said, you can’t be doing that anymore and he left when I was about three months pregnant.

JFA: So you gave him an ultimatum and he took the ultimatum, he left?

Priscilla: Yeah, yeah. (Priscilla at 902).

Yvonne’s exit from crime was similar as she resisted the temptations and threats made by a boyfriend who introduced her to the street life in a large city and the euphoria of opiates. She told him she was moving to another city and “if you [want to come along with me... I’m going straight]”. He told her to “have another shot of liquor and you’ll be fine” but she responded “I’m serious, I’ve had it” (Yvonne at 348). She left that day and never returned.

Cheryl’s exit was preceded by crises including the debilitating effects of cocaine addiction, associations with an OCG, fear that the police had intelligence about her role in drug trafficking operations, and a deteriorating relationship with her significant other. In her view at the time, all of these had to go in order for her to get control of her life. After a five-day drug binge where he became “abusive and manipulative”, she found herself contemplating suicide because it seemed the only way to abandon the self which she was becoming (Cheryl at 482). She immediately sought family and friends who

provided avenues for leaving crime. Although Cheryl initially used the support of a Twelve Step group, she gradually disengaged from their social activities. Loni's exit is similarly self-driven, and she attributes the motive to her own firm resolve to stay free of crime.

Loni: With the alcohol I was out of control often and I didn't like that so that was one of those first changes that I wanted to make in my mind.

JFA: Interesting. Were there other people around that you could talk to about what you were going through or was this just something that –

Loni: No *I just did that on my own*. I felt, see I had, my husband today says that I have, that my constitution is scary is because it is so strong and I agree, I know that I'm not, not that it's scary but I know that it's very, very strong and I knew that way, way back, even before I quit drinking. *I knew that I could do whatever I decided to do*. And I still have that, that underlying thought with whatever I choose a challenge in my life that I, *I can do anything*. (Loni at 689).

By taking responsibility for themselves and pledging to address the problems which brought them into deviance, some ex-offenders embrace a conversation of personal responsibility which is attractive to external audiences and is thus likely to address the stigmatic aspects of the residual self. They tell a story which others will likely receive, especially those who are sceptical about the positivistic thrust of accounts featuring the disease of addiction and adult outcomes of early childhood abuse⁶². The reformed have “made it on their own” through cultivating only the help they need to leave crime.

Priscilla discusses her relatively autonomous decision to leave addiction and prostitution.

JFA: Was there somebody that you think was especially influential in your decision to clean up your act? Any one person?

Priscilla: *Yeah, me [...]* I actually isolated myself like I was living in downtown Metroville and ah basically in this Apple Hotel or Apple Apartments where there's a lot of, it's a drug house. It's a crack house so I basically lived there and *I just left it* and turned my pager off and I would

only talk to my boyfriend... I *just isolated myself* and *started a different network of people...* (Priscilla at 991; 1382).

Priscilla knew the problems she faced and how they could be resolved through a new network of peers. She also reports that her struggle with addiction was confronted through self-diagnosis and her own choice of medication to alleviate withdrawal symptoms. Her remedy consisted of a daily dosage of “30 Tylenol 3s just to help with heroin addiction and the cocaine addiction” (Priscilla at 1416). Priscilla exemplifies a “go it on your own” exit which involved some degree of outside help, but she was very selective in what help she would accept. Her conversation features a determination and agency to resolve the residuals of a past self which sets her apart from others. Not only did Priscilla go through opiate withdrawal and use her own resources to quit prostitution, drug addiction and crime, she rejected the Narcotics Anonymous portrayal of addiction as a disease.

Priscilla: One of my problems with it is, it’s a disease type model. ‘Oh I have a disease’ and to me that sounds like an excuse. It’s like, I’m a big believer in you have choices. I’m kind of Aristotelian in that way [laughs]. And I’m like, whoa, *sure it’s a disease but you made the decision to do that* and so I have a problem with that... (Priscilla at 1449).

Similarly, Yvonne reports that she had tried A.A. but reports “I went through my withdrawals, I tried going to A.A., that didn’t seem to work for me” (Yvonne at 629).

Those who left crime autonomously help recall their crime period as “a phase I went through”, or a series of experiences which contributed to a deeper wisdom about themselves and the world. Traces of the residual self are addressed more independently than other ex-offenders, and they are less dependent on externally supplied conversations by self-help agencies. Help from the usual sources is rejected or idiosyncratically tailored

to meet their needs. They find what works, sometimes adapting parts of a program, or participating only enough to get the help they feel they need. They establish networks of new friends, abandon destructive relationships, quit using drugs and adopt a personal philosophy which reflects *who I am*.

The exercise of “doing what I know is best for me” includes severing close associations with people who threaten *who I am* when they invoke the previous self. Cheryl’s decision to discontinue a relationship with a boyfriend was one she believed necessary for becoming a new person. Her boyfriend was heavily involved with an OCG in marijuana cultivation, possessing restricted weapons, money laundering and trafficking cocaine. She left him to begin a new life and he tried to lure her back to the same self-defining lifestyle which she left:

Cheryl: There were times when [her estranged boyfriend] would come to see me and we’d go for a walk together or something, meanwhile I’m clean, and he’d say, you know, come back, come back and I almost did several times but I KNEW, in my heart, that *I could not do it and be with him at the same time* because it was too, that lifestyle was too ingrained in our relationship (Cheryl at 578).

Although Cheryl was involved in both Narcotics and Alcoholics Anonymous to ease out of her involvement in the drug underworld, she later became selective in what she could take from this resource. She tired of looking at herself and just wanted to be. “That’s one thing about that, is that you’re forced to look at all of the choices that you make and all of your motivations and why and blah blah blah [laughs] you know. Sometimes it’s ah, it’s nice to take a break from it, you know” (Cheryl at 72).

Peter’s exit from crime can be categorized as incorporating a self-help relationship based on his own rational, cognitive assessment about his future. (His narrative was also

devoid of any of the imported conversations which are characteristic of offenders who showed a deep identity with criminal values):

Peter: Another reason [for leaving crime] would definitely be, is ah, my parents are, they're both retired and their financial situation is, not, they don't really have one, right and I was worrying about, you know, what am I going to do? I can't maintain a so-so, you know *I can't get by on selling drugs, that's ridiculous kinda thing*. So I ah, *I made the choice to, to get into school* [university] and ah, and *disassociate, that's what I call it, from my older friends* (Peter at 260).

The declaration that change had occurred because "I made a choice" was a form of rationality which was inconspicuous among the group. When it came time to making the choice between abstinence and using cocaine, Peter's description of what happens next is without any reference to an imported conversation from Twelve Step groups.

Peter: I think it's with the more alcohol ah, I've consumed, the weaker I become too. But I mean there's been numerous occasions where *I just said no*, you know, come on in the bathroom kinda thing on the, [cocaine] on the counter. *Like no it's okay, I'll just pass* (Peter at 674).

Dwight portrays a similar relationship to self-help in the following passage.

Dwight: He [a retired RCMP officer who knew him from the past] was the first one to ask me HOW I got away from crime. And I told him, because *I never looked back*. I reflected on it but *I never WENT back* (Doug at 236).

Dwight refuses to occupy the same self which he believes led him to crime in the first place. He indicates a self-directed process of leaving crime accomplished through reflection, reading psychology textbooks and developing networks of people who hold conventional norms. For those who showed determination and autonomy in the process of becoming, there was often evidence in other dimensions of their lives of the same qualities.

Loni: When I quit smoking it wasn't difficult either. I quit, [snaps fingers] like that without looking back and I never - I bought two packs of smokes afterwards just in case I changed my mind but I never did. I gave them away three months later, yeah (Loni at 721).

Although the category of self-help was evident in several accounts of ex-offenders, it could be tied to an experience which provided the strength to become a different person. Lance talks about a situation where he was able to resist drugs because of an earlier spiritual experience, linking the imported conversation of First Nations spirituality to changes in his decision-making ability.

Lance: I couldn't understand this feeling I had. I just felt so sure of myself and so positive and so, you know, nothing could hurt me. And I went over the following weekend to visit my brother over there and walked in over at that house there and he had all this dope. He had coke, heroin, you know, pot, pills, anything I wanted. He says, what do you want? And I said, nothing and *I wouldn't have been able to do that if I didn't go to that sweat and get that whatever it was* (Lance at 704).

To summarize, ex-offenders report the essential features of help as being the adoption of conversations which are taken from interactions with helping people. These shared meaning systems facilitate transcending or maintaining the residual self in such a way that a normal status is created, or restored in part or whole. Even for those ex-offenders who might be covered with tattoos and other notable reminders about the residual self, these markers are interpreted as credentials, signifying a former self left behind, provided these symbols are interpreted as such through the helping self-talk of imported conversations.

There is at least one more relationship which ex-offenders could have to help, and that is the degree to which help is supported structures of culture, programmatic initiatives in the public sector, and the wider public.

d) Structural

The context in which going straight occurs cannot be divorced from the political and socio-economic factors which support wider discourses of reform. A recent paper published by the US Department of Justice notes that about 600,000 offenders will be released annually as the result of “get tough” policies associated with sentencing reforms in the past two decades (Petersilia, 2000). Between 1986 and 1997, average federal prison sentences increased from 39 to 54 months (“Coming to a Neighbourhood Near You”, 2001; see also Ripley, 2002). The consequences of this prison exodus will have extensive effects on community cohesiveness, social disorganization, families, and the numbers of homeless. Many ex-offenders will be politically alienated: in 1998, 3.9 million US voters were permanently barred from voting because they had been convicted of a felony, which includes 13% of all black men in the United States. The sentiments which led to these policies foreclose opportunities for social integration. Petersilia (2000) notes that in

California... [ex-offenders] are barred from law, real estate, medicine, nursing, physical therapy, and education. Colorado prohibits them from becoming dentists, engineers, nurses, pharmacists, physicians, or real estate agents. Parolees are not barred from all jobs, but the list of proscribed professions suggests a contradictory approach. The States spend millions of dollars to rehabilitate offenders, convincing them they need to find legitimate employment, but then frustrate what was accomplished by barring them from many kinds of jobs (p. 4).

The opportunities and resources for ex-offenders are diminished by public attitudes, reflected in a recent survey of employers in the United States. Sixty-five percent said they would not knowingly hire an ex-offender, regardless of the offence, and another 30 to 40% said they had checked the criminal records of their most recent employees (Petersilia, 2000: 3-4). Comparable, recent data in Canada about employers’ willingness to hire ex-offenders are not available⁶³. Although direct comparisons are problematic, the

situation in Canada may be less difficult for formerly imprisoned ex-offenders. The federal correctional system is structured to facilitate reintegration through conditional releases such as accelerated parole review, day parole, full parole and statutory release. Rehabilitation is still promoted in Canadian correctional policy (Bonta and Cormier, 1999: 239) and there is evidence that Canadians believe that assisting offenders to rehabilitate should be an important purpose in sentencing (Doob, 2000: 329, Table 1) and parole (Samra-Grewal and Roesch, 2000).

Coding the transcript data revealed passages which draw attention to opportunities for leaving crime which were connected to the historical moment in which they occurred. Structural help refers to institutionalized social welfare practices such as community corrections or intervention programs that are particular to the historical and social conditions in which ex-offenders decided to leave crime. Some examples will be provided below.

The time frame through which my sample of ex-offenders entered and left crime spanned nearly forty-five years, from the mid 1950s to the late 1990s. Understanding the process of leaving crime acknowledges that decisions are not made in a vacuum, but are embedded in the immediate and wider social structural arrangements which provide for alternative choices, the requisite social capital to support those decisions, and socially endorsed vocabularies of motive which provide rewards for self transformation. While this study focuses on the microsociological dynamics of leaving crime to formulate a grounded theory, the structural context in which these narratives were forged cannot be ignored.

Exits are characterized by structured opportunities for leaving crime which are dependant on the particular historical moment for each cohort of offenders. Different socio-historical contexts show different emphases on rehabilitative ideals informing correctional practices, interventions, institutional support and a wider discourse on the possibility of personal change (Cohen, 1985; Cullen and Gilbert, 1982; Currie, 1985). To illustrate, one ex-offender refers to a time when the community-based model of corrections was being phased into federal corrections (early 1960s), providing him with an opportunity to be identified by the Canadian Penitentiary Service as a good candidate for temporary absences to attend a post-secondary institution.

Larry: [The Deputy Warden] called me up he said would you be interested... y'know in taking this program...—This was a new pilot program, yes, why not, you know, if you're going to accept me, why not, well you go out for the summer, right, like to be going to summer school, and [the Deputy Warden] said that if you get two Bs, take two courses and get two Bs, they'll accept you as a full-time student in the fall (Larry at 759).

This opportunity was the break that Larry - a self-described “career criminal” - needed in order to discover that he was capable of much more than his chosen criminal trade. The chance to attend university set in motion a number of further opportunities, interpersonal relationships and personal changes which brought him to *who I am*. Years later, when he appeared to falter after being arrested with stolen property, a network of supportive people convinced the sentencing judge to impose a non-custodial punishment. Larry severed his remaining ties to the criminal underworld and continued his post-secondary education.

Harry speaks about a moment in the early 1970s when a mental health worker referred him to the Alcoholism Foundation in a Canadian city.

Harry: He [the mental health worker] said, 'you better start doing something about it'. I said 'well, what do you think that should be'? He said, 'well I know some people from the Alcoholism Foundation, maybe I'll bring them in and let them talk to you'.

JFA: But alcoholism was not the issue with you.

Harry: No, yeah but they WERE the addiction people. And this is 1972. They didn't know - drug addicts were all treated with psychiatric help in '72. It wasn't an addiction issue. It was a psychiatric issue.

JFA: Some personal weakness?

Harry: Oh yeah, wacko spiritual entities or voodoo, or who knew eh? [Laughs]. Anyway, these people came in and ah what I responded to was ah, they CARED about me. They cared about me, they got me a job bouncing in the bar. Bouncing in the bar and ah and then they wanted me to come and work as a street worker. But I stopped using needles and that was a big chunk of my life, the beginning of the beginning, when I stopped using needles (Harry at 1371).

For Harry, the process of reaching *who I am* was facilitated, in part, by the structured opportunities made available for people like himself.

Canadian judges have wide discretion in sentencing, and may choose an option which serves the needs of someone leaving crime. Priscilla faced outstanding criminal charges at a time when she was trying to clean up her life. The judge imposed a rehabilitative penalty as opposed to a retributive one.

Priscilla: I had 'failure to appear' and went to court and by then I was living with my dad and started cleaning up my life so ah they gave me a criminal discharge and six-months probation.

JFA: A conditional discharge? Or a criminal discharge?

Priscilla: Yeah, a conditional discharge. That's what they call it. They said that within the next two years if you get busted with anything again, we'll bring the discharge up too, a new offence.

JFA: They gave you a break?

Priscilla: Yeah, yeah (Priscilla at 942).

The option would not have been available without the enabling legislation and sentencing rationales in case law which can be invoked to justify “judicial leniency”. In one other case, a judge used a lenient sentencing option to give Yvonne a break which helped facilitate her exit from crime.

Kirk’s exit from property crime was made possible by the help he received from a Native probation officer who was able to make a personal connection with him, and then recommended a referral to a drug and alcohol treatment centre for First Nations offenders.

JFA: Yeah, who was influential in sort of getting you to think about ah, stopping –

Kirk: I think [the probation officer] was probably –

JFA: He’s the drug and alcohol counselor?

Kirk: Yeah, ‘cause he gave me, he gave me the time of day. He didn’t y’know fuckin’ judge me, he didn’t even think twice about what I was doing or why I was doing it. He just said, ‘listen, there’s somebody really good in there. I know there is’. [I said] ‘Think so?’ [He replied:] ‘Cause fuck, yeah so it’s up to you my man and what do you want? Do you want to continue your life of fuckin’ being the bad boy?’... I did go away [to a treatment centre] ah, on an account because yeah there was something inside that he did make me see and that was I was a good person. He said no matter what happened to you, I was physically, sexually abused and he had told me his story, right, and he had similarities. He was brought up in residential schools and if you know anything about that, okay that’s where he come from. So I related to him, *I could grab on to that, connect with him* and [he said:] ‘do you want some help?’ And I said ‘fuck can I get some help?... So he put me in a treatment centre, it was for my alcohol and my drugs (Kirk at 766).

When Kirk came back to the community six weeks later, he continued to benefit from the relationship he had with the Native probation officer. This is the only person who Kirk mentions as having some helping influence to leave crime. The presence of a First Nations probation officer who could identify with Kirk’s victimization as a child, coupled

with a treatment centre specifically designed for aboriginal offenders constitute structural sources of help, and help to resolve the main concern of some ex-offenders. For Kirk, the help he received was transitory and structurally located to address the needs of First Nations probationers.

If structural opportunities facilitate the exit from crime, then it follows that their absence would prevent or defer the same exit. Yvonne told me that the absence of transition homes in the mid-1980s prolonged her stay with an abusive partner - the main associate with whom she was criminally involved.

Yvonne: And during all those years, I call it going to hell and back because we were, we lived in downtown Metroville for a while and he introduced me to Townville after, 'cause this is where he's from, he's [aboriginal band] and we moved here for a while to, he introduced me to his mom and his family and the stay here was just hell, like I had nobody here, I didn't know anybody and *I didn't know of transition houses* at the time, so *the beatings I took were, I had to take I felt because I didn't have any help, I didn't have any kinds of support* and they weren't too many, the beatings weren't just beatings, like the normal stuff you see on TV, just fist to face, like he used anything he could get his hands on (Yvonne at 113).

Perhaps the greatest value of structured opportunities provided by non-profit agencies, self-help groups and government interventions consist of the permanent conversations of self which they create, disseminate and support. Such internal conversations of self can be adopted by ex-offenders to provide a conversation about the residual self and facilitate behavioural changes. Structural opportunities can be seen as a wider recognition by society that offenders are capable of change. Criminal justice officials, their affiliates, or social welfare agencies comprise the structural elements for *becoming* the new self, and where needed, deal with the residual self. Structural dimensions of help will vary in each historical epoch, depending upon the degree to

which they are formally organized, supported by legislation and resources and embrace wider ideological beliefs about the possibilities for inner change.

One of the more vibrant conversations for internal change is facilitated by religious groups who believe not only in the possibility for deep internal change, but also promote an obligation to wider society to give the disgraced a chance to redeem themselves. This is evident in the case of the convicted pedophile, Hector, whose main support comes from the faith community. Who else in Canadian society would give a pedophile a second chance but those groups whose professing ideology embraces forgiveness?

Help and the internalization of conversations to make sense of the residual self leads to inner change and subsequently, to non-criminal behaviour. The evidence of change is credentials which they can talk about or otherwise demonstrate to intimate or more removed evaluative audiences such as potential employers. The category of credentials could emerge early in the interview as ex-offenders discussed who they were today by describing their work in university, or at a paying job. Others preferred to present credentials or evidence of *who I am* later in the interview, having covered a narrative of *who I was*. Credentials are important for those with a discreditable self to establish their moral credibility. Evaluative audiences will expect, and perhaps solicit, evidence of change. The next chapter deals with these issues.

7. Credentials of Reform

I was one hard-assed mean son of a bitch and ah, you know, whatever it took is what I did. Unfortunately what ever it took hurt a lot of people. I gotta make up for that somehow (Brad at 289).

Someone who has been stigmatized and labeled is ushered into the deviant position by a decisive and often dramatic ceremony, yet is retired from it with hardly a word of notice (Goode, 2001: 117).

The concept introduced in this chapter is credentials. This word originates from a medieval Latin term, *credentia* (literally, 'trust'). Credentials refer to testimonials which inspire confidence by those who possess them. The stigma of being a former offender is resolved by presenting an account of *who I am* which distances one from a residual self or *who I was*. Credentials in this sense have a special value for ex-offenders because any lingering stigma is eclipsed by a present, transcended self based on evidence of reform. The tentative moral standing of ex-offenders can be mediated, affirming that they no longer deserve the suspicion or mistrust which accompanies this label.

The narratives recounted here are sense-making accounts which take disparate phenomena and knit them into a coherent past history which can be recalled to produce credentials. The qualifications signal to others that ex-offenders are reputable, and the evil which led them into deviant behaviour has been abandoned. Importantly, credentials are self-validating when they are thought to be signs for being fundamentally different from *who I was*. "I'm just not like that anymore", "That's not me", or "I am..." are the strongest statements made by someone with a disreputable past. Credentials are the outcome of the help sought by ex-offenders, and *becoming a helper* is the one of the highest forms of certification, especially for those who participate in Twelve Step groups⁶⁴. The ability to help addicts, offenders, ex-offenders, street youth and similar

populations attests to deep, inner change. It is also a respectable role in society because the work done by helpers is assumed to have effects on public safety⁶⁵.

Credentials have five general properties. Pardons are a declaration that one has lived at least five years crime free, and a background inquiry by the Solicitor General (through the RCMP) has found the applicant to be “of good character”. Secondly, ex-offenders offered the amount of “clean time” accumulated by not using drugs or alcohol as evidence of their commitment to going straight. A third type of credential involves making amends, which can be either direct or symbolic. “Doing good” constitutes the fourth type of credential, such as participating in paid employment, doing volunteer work or furthering one’s education with the goal of helping others. The fifth category attests to the inner changes which shows others they are not the same person they used to be.

Ex-offenders refer to an abandoned self – a ghost self comprised of personal attributes, attitudes, cognitive thinking styles and temperamental dispositions which they now see as undesirable, capable of reform or having been entirely transcended. They have made an important distinction which they previously did not possess. *Who I was* is understood as emanating from the effects of abusive childhood experiences, having a biological or personality disposition towards addiction or anger, or what some women see as a proclivity for destructive relationships with abusive men. Personal reform shows up as a new set of distinctions or awareness about themselves which leads them to want to be someone different.

A. Criminal Pardons

A credential can be a certificate which testifies to the truth of some state of affairs. Certificates are credentials for ex-offenders when they convey the message that some

external body has found the bearer to have met a standard of performance or possess some desirable intrinsic quality⁶⁶. Reflecting back to the earlier discussion on “discrediting information”, a pardon operates much like a curative to the kind of discrediting information which might shape the reactions of others.

While a criminal pardon might seem significant to address the main concern of ex-offenders who had official records of their crimes, the value of this process is more symbolic than substantive. Six of the twenty-four research participants did not have adult criminal records. Seven had obtained a pardon, or were in the process of doing so. Obtaining a pardon was seen as having several bureaucratic difficulties attached to it, but it was seen as necessary for certain types of work, such as in a prison or with street shelters for youth. Gary told me that obtaining a pardon was part of the “bureaucratic nightmare that’s required to actually help somebody and have the credibility to help somebody” (Gary at 1066) to work within institutions or even a street shelter for youth. Edward believes that it would have been impossible for him to enter his line of work without a pardon, and he was encouraged to obtain one by a mentor during his post-secondary education. It was a marker for Edward, one that signalled a turning point because it brought a “sense of closure... of finishing, you know, saying that I’m finished with that” (Edward at 544).

Jack’s and Warren’s motives for obtaining a pardon were to remove the barriers for traveling to the United States. For Jack, it was also symbolic because it signalled the end of a past life, “closure on the past 33 years” where the old record would be put “in a sealed container and brought out if I commit another crime” (Jack at 1244). Dwight recognized the certification in instrumental terms, but also described it in a symbolic way

- obtaining a “clean slate” which was necessary for opportunities from which he might otherwise be restricted (Dwight at 294). Darryl wanted a pardon, but it did not have much significance for him because his identity as an ex-offender in the community was well established. Besides, having been an addict and criminal provided him with the set of credentials effective for his work with young people. Nevertheless, he did not rule out the possibility of someday acquiring this certification.

JFA: Is that something you think is meaningful, to have a pardon?

Darryl: No, *it's just a piece of paper*, I did though, I got a pardon kit and did everything else and I just, it cost 50 bucks so I didn't mail it in, I, for me 50 dollars is, ah, put food on my table, I just haven't got around to doin' that yet, ah *one day I will...* (Darryl at 1202).

Darryl also thought a pardon might be useful because of his role as an ex-offender who takes the message of “healthy choices” into local schools. He could “show something to the kids” as evidence of his reform.

B. Clean time

A credential freely offered by many ex-offenders was the duration of time passed since they stopped drinking or using illicit drugs or alcohol. The relationship between drugs and/or alcohol and crime was firmly established in their narratives, with the exception of those who continued to drink because alcohol was not a problem, or those who continued to use marijuana (discussed later). Abstinence signals to others that one has the requisite level of self control to be trustworthy, especially if previous crimes were committed while under the influence of drugs. Abstinence also has an incremental quality where the length of time during which a person remains drug free becomes a tangible indicator of change to signal self-control and conformity to the Protestant Work Ethic.

Many ex-offenders recalled the exact date when they had their last drink (or used drugs). Total abstinence is the only solution according to the conversations which have been imported by ex-offenders from helping groups. Abstinence was interpreted as “a price to pay” for a what they believed was a personal disposition which differentiates substance abusers from non-abusers. Cheryl said, “I ruined my, I sort of abused my privilege to have a glass of wine, to drink socially, to smoke the odd joint. Like I can’t do that anymore” (Cheryl at 1229). Earlier in the interview, she also told me that abstinence allowed her be in a position to help others because “I’m not drowning my feelings with drugs or alcohol, I’m not numbing out, I’m aware of what’s going on and this world really needs help, you know” (Cheryl at 817).

Clean time is official in the sense that it is a recognized credential within Twelve Step groups. The duration of clean time can never be verified, but the openness and interlocking nature of close social contacts characteristic of Twelve Step groups would make it difficult for someone to “fall off the wagon” unnoticed. “Birthday parties” are held for each year of sobriety, and sometimes participants in these groups may describe themselves as, for example, “eight years old” – the number of years they have been abstinent.

Had the conversion from deviant to normal been complete and clean, and the residuals from a past self posed no consequences, then it should be possible for ex-offenders to have the occasional alcoholic drink, smoke marijuana recreationally or perhaps use cocaine if the situation arose. But that is not the story told. As mentioned earlier, ex-offenders who became abstinent saw their relationship to drugs within the interpretative framework provided by Twelve Step groups as something negative which

detracts from becoming an authentic person. Drug and alcohol abuse are understood as diseases which differentially afflict members of society, and that the cure can be found only in a continual program of total abstinence supported by similarly afflicted others. Thus, the residual self is affirmed by the very help they seek from others: “You are different, you will always be different from others, and you must live your life differently in order to be normal”⁶⁷. Even one drink is problematic because in the discourse of Twelve Step organizations, any alcohol is a prelude to potential catastrophe.

Regardless of how others may interpret abstinence, it is presented as a credential which is acquired over time and demonstrates the ability to resist temptation, even in the face of peer pressure. Peter recalls a moment which now serve as credentials for *who I am*.

JFA: Ah, so what about if you’re at party and somebody pulls of ah, a gram or quarter ounce and passes around a mirror lined with cocaine? How do you think you’d would react to that?

Peter: Well, it’s been, that situation has happened more than, you know, a few times and ah, as far is marijuana goes, it’s been easy for me to say no, I just don’t like it. But cocaine, *it’s taken me a long time to say no*. Yeah. And, you know, there’s the pressure, aw come on come on, right, but I mean, no way, *I just don’t want to do it* (Peter at 661).

Similarly, Jerry faced much the same temptation and was able to resist:

Jerry: Like he [a relative] says do you wanna do a rail [line of cocaine]? [My wife] wasn’t here, nobody would have known except me and I said put that shit away, like and I feel good about that because *it was an uncontrolled situation and I totally controlled it* (Jerry at 1748).

There is also a somewhat different stance in relation to what alcohol means for some ex-offenders. Some statements signal a transcendence of alcohol and drug problems to the point where peer pressure is not a problem, which is an extended credential of

abstinence. Experience has tested their resolve. Gary and Darryl have redefined their relationship to alcohol and drugs within the context of other users as follows.

Gary: We [referring to a family member] get along fine. He picked me up here in his ah forty thousand dollar boat, and we went up to [a coastal island] and he was drinking de-alcoholized beer in deference to me being on the wagon and I said, 'I don't give a shit what you drink' you know. Drink whiskey, straight up, *it doesn't bother me*, I been there' (Gary at 541).

Darryl: I went back for my [relative's] funeral, everybody in that house was drinking, everybody, and I didn't have to pick up, ah the people were smokin' weed, one my ah, cousins was doin' coke, *that didn't bother me*, 'cause *I stayed focused* on what I was there for (Darryl at 888).

The presentation of clean time as evidence of personal reform testifies to others about the extent to which they have forsaken *who I was*. The insights into the process of becoming alcohol or drug dependant, understanding the harms to others which occurred as a result of that dependency, and new self-control are credentials. When others accept the credentializing meaning of abstinence as negotiated by ex-offenders, their main concern is partially addressed.

C. Making amends

The credential of amends surfaced in almost all accounts, but was most vivid from those who had been involved with Twelve Step Groups. Almost all ex-offenders spoke of apologies or getting things right with others for harms done in the past. The interview schedule was theoretically sensitive to the issue because of its earlier salience in the data, and participants were asked if there was any compensation necessary for the past crimes they had committed.

Making amends involves, like other forms of atonement, a level of personal discomfort or reparation to the offended party⁶⁸. It involves a process of recognizing

harms done to others, approaching them with a confession and asking forgiveness. For those that chose to make amends, a feeling of relief and acceptance from others was generally forthcoming, but not in all instances. Two ex-offenders reported that they had to make amends with many people who were directly affected by their disreputable past, but were typically by family members⁶⁹. Both interpreted this effort as “the best they could do” and acknowledged they were powerless to change some peoples’ opinions about *who I was*. Generally speaking, the effort to make amends with others was well received. Amends have two properties: direct and symbolic.

1. Apologizing: Direct Amends

Making direct amends to others involves face-to-face interactions, a confession and perhaps asking for an opportunity to “be given another chance”. Inasmuch as they are accepted by others, making amends establishes moral credentials when ex-offenders address guilt from past wrongdoings, and seek to genuinely “make good” for harms done in the past. Bill and two co-accused made direct amends when they wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper of a small town, apologizing for a robbery they had committed, and otherwise having to “apologize to some people” (Bill at 1140). Usually they are made to family members such as when Gary recognized the extent to which his drug abuse was dependant on his social proximity to victims.

Gary: You can’t rip somebody off really good unless you’re really close to them. You can rip them off on a one-time shot, you know. My ex-wives, *I apologized to them, apologized to my daughter*, they all talk to me now, all of them, I go to dinner at, at one of my ex-wives... ah, my father, my brother, and my sister, and people on the street, I apologized to a couple of them, that’s only money, eh, I give ‘em back the money... (Gary at 887).

Allison felt compelled to make amends to both herself and her daughter (Allison at 581)

by becoming the “best mother” she could for her daughter. Other ex-offenders made similar efforts to “get things right” with those whom had been most affected by their disreputable pasts, especially family members.

Direct amends were not conspicuous among the research respondents, mainly because victims were either unknown or could not be located. That situation created a dilemma for 11 ex-offenders in Twelve Step groups because an important part of their recovery is to provide recompense to those harmed by their past actions. If amends cannot be made directly, they can be made symbolically.

2. I Can’t Apologize: Symbolic Amends

Symbolic amends differ from direct amends when the former are generalized towards society, in contrast to direct, face-to-face amends to people who were affected by their past actions. It partially resolves the main concern of becoming reputable for those who cannot make direct amends to victims, or others who suffered past actions which were hurtful but not necessarily criminal. Symbolic amends were characteristic of ex-offenders who believed that it would be impossible or impractical to locate their victims and speak with them directly. Therefore, good works to compensate for the harm done are generalized towards society. Bill and Beverly talk about how they made amends:

Bill: I do mine [make amends] in a different way. I *do a lot of volunteer work and stuff like that* and ah, you know, I don’t expect anything. I’m a firm believer in karma. Things are going to come around for me one day (...) I don’t really ah, as far as like going up in talking to people, it’s pretty useless for me to say, you know, geez I’m really sorry I did that, you know, 10, 15 years ago. I could maybe show them that I’ve turned my life around. This is a small town, you know, a lot of people know me (Bill at 1148; 1162).

Beverly: I probably couldn’t find him [a victim] anyways because I didn’t ask him his name, but, you know, that’s the only way I have. I can’t go

back to all the stores I robbed either [inaudible] right, but *I do things like ah, contribute to the food bank. I go to church*, you know, I try and ah... *I try and contribute to society*, right, now, as much as I can, right, like, I don't have any great howling fortunes, but *if I got something that I can give, I do*.

The reason for making amends is stated most clearly by Yvonne, Harry and Brad, which is to provide some inner relief from the guilt or "blocks" which they believe might interfere with getting beyond what has happened in the past. Making good addresses the main concern of ex-offenders by removing barriers to becoming an ordinary citizen.

Yvonne: At that time of my transition in my life when I was treating people so roughly, like I even still take that to my heart today, like if I can go back and see those people that I've hurt so much and just tell them I'm sorry, *that would probably make me feel better*, that's not going to happen though (Yvonne at 860).

Harry: I think the big thing for me and ah is I OWE... *I owe large*. I'm into a lifestyle now where that allows that to take place. *I can pay back now*. And - which eases a lot of the guilt and the shame I have (Harry at 1891).

Brad: Okay well there's a certain step [in my Twelve Step program] where you have to make amends. Now I've held guns and knives and choked a whole bunch of people I will never know. Like they were only in my life 30 seconds 'cause if they were in my life longer than that, I was gettin' caught. *How do I make amends to them? I help other people*. And that's my own philosophy. It works for me and it allows my conscious mind to get me past that hurdle (Brad at 129).

Hector faced the same dilemma of not being able to make amends to each of his victims of sexual assault because they could not be located, or parents of victims were unwilling to have anything to do with him. As part of his treatment plan, he wrote a confession about many offences which did not come to police attention. He also became engaged in a formal Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program which involved making a video-taped confession and apology. Although many of Hector's victims or their families were unwilling to be involved in making amends, his efforts were interpreted by correctional

and treatment authorities as evidence of a genuine desire to come to terms with his crimes. Today he works in a helping capacity with adults in need, trying, as he says “to make up for the past”.

By making amends, indications are made to self and others that the culturally requisite norms of contrition, forgiveness and good behaviour have been satisfied. Transcending the residual self means creating evidence for oneself and thus signalling to others that the disreputable past has no claim on one’s current identity⁷⁰. In making amends, they may tell others that they have a predilection for drug or alcohol abuse, especially within particular social contexts. With this knowledge, others can be sensitive and respectful of their subjective experiences and thus support the efforts of ex-offenders to go straight.

3. Doing Good

Amends as a form of credential can be made through good works in the community which is different from making direct or symbolic amends. Doing good means using the status of “ex-offender” to help others. Taking on a helping role attests to the depth of change in the lives of ex-offenders, as time and interest is now spent in pursuit of conventional goals such as employment in a helping capacity, or in a transitional status such as being a student. Performing good works is significant for ex-offenders because it mitigates against their past status as dependent or deviant. The good works they report may not have been possible without their disreputable past. The badness of the past is reinterpreted to provide value within their present role as helpers. Brad, Harry, Yvonne and Lance speak to the good works in which they now participate.

Brad: Today I, as I said earlier, I did [conducted] a life-skills course out at the jail and I've also spoken in a multitude of schools ah tryin' to help the kids but and now I'm in a position whereby I'm tryin' to help others (Brad at 125).

Harry: What I'm trying to do is maybe with you [in the interview], and what I became helps some other people not to get all the way out there that I got all the way out there, you know. So I've got some purpose, you know I've got a bit of vision and ah I've got some structure but I've got a whole lot of people around me being very supportive of me now (Harry at 1921).

Yvonne: Through all the experience that I've [been] enduring through all this to where I am now, *I'm now a drug and alcohol counselor*, I'm working at the [aboriginal organization] in Cityville as a drug and alcohol counselor and in-home support worker, so my experience helps me counsel people that are going through their process [of leaving drugs and crime] (Yvonne at 679).

Harry, like many others in the research sample, identified his role in the interview and what they were doing in the wider community as a helping one (e.g., in his words, becoming a “professional do-gooder”). This is a noteworthy account, especially since Harry's criminal past was sustained by the proceeds of crime. Similarly, Lance's participation with aboriginal inmates focuses on doing good by becoming committed to Native spirituality, and by participating in “sweats” to convey possibilities of reform to federal offenders. Good works for Lance in the context of his previous life as a drug addict and criminal is credentializing in the content of what he does, and how the role defines *who I am* for others.

Other respondents were involved in doing good. Gary, whose struggle out of drug abuse and crime was assisted by help from God, reported that he went to Twelve Step meetings regularly, prisons to give talks to inmates, schools to speak with students, and assisted at a detox centre. Even his educational efforts were focused on writing about “drugs, alcohol and spirituality” (Gary at 475). Jack left a lifestyle of addiction and

property crime to set up a “safe house” for recently released prisoners. Most of his time was spent working in a helping role with ex-offenders and people with substance abuse problems. Priscilla mentioned her new role as a responsible mother in raising a “pretty smart and well adapted” child as evidence of reform (Priscilla at 1372). Dwight left a past of alcoholism and property crime and an identity as “a mean fuck” to become a student, and was firmly committed to becoming an agent of change for high-risk children (Dwight at 452).

Doing good invokes a new identity because desirable personal attributes are assumed necessary for what reformed ex-offenders do. Being a mother to young children, becoming a member of a board of directors for a non-profit agency, or operating a safe house for ex-prisoners signals to others that one is trustworthy, reputable and has something to offer others. Doing good things means *being* different when relating to others, and not simply acting out their expectations. Jack illustrated this tendency to be different when he tells this story about giving some of what little money he had to help a recently released prisoner:

JFA: Well it sounds like you went the extra distance like many of the people which you admire.

Jack: Exactly. And I lent him [a man recently released from prison] 20 dollars for groceries when he came in. Well we went to the store and he bought some groceries and I gave him 20 dollars and there was seven or eight dollars change. I said, you need walking around money ‘cause you just got out. I’m sure you want to smell the fresh air, go for coffee and whatever and he was really happy and he went through the system and I got my rent money and he gave me the 20 dollars back (Jack at 1287).

Jack casts this story-within-a-story as an illustration of his credentials, something which he says he could not have done when his primary focus was on satisfying a need for drugs. While others might judge Jack as having made a minor contribution to someone

else's reintegration into society by loaning a few dollars, for him it was evidence that he was subjectively changing because he was thinking about the needs of other people. Doing good provides the opportunity for *experiencing oneself* differently. The theme of doing good was expressed by ex-offenders who held steady jobs or were students, which was a significant role reversal for them. These social involvements were noteworthy accomplishments within the structural disadvantages and personal deficits which they experienced in the past.

Amends were absent in only two accounts where the ex-offenders felt as though their crimes constituted victimization *by others* in positions of power and authority. Kirk and Warren never mentioned any form of amends which was consistent with understanding their criminality to be the result of victimization by political authorities (see the discussion in Chapter 8 regarding "ensoriousness").

There remains yet other, perhaps more compelling credentials of change. Those are the ones to which ex-offenders attest as taking place "deep within" themselves.

D. New Distinctions and Inner Changes

To recapitulate, the main concern for the interviewees continues throughout the basic social process of *becoming reputable*, which is to attenuate the stigma of being an ex-offender by presenting a credible self. The new self, *who I am*, is actively and consciously distinguished from *who I was*. The new self emerges in a process where transformative crises are accompanied by new awareness, and continues through the related process of making distinctions. Importantly, to refer to an objectified past self requires a vantage point to make a distinction between *who I was* and *who I am*. "I'm not like *that* anymore" begs reference to the former self now abandoned. Without a new

awareness to disconnect *who I am* from *who I was*⁷¹, there is no narrative of change and therefore no credentials.

1. Now I Get It and I Can Explain

One of the most compelling indicators of change, and one expected by evaluative audiences, is the degree to which the disreputable have insights into how they became the deviant person they subsequently disavow. The overview by Beverly here is instructive, as she describes the awareness she has about who she was in a moment of insight.

Beverly: I wasted most of my life. This sounds really weird but I was tryin' to find somebody who would feel as sorry for me as I felt for myself, right, and that whole scenario with drug use and everything else *was me feeling sorry for me*, right. I'd been abused and nobody cared about me and so I'm gonna abuse me too and I'm going to hang out with people that don't care about me because nobody does anyway. There's nothing here to care about. I'd have to say that the past lifestyle is just a way and means for me to continue feeling sorry for myself (Beverly at 381).

Yvonne retrospectively describes the person she used to be from the new self which she has created through self help, and the assistance of First Nations spiritual groups.

Yvonne: Like it was pretty bad, like *I didn't think of it really bad at the time*, I thought it was like hey, this is my money you're screwin' with and this is also my dope that you're rippin' us off with so *at that time I didn't see wrong* but *where I'm at now* it's like holy smokes *I can't believe I did that to people, like I couldn't believe I was so cruel* (Yvonne at 86).

Making distinctions between the old and new self is expected by social audiences, especially by those with power to make consequential decisions based on an assessment of their moral integrity. Whether the audience wishes to make decisions concerning conditional release (e.g., parole authorities), or to hire someone with a known, disreputable past as a caregiver for children, one of their main considerations will be the depth and quality of former offenders' explanations for breaking the law in the first

place⁷². It is not sufficient for ex-offenders to report, “I *was* bad, but I’m good *now*”.

Others expect to see evidence that ex-offenders are no longer influenced by the forces assumed to have propelled them into deviance in the first place. They want ex-offenders to have insight. Given these expectations on a group with a precarious moral status, it is incumbent on them to demonstrate change. A narrative which emphasizes insights resolves the stigma of being an ex-offender when it uncouples *who I am* from *who I was*.

Ex-offenders tell us that leaving crime is a process of new awareness and change triggered by transformative crises arising from their involvement in crime. Those who trace the origins of a disreputable self to events in their earlier years were simply not concerned about the depth of deviance in which they were involved. They “just didn’t get it”, apparently because they had no moral or cognitive place from which to discern themselves as being different from how they had experienced themselves up to the point of change. Without the self awareness which they now report, earlier crises were interpreted simply as part of “life on the street”, or what might be expected from being associated with so many other criminals, particularly those in violent inmate subcultures (“what goes around, comes around”). The self they recall is radically different from whom they now present, especially when contrasted against the ease with which several offenders used gratuitous violence to steal money for drugs or maintain street or prison reputations. This previous person - the self now disavowed - is captured in the interviews as *who I was*, often with the qualification that they did not realize just how deviant they were until they made some critical discernments. Statements about *who I was* emerge continually throughout the interviews and are important declarations in the process of becoming reputable. Indeed, *who I am* is unremarkable unless it is held against the

background of a previous self, much like a “character foil”. (A character foil is a literary device to contrast two characters, usually to emphasize the qualities of the protagonist). In the present study, *who I am* is made meaningful only when contrasted against *who I was*.

One credential which others accept as evidence of change is whether or not ex-offenders can report an *understanding* about why they engaged in disapproved behaviour. Probation officers, parole board members, provincial court judges, school teachers, parents and other decision-making authorities require their charges to “have insight” into the contexts and inner states which lead them to offend in the first place. They assume that if wrong-doers understand their motives for criminal behaviour, they will be less likely to repeat them in the future.

Harry provides us with an illustration of this past “self-in-reflection” as he recounts his decision to buy a European motorcycle instead of an American-made Harley Davidson as part of his recovery from drug addiction and crime.

Harry: Well, one of the things, when I came out of the recovery process and people found out *who I was* [an ex-biker] I had all these people on motorcycles doin’ this around me [draws circles in air] for all the wrong reasons. And *I was just this scared guy* wantin’, needin some help eh and I’m getting all these people around me because of *who I used to be* (Harry at 1603).

Rather than identify with all the symbols of an OCG where he held a status position, Harry purchased a more conservative model of motorcycle within the context of *who he really was* (frightened and needing help). Earlier in the interview, he explained his entry into the OCG as a means of meeting genuine human needs such as belonging, loyalty and respect. These are insights about reasons for entering crime which he has since acquired,

but did not know at the time. As for his problems with addiction, he interprets these as the lesser of two evils and a means of avoiding death: “I was alone on the planet and they [drugs] filled that gap. I believe that if it hadn’t have been for [the OCG] and drugs and alcohol, I would have committed suicide. From being alone” (Harry at 1939). New distinctions about his essential self allow the disreputable one to be renegotiated in the light of new distinctions. Rather than believing himself to be inherently evil, or cursed with some personality flaw, Harry understands *who I was* as a misguided attempt to satisfy genuine human needs. If others accept Harry’s insights for what he intends them to be, then it is less likely that his crimes will be seen as *mala in se* (“evil in themselves”).

The past self is objectified and distanced through the use of the past tense to establish the depth of change between the selves described in the interview. Darryl told me several stories like the following to underscore the evil person he used to be.

Darryl: I remember hitch-hiking, getting a ride with a guy, [1] throwing him out of his car, takin’ his car and his wallet and leaving him there, [2] thanks for your vehicle, remember I said people work for me? He was just driving my car until I come along [laughs], *that’s how I thought...* [3] *I was real cold* (Darryl at 1849).

Darryl refers to a (1) harmful robbery involving violence, (2) his past identification with deviant values about other people’s property, and (3) the old self which was devoid of conscience about the crime. He attributes the abuse he suffered at the hands of his father as the source of his emotional coldness, the role of drugs in medicating the emotional pain he felt, and the necessity for violent crime when he was part of a the drug underworld and prison subculture. By understanding *who I was* in light of help provided by Twelve Step groups and counsellors, supplies an internal and public explanation for

his disreputable self.

The inner changes described here relate to new distinctions of self acquired from help. Jerry talked about the thrill of crime as part of who he was in the past, about how “breaking and entering was a big rush, you know, the ritual of going in breaking into the house” and how he “liked that part of it” (Jerry at 85). In fact, Jerry’s identity in crime was so much a part of him that it became a status symbol to impress a woman he was courting, something he realizes in retrospect.

Jerry: I didn’t want her to know everything about me. Told her a few things ‘cause it was my - to get rid of my insecurities I guess like you know *I’m bad, I’ve known I was bad all my life. That’s how I got attention from people* so I told her a few, you know, the armed robbery and stuff and her eyes opened and *I thought ‘right on’ reaction, right?* (Jerry at 256).

Jerry recollects a self he no longer claims to experience. These distinctions are credentials of reform which ex-offenders need.

Exits from crime and *who I was* are recounted with the benefit of hindsight. A condition which occurred in the past may not have been experienced as it becomes recalled and assessed in the interview. Consider the following passage when I asked Lance if he developed any friendships when he was in the street addict culture in Vancouver.

Lance: You don’t get close to anybody, it’s always, you know, all your thinking about is how can you use this person. There’s no such thing as friendship or there it’s like, what can I get from you, that’s it. And that’s how everybody lives down there (Lance at 335).

The distinction Lance makes between instrumental and genuine friendships results from insights gained in the process of becoming *who I am*.

Four of the eight women interviewed for this study were in abusive living arrangements with men just prior to leaving crime. The new awareness they report focused on the realization that they “don’t have to take it anymore” - an insight which accompanied their decision to leave these men and the crimes which moulded their lives together. Leaving the men with whom they shared lives of crime was synonymous with leaving a criminal self. (Cheryl restarted a relationship with her former boyfriend, but only after he proved that he was serious about leaving crime).

Insights are typically accompanied by a declaration that the former self was inauthentic. If the past self was counterfeit, some of the moral stigma is relieved through discovering the “real me”. The “real me” surfaces with new distinctions made through help, and constitutes a credential of reform.

2. Without Drugs: The Real Me

For ex-offenders, the most common declarative for *who I am* concerns a new sense of being authentic, genuine, and true to the talk in their conscious minds. Insights tell ex-offenders and their social audiences “why I did bad things” and the real me is a claim to authenticity. Both are credentials. We hear about the changes ex-offenders convey, the transformation of self by recognizing and claiming management over the residuals of *who I was*, and getting in touch with the real me. Conversely, the “not really me” account is stated directly or by inference, especially by former addicts who place responsibility for past, harmful actions to the evils of alcohol or illicit drugs.

Drug abuse is framed within a discourse of seeing alcohol or drugs as facilitating states of being or consciousness which themselves are inauthentic. “Getting real” or “getting in touch” with oneself describe life without the drugs which were so integrated

into their previous, disreputable selves. Thus, abstinence from drugs and alcohol consumption is about character reform, and not simply ceasing a behaviour which is relatively unproblematic for most Canadians.

The real me provides currency to claims of reform, and will be well received by others. Not everyone will be privy to *who I was*, but if necessary, the distance presented between the two self descriptions can attenuate the stigma of having a disreputable past. I was privileged to hear the inner details of self change and transformation, and this same information is likely to be conveyed to others whose opinions are important to ex-offenders. The authentic self is experienced after some transformative crisis and subsequently participating in help - which often means adopting an imported conversation of what it is to be “real”. (A consistent message conveyed in Twelve Step groups is that alcohol produces an inauthentic human being, and that abstinence is the only way to “get real” because psychoactive substances are a “crutch” or “means of escape”). The discovery of the real me foreshadows a new relationship with oneself and others.

At a moment early in her recovery from cocaine addiction, Beverly began spending her leisure time in the company of an AA sponsor-turned-friend who introduced her to arts and crafts, some of which she saved. “They were so important to me at that point when I was first like trying to, you know, trying to get a sense of who I was” (Beverly at 872). During the months after deciding to leave crime, Beverly became aware of her authentic self by making distinctions about honesty. She differentiates between “cash register honesty” which contrasts with a relationship with self which is more transparent than anything which she had experienced in the past.

Beverly: There was a lot of changes that I had to make... like for me to be honest, lying comes really easy right, like it's really easy to make an excuse for not paying my bills. Like I can come up with a song and dance for anything right. When I first cleaned up I had to be really careful about my honesty, like being really honest, vigorously like without exception, right, like and I don't mean cash register honesty, I mean with myself even because I can convince myself of anything if I want to. Those are some of the big changes, right (Beverly at 695).

Jerry talks about new distinctions between a bogus self in the past, and the real me which is more rewarding: "I just *let myself be me* and it's so much more comfortable, like *I've got calmness* I've never had before [...] this is *the real me* and not having to put on all these masks... (Jerry at 688; 1699). Other moments in Jerry's interview speak to a new sense of freedom he experiences from not having to "play the role" he thought others expected of him. Cheryl shared with me the positive changes which she experienced, and about those which she anticipates, given the trajectory of self-reform which she established to this point in her life. She talked about the ability of being able "to look people in the eye now" (Cheryl at 909).

One First Nations respondent traced a life history which began with a great deal of joy and happiness when he was in the care of his grandparents on a ranch. While in primary school, Lance's family was forced to move from the ranch when the federal government expropriated their property for use by the Canadian military. After his family subsequently moved to a large city, he lived in poverty, becoming the object of derision and racism from other students in a public school. Later, as a young adult, he was attracted to street life and the attendant escapism which illicit drugs provided. Listening to his recounted past, I was struck by the absence of power in his life, taken away first by the government, and later by racism and addiction. Recovery from addiction and the journey out of crime occurred for him as he regained a sense of empowerment.

Lance:... Like *I've taken my own power* and have grown and developed that. And that's like that spiritual force. There's mind, there's body and there's spirit and if you can connect them all together, *that gives you the strength to be able to stand on your own...* (Lance at 1135).

The real me which Lance now talks about allows him to develop “that relationship with yourself” which is authentic or “grounded” (Lance at 1033).

The discovery of the real me within a quagmire of addiction and crime motivates many ex-offenders to be honest with themselves, others and thus becomes a further credential of reform. Exposing oneself about *who I was* is a dimension of the real me testifying to inner changes. Ex-offenders may be in a position where it is very difficult or impossible to hide stigmatizing information about their past for reasons discussed earlier. This presents a problem for attaining a reputable status, and public disclosure and wider knowledge of *who I was* can be renegotiated as a credential.

Similar to the process of neutralizing deviance by negotiating its moral turpitude, openness about one's past attenuates stigma if everyone knows⁷³. Public disclosure brings exclusionary treatment by others into the open where stigma can be challenged and negotiated. The disclosure of a formerly disreputable self can be safely made in contexts where one's past life is viewed as a credential for someone who has “been there, done that” and can provide mentorship for similarly placed others. Drug and alcohol counsellors will often be seen as more legitimate if their own life displays features like that of those of their clientele. Lance is a counsellor with First Nations offenders and makes his former life a priority for disclosure: “My story is open to anyone. Everywhere I work, that's the first thing that I tell them. I don't hide anything” (Lance at 1166).

Unlike information which can be used as discrediting information, disclosures by ex-offenders prevents surprises from those who might wish to harm their public reputations. Bill reports much the same effort to diffuse any bombshells possible by others in possession of discrediting information.

Bill: Ah, you know, *everybody that I know at work knows me*, ah, knows about it [my past]. *I don't keep any secrets about it*, you know, my daughter, my five-year- old daughter has told half her schoolmates and stuff, you know (Bill at 1437).

Harry, Larry, Yvonne, Gary, Jack, Brad and Wayne also reported being open about their past lives. All but one of them work with others in a public, helping capacity with ex-offenders or drug addicts. The real me is pragmatic in the sense that it directly addresses a disreputable past, and deflects public criticism.

3. They're Not So Bad After All: Redefining Others

Credentials of reform address the question, "so how are you different from what you used to be?" One of the recurring codes that identified this issue was how ex-offenders' relationships to others had changed in the process of reform. Evidence of a profound change in self is manifest in the ways that individuals, groups and society in general are now redefined as having more positive qualities other formerly appreciated. They report relating more positively with others than they had in the past, such as towards groups of people like children (Wayne) and the elderly (Cheryl), to society in general (Allison and Gary), and the opposite sex (Lance, Jack, Peter, and Cheryl). Some report a new ability to relate to people as friends (Beverly and Lance), parents and grandparents (Dayna, Bill, and Harry,) siblings (Jerry), spouses (Harry, Darryl and Jerry) or former criminal associates (Lance, Harry, Cheryl and Darryl). For those who reported a deep identification with deviant values in their criminal years, friendships in the past were seen

in instrumental terms, for satisfying criminogenic needs. Darryl provides an example of *who I was* which starkly contrasts his relationships to people today⁷⁴. This kind of thinking was not uncommon among other ex-offenders.

Darryl: I never had any friends. If I was friends with anybody, it was because they had something I want. I didn't have anything to do with them, why would I want to have anything to do with them for? Like I told a friend of mine, I said, back then friends were a responsibility. Who the hell wants responsibility? They want you to remember their birthdays. They want you to invite 'em over for coffee. Piss on that shit. I never had any friends. I used everybody I came across in contact with. There's nobody I never used (Darryl at 1821).

In much the same way, the prison values which Lance embraced before he decided to go straight included a deep hatred for sex offenders, a group with whom he now works in a helping capacity.

Lance: I worked there [a treatment centre for offenders] for three years and I advanced a lot. I was a counselor working with sex offenders, and was like, how did this happen, right. I had come from a jail where sex offenders were looked at as, lower than anything you walked on, and there I was, faced with sitting in a circle, you know, 12 of these guys every night, five days a week (Lance at 960).

Relationships which non-offenders take for granted, such as having adult friends, may be new for some ex-offenders. Beverly talks about the first person in her life which she experienced as a friend – her sponsor from Alcoholics Anonymous.

Beverly: Yeah she's pretty much like a friend which is a big deal for me because I've never been really good at ah, well not really good, but really capable of having friends, like having relationships with people. I have always been afraid of people, right and to actually have a friend and to be able to pick up a phone even and call this person and talk to them is like, wow (Beverly at 42).

Allison and Cheryl developed new relationships with their children who suffered to various degrees as a result of their parent's participation in the underworld drug trade.

8. The Residual Self

So, the Jekyll and Hyde, okay, *that's still there*. That's *still there only I have control of it now*. I'm driving whereas before I was the bad guy... (Harry at 2140).

I'd get that little inclination of, I want to go do this, but I have to kick it aside, because *if I think about it too much longer, I will do it, you know* (Kirk at 1881).

This chapter revisits the residual self, but now pays attention to manifestations different from those physical traces, information databases, human memories and stigmatic interactions described in Chapter 4. The lifeworld for many ex-offenders reveals a struggle with the remnants of a disreputable self: the character traits, thinking patterns and emotional states which persist to the present.

There is considerable variation in how ex-offenders respond to their own internal struggles in coping with lingering aspects of *who I was*. There were moments in the interviews, and later during analysis of the transcribed text, which caught my attention about the struggle associated with regaining a normal status, especially for those who had a deep identity with criminal values, and whose early childhood experiences were similar to those described as “life-course persisters” in longitudinal studies on desistance (Farrington, 1992, 1995; Moffit, 2001). A subset of research participants presented *who I am* with characteristics which resemble both lay and professional assessments of criminality. While some people found going straight to be a relatively smooth transition and indicated multiple credentials of the type discussed in Chapter 7, others had much less to offer, and made few distinctions or between *who I was* and *who I am*. In light of the residuals I am about to discuss, most people would likely conclude, especially with physical markers or discrediting information, “once a con, always a con”.

In this chapter, I am faced with two challenges in representing the residual self. First, my interpretations of the meanings drawn from the interviews can be contested if I am seen to be judgmental towards the women and men who willingly became my research participants. And if they are portrayed as “not really much different” from who they were in the past, I might be seen to affirm an essential, deviant identity in the very people who struggle with the problems of being an ex-offender.

My second challenge is to write accurately about that which comes only from *being* in the research context of talking and listening. The attitudes reflected in the interview experience cannot be fully conveyed when they are decontextualized from voice and body language. As listeners, we continually make judgements about the attitudes of others, such as their deference to authority, how speakers value us or themselves, whether we feel we are being “sold”, or how a conversation can be used to satisfy a personal need rather than the pretence for its occasion. What people say is heard in both their language and deportment. Attitudes are interpreted from voice tones and inflections, facial movements, eye contact and the content of beliefs expressed. Our reading of attitudes is affirmed when we encounter others who share the same impressions as ourselves towards those with whom we commonly interact. By way of illustration, note how one ex-offender evaluates his prison experience within the framework of values and slang characteristic of the inmate subculture (Sykes and Messinger, 1960). He refers to one of the institutions where he served his sentence.

Kirk: I did most of *my bit* [provincial prison sentence] in [a maximum-security prison]. They kicked me out of there and sent me to a camp up north, that little, you know where it is, *it's a fuckin' joke. Fuck.* (Kirk at 892).

In the prison subculture, the more restrictive the jail, the greater the chance that one has

been assessed by the authorities to be “dangerous”. He currently subscribes to these values in his view of the medium-security prison as being “a fuckin’ joke”. From my previous experience as both an inmate and prison guard, I also hear him saying that he “deserved” maximum security, given the gravity of his crimes. Others without similar experiences may interpret his comments differently.

In another interview, Darryl used the term “straight john” to describe someone he never wanted to become. I asked for clarification of the term, to which he replied:

Darryl: Nine to five, lunch bucket, go to work, work on a computer, go home to a family, don’t say boo to nobody, don’t complain about the government, that’s a straight john (Darryl at 1226).

When I heard him say this, I wondered how other people might understand the term “straight john” which was conveyed in a disparaging tone. In the vernacular of inmate jargon, it seems that conformity itself is disvalued if he is heard to characterize people who live conventional lifestyles. The statement could also be interpreted as categorical thinking, without shades of grey. Regardless of my interpretation, comments like these have the potential to leave a lingering feeling of unease for the listener(s), especially if others see themselves fitting within a disvalued category raised by an ex-offender. When recorded, transcribed and analyzed within the developing conceptual scheme of what it means to go straight, comments like these take on new meaning for understanding the stigma with which ex-offenders struggle. To the extent that communication forms like these are interpreted by those outside the realities of ex-offenders, the speaker may be seen as odd, unusual or unduly critical. Reciprocally, ex-offenders will perceive others as condemnatory when the latter react to a particular cognitive style. In other words, ex-offenders may feel stigmatized *because they are*.

In the face of these potential challenges of representation, I can only affirm my commitment to fully explore the lived realities of ex-offenders from an appreciative stance that can be communicated to academic and wider communities of interest. I subscribe to the ethical values mentioned earlier in this study, especially the promise to bring “no harm to subjects”. I am not passing moral judgement on who they are, but I can say how a few stories contrasted against others to reveal a continuum of distance between *who I was* and *who I am*. This feature emerged through the diversity of change experiences reported by the 24 ex-offenders, the very diversity which led me to code some people as having greater success in transcending the residual self. To leave out the persistent features which emerge in reading the data would ignore realities recognizable to ex-offenders - and those who work in a helping capacity with them.

The realities experienced by many ex-offenders reflect a world of subtle, stigmatic treatment which people without a disreputable past do not experience. Before categorizing their accounts as indicative of some deeper malady, we need to appreciate how their worlds appear as real to them as ours do for us. What I have learned from the transcripts is a manner of being which can be interpreted by others as constituting traces of a thinking style which invokes a stigmatizing response. As a listener, I can hear both for myself and within the imagined roles of others who might not be as sympathetic, and appreciate the *eigenwelt* (“own world”) of ex-offenders⁷⁵.

The residual self varies among ex-offenders in its presence, intensity and the degree to which it requires maintenance through a helping, imported conversation. The concept of the residual self helps us understand why ex-offenders may not be entirely “crime-free”, why some return to crime, and why they are stigmatized by society. An aspect of

the residual self occupying a significant place in the interviews comes from the few ex-offenders who told me they were still engaging in criminal activity. Initially, I was tempted to exclude them from the sample so I could have a group of “true ex-offenders”. That would have been a mistake. Their inclusion in this study affords us a deeper understanding of the residual self, and how some strategies for resolving the problematic conditions of being an ex-offender can be less than optimal. These are “marginal cases” whose inclusion helps to develop a theoretical framework for understanding the process and meaning of going straight.

A. Criminal Behaviour: Still Doing It

Four of the 24 ex-offenders were still involved in criminal activities. Two freely admitted to smoking or trafficking in small amounts of marijuana, one was (briefly) involved in distributing black market cable TV boxes, and another told me that he had never obtained a driver’s license (but still managed to drive almost daily). I wondered how ex-offenders integrated these apparent contradictions into their claims to have left crime. Sometimes they offered an explanation for the dissonance between word and deed, or an account which justified their law-breaking.

Ex-offenders who engage in behaviour which could draw public attention from the police risk challenges from sceptical others about their claims to be an EX-offender. The few who continued to commit crime explained their actions by claiming that they were no more deviant than other Canadians who, for example, possess marijuana for personal consumption - or others who engage in fraud by failing to declare income to Revenue Canada. Two people outside my research became aware of the topic informed me that two of these four research participants were still engaging in crime (fraud and

trafficking in small amounts of cannabis). I was left to address their comment, “I thought you were interviewing EX-offenders...”⁷⁶. Their reaction underscores the stigmatic status carried by ex-offenders but with an added dividend: they are bad because they break the law *and* because they claim to be ex-offenders. Although criminal behaviour may be seen as a forgivable indiscretion for someone who does not have a criminal history, the same behaviour receives a more stigmatizing reaction if understood within the context of previous legal convictions or another disreputable attribute, such as having been a prostitute. Crimes committed by ex-offenders is an oxymoron likely to be interpreted as evidence for an enduring propensity for antisocial behaviour, confirming, “once a con, always a con”.

B. Censoriousness: If You Think *I'm* Bad...

Three of the four ex-offenders who said they occasionally broke the law rationalized their actions by being censorious towards authority. The emergent property here is an attitudinal disposition which directs attention away from personal culpability, and impeaches the law, criminal justice officials or society in general as hypocritical or wrong. The deflection of moral responsibility by being censorious enables one to renounce blame. However, censoriousness will not be seen as a legitimate response compared to imported conversations which soften blame through helping discourses about the disease of addiction, early childhood trauma, the triumph of the will, or the invisible hand of Providence. If society, its key institutions, or people in positions of authority are portrayed as morally tainted, then ex-offenders have a conversation which addresses their main concern. Censoriousness conveys the message, “I may be bad, but society is just as bad - or worse”. The stigmatic properties of their own status are

attenuated when they evaluate others as equally immoral, or contend that the law itself is wrong to criminalize the actions in which they engage. The risk ex-offenders take here is that censoriousness will be perceived by others as an illegitimate response to their precarious moral status, especially if their criminality is perceived as a manifestation of being anti-authoritarian. This is a type of account identified as a “condemnation of the condemner” where the “actor admits performing the untoward act but asserts its irrelevancy because others commit these and worse acts, and these others are not caught, not punished, not condemned, unnoticed or even praised (Scott and Lyman, 1968: 51; see also Sykes and Matza, 1957).

Warren had been convicted in a drug trafficking conspiracy - an event which capped a decade-long lifestyle of drug use, international travel and spending huge sums of cash. During the interview, he contested the morality of his arrest for trafficking in marijuana. I asked him what to make of the government and corporate crimes which he brought to my attention moments earlier in the interview. Initially referring to his past crimes, he replied.

Warren: Oh yeah that's nothing. Nine million dollars worth of pot is *nothing in the big scheme*. Now figure out how much money - how much was it that they're gonna pay back now, the NDP [New Democratic Party], you know, they stole two and a half million and we'll pay you back sixty thousand. What does that say to you? *Somebody pocketed a couple million, it happens every day* (Warren at 258).

By referring to a political scandal where a prominent politician had been convicted for skimming money from a charity, he compares his own malfeasance relative to what he perceives as widespread wrongdoing by those in power. His actions are no worse than the “law-abiding”, and any moral disapprobation from others must be seen within that context. Similarly, Kirk provides an instance of censoriousness towards authority when

he condemns victims of a past break and enter because they were “political pimps”, thus standing as reasons for why he broke into and ransacked their property.

Kirk: I hated them because... well I don't understand politics I still fuckin' don't and I really, y'know a bunch of political pimps but I just fuckin' went berserk. They had our office down on [jurisdiction] there eh, and I just went fuckin' mental (Kirk at 250).

The condition he describes to inform his anger toward politics (and not understanding politics) still remains, but no longer emerges as outbursts of rage through property crime. The behaviour has changed, but the attitudes remain. Similarly, his condemnatory attitude extends to a Twelve Step group where he talks about his inability to gain anything from the experience, and sees other participants as a “bunch of assholes”.

JFA: You know, from probation to - I'm assuming that you didn't do any other prison sentences after that?

Kirk: No. Ah, I was, ah, I was supposed to be attending meetings and I worked it to a point where I said to [my probation officer], ‘I said look, I can't relate to the fuckin meeting, bunch of assholes in there’, and they gave me the old ridicule about, ‘yeah [given name], you're here for a reason’. I said, ‘I'm here for a FUCKIN' REASON, I'm here for MY fuckin' reason. I'm not going listen to you stand up and fuckin' talk, and I'm not going to ridicule you and why are YOU fuckin' telling me that I should be doing this and doing this?’ (Kirk at 1121).

He also reports his time with a Twelve Step group in a critical tone, which differs markedly from the manner in which other ex-offenders reported their experiences, even where Twelve Step groups were described as “not for them”.

JFA: Was this AA or NA?

Kirk: It was both. I chose not to go because you know, like I sat there and fuckin' I tell my bit and, yeah like we're talking strictly alcohol. Fuck! I'm in the wrong place then, I'm outta here. Fuck you. I go back and I call my counselor and I says, ‘this is fuckin' garbage, a fuckin' white guy blowin' me fuckin' shit and tellin' me this and tellin' me that’ (Kirk at 1136).

My intention here is not to challenge Kirk's interpretation or expression of disapproval about the Twelve Step participants or what transpired in these sessions. It may very well have been the way that he says it was, but his comments would likely be interpreted quite differently by someone other than a sympathetic and informed researcher. Thus, while he can claim to be an ex-offender because he no longer engages in property crime, the attitudes expressed in the interview or in other situations may lead people to believe that he remains disreputable. An audience may see that the problems he reports have more to do with *his* inability to deal with substance abuse issues, than with a group of people belonging to an association which is widely perceived as reputable.

Harry casts blame towards politically created institutions which he believes contributed to the offender he became.

Harry: I had a lot of hate in me and a lot of anger against the system, *still do, still do*. You don't take 16 year old boys and put them in an adult prison. *Fuck you*. And that's - and I SAY THAT out loud publicly ah, *there's other people* that had a piece of me being who I became. *I didn't get here all by myself*, I had some help eh and I believe that. Now, there's probably people that would say, geez he's still got some unresolved issues. *Damn right* (Harry at 1914).

Many of the sociologically inclined would agree with him about the role of early institutionalization and its effects on youth, and perhaps understand why he views "the system" in such harsh terms. However, the anger expressed here can be interpreted as an indicator of the same disposition which preceded many crises in his criminal past and, in their view, still resides. He says his issues are "unresolved", and are portrayed as natural outcomes of systemic forces over which he had little or no control. The issue here is whether others would stigmatize this man by *blaming him* for being the angry, hateful person which he tells us he became. If we accept that his adult condition came about from

structural conditions, then censoriousness has achieved its purpose, which is to avert blame in favour of understanding the external forces which contributed to his disreputable self. There is nothing disingenuous about his narrative. Rather, he alerts us to how he understands society's role in creating deviance, and this conversation subsequently requires us to appreciate him in a less condemnatory way. In so doing, the stigmatic circumstance of being an ex-offender is attenuated, which helps address the main concern which is to be perceived as essentially reputable.

Censoriousness also emerged in the way that some ex-offenders described society in general. To suggest that deviance is not unusual, one person claimed that "everybody cheats on their taxes, everybody lies about how many fish they've caught, I mean, it's just what they were saying about [former US President] Clinton, about extramarital affairs..." (Jack at 1022). A woman interviewed for this study believes much the same when she said, "I'm sorry but everybody has some kind of a link to crime but you know, unless you're a priest or something" (Francis at 243). Another individual told me about how the parole board noted his lack of remorse for a property crime. He responded that his victim "doubled the amount of money I got [from the break and enter]. I'm doin' the time and this guy got the insurance money, and I feel remorse? I don't think so. Who's the criminal here?" (Brad at 180). Another man said that his exposure to the criminal justice system led him to believe that the police were corrupt: "As I got more involved, I began to realize that the bad guys are basically the ones that have the uniforms on, right?" (Warren at 79).

My thesis here proposes that the moral status associated with being an ex-offender is a problem which is processed by those who live it. Censoriousness, whether articulate

and compelling, or angry and condemnatory, attempts to address the stigmatic condition of ex-offenders: it moderates, diminishes or weakens the stigma of being an ex-offender.

While not related specifically to censoriousness (but having much the same effect), another response to deflect the stigma of being an offending ex-offender is a legalistic one. A woman confided that she had given up all drugs except marijuana. I asked what it might mean if she was discovered by the police for possession of cannabis.

JFA: Ah, are there, is there any fear around ah, about being discovered or, what does it mean to you?

Francis: By whom?

JFA: Well, by the authorities.

Francis: Depends. Well if it's cops, first of all I know my rights. Second of all I know for a FACT that they can't charge if I have under an ounce on me - and I NEVER have more than that on me anyways and when I'm at my drug dealer's house, no, it's not my house. They can't charge me so I mean, I know the law pretty well so I'm not very concerned about that (Francis at 876).

The question remains as to how her justification for smoking marijuana would be interpreted against the backdrop of the disreputable past she reported earlier in the interview. Is her current marijuana smoking an indicator of the same rebellious self which led her into drug trafficking? The answer lies in the crucible of identity-formation: the social reactions of others. Although a strictly legal definition of desistance would exclude her from qualifying as an ex-offender, the important part is that she believes she has left a disreputable self. She now participates in behaviour which she believes is within the "normal range" of Canadian deviance.

Becoming an ex-offender is about achieving a reputable status in a struggle with social reactions towards stigmatic labels, and the continuous threat of being identified

with the ghosts of a past self. Both of these dimensions vary, and the focus here is on those whose residuals of a past self can be seen by audiences as lingering, despite the “ex” in ex-offender.

C. Crime’s Been Good to Me

The problem of stigma can be alleviated by making it sound like crime pays, or a comparable conversation glorifying *who I was* as a criminal. One response to deal with others’ negative opinions is to portray the life of crime as having benefits which make it appear attractive, alluring or worth the consequences. It was hard not to be impressed about the benefits of crime when this man spoke about his past life in crime.

Warren: When we finally went to court ah, I just, I had properties. I owned acreage on the [Canadian resort property], I owned a house in [U.S. city], I owned a house in [U.S. state], I owned a house in [Canadian resort community], ah, you know, the property on the [Canadian waterfront resort area] and ah-

JFA: Did the Crown seize that?

Warren: No, they never. It was all numbered companies. I also have off-shore companies. I have a company in [Central America] , a company in [Western Europe], you know (Warren at 313).

His claims about the benefits of crime are in the current assets he holds today. His relationship to his past is important for understanding the residual self because it reveals some affinity with - not disavowal from – a past life in crime. The question is whether or not the wider society would accept this man as an *ex-offender*, given that his real estate holdings were acquired through the proceeds of crime.

Similarly, Kirk’s bragging about *who he was* concerns the reputation and image he enjoyed among law-enforcement officials, his peer group and the wider society.

Kirk: Everybody they'd say, I used to wear this long rider coat, black coat with a black hat and I stood out of the crowd. Fuck, I walked through the mall and like, just like, 'whew, here he comes, *the man from the dark side*, don't fuck with this guy'...People would go, 'And how is it going Kirk?' 'It's good. What's going on in here? I want to know what the hell's being said and I want to know if there's a nickel bag [small quantity of cannabis] in the mall, I want to know about it, this is my fuckin' show, don't steal it now' (Kirk at 1445).

The comments by these two participants stood out against the 22 others who spoke of their past actions or self in a distant and more transcendent way. Neither of them spoke about the kind of "insight credentials" discussed earlier. Their descriptions of their past lives may leave listeners feeling as though they regret leaving crime.

D. I Can't Say I Will NEVER Do It Again

Vestiges of the disreputable self remain in the present behaviours, thoughts and emotions of many ex-offenders and makes going straight a struggle. I asked Kirk if going straight was a "clean break". He replied:

Kirk: Like I said earlier John, sometimes, you know, I'd get that little inclination of, I want to go do this, but I have to kick it aside, because *if I think about it too much longer, I will do it, you know*. But some people don't seem to understand that part because it's like *what you are saying and doing is two different things* (Kirk at 1881).

Depending on the degree to which residuals like addiction or uncontrollable anger were held responsible for their past crimes, going straight means struggling with an obstinate self which they live with in the present. Harry struggled with "anger issues" and speaks to the lingering nature of a past self which he now keeps in control through daily maintenance: "So, the Jekyll and Hyde, okay, *that's still there*. That's *still there only I have control of it now*. I'm driving whereas before I was the bad guy... (Harry at 2140).

Another glimpse of the residual self emerges when ex-offenders talk about their relationship to illicit drugs. The two passages below represent differing responses to the prospects of backsliding into crime by using cocaine (the drug of choice for both during their past criminal lives).

Dayna: Yeah, like *I can't say I will NEVER ever do cocaine ever again*, I would like not to... and ah, like I said that I mean you get a craving (Dayna at 1364).

Peter: And, you know, there's the pressure [from peers to use cocaine], 'Aw come on come on', right, but I mean, *no way, I just don't want to do it* (Peter at 670).

There are important differences in the inferences which could be made by evaluative audiences towards someone who views using cocaine as a *possibility*, and someone who makes a definitive statement about their *commitment to avoid* this stigmatized drug.

There is considerable variation in the way that the residual self is experienced as “nearby” or “far away”. Some ex-offenders described themselves as being “close” to the self which they left, while others considered *who I was* as a distant self which had no allure, attraction or power over *who I am*. To illustrate this variation, Brad told me, “I’m *one drink away from a drunk*. [If] I go out and have a drink, you don’t want to be walking down the street later, especially if I run into you” (Brad at 496). Harry was the most articulate with this property of his own residual self.

Harry: One of the biggest problems I had in recovery was, Harry who are you? WHO are you? Well I know who I was but I have no idea who I am. I have none. Who are you? And I couldn’t answer that question. I had a total identity crisis. Well now I don’t. You know, I know who I am, I don’t know who the hell I’m going to be tomorrow but I know who I am today and *who I am today is a little bit like who I was yesterday*, you know, ah and I know what my purpose is and my function, and how I’m going to do it ah, my vision, my desires, my aspirations. I’ve got, I’ve got a shot at those. If all of those things that make of my identity, okay, but it

still not real formulated for me 'cause I know who I was. *I know who I was and I know that's [snaps fingers] accessible to me just like that.* I'm armed to the tits. *I'm probably more dangerous now than I've ever been in my entire life.*

JFA: I don't understand that.

Harry: Wow. *I have the capacity to be violent. It's not a problem for me.*

JFA: What do you mean by "armed to the tits"?

Harry: I've got - they gave me an FAC [firearms acquisition certificate]. I have a gun collection at home that's admirable. You know what I'm saying? And, and but *I'm very responsible.* I'm not an irresponsible gun owner but I'm armed. *I'm armed now more than I ever was as a bad guy* (Harry at 2105).

The same person told me that if he ever relapsed into alcoholism and crime, it would be "a bad day, a bad day for everyone, everyone" (Harry, field notes).

For some the hardcore ex-offenders, the residual self is described as "available" but maintained and kept under control. In the exchange below, Bill talks about the proximity of *who I was* which still informs *who I am*.

JFA: Is there - we're getting into a little bit deeper stuff, right now, but you said something earlier that kind of prompts me to ask if, do you ever imagine a scenario for a situation where you might go back to that former lifestyle?

Bill: Well I think sometimes about it. I think if I ah, if anything, well I know, things that would push me over the edge, if anyone ever did anything to my family, without it being a whole threat and I know lots of guys that say well I'd do this and I'd do that, *well I would kill and I would do it happily and I would wait to get caught and I will kill anyone that hurts - especially my children.*

JFA: But I don't think that's too much different then most of us would feel about our kids.

Bill: Yeah, but there's a difference between feeling it and doing it. *I know, I know I am personally capable of doing it in the blink of an eye.* I don't know how everybody else feels about that sort of thing. *I could commit extreme violence, I know I can and ah I sometimes worry about that more*

than anything. That might get me back in jail. If I were ever to start losing my temper which I don't do, but if I did, I could see myself being in jail again (Bill at 1213).

In a comparable description about the subjective realities of going straight, Beverly, like the other addicts interviewed for this study, tell us that staying straight means “paying attention” to her own inner states.

Beverly: There's a lot of times that I don't know what's normal. *I had no idea what's normal is.*

JFA: No one has written a book on it yet.

Beverly: Well, it's a setting on the washing machine as far as I understand [laughs]. I'm on the spin cycle so like [laughs] it's a lifetime commitment. It's not like, I don't think I'm ever not going to be an addict. I don't think *I'm ever not going to have to ah pay attention to what's going on, right because I can get involved with criminals that fast* [snaps fingers] *too right, that's part of that whole process, right* (Beverly at 963).

By way of contrast to the ex-offenders cited above, another one reports that he has become a new and trustworthy person, supported by a long list of tangible and intrinsic changes:

Edward: I'm not, *I know very clearly that I'm not the same person I was twenty years ago. I'm just NOT and I COULDN'T be the person I was twenty years ago* (Edward at 944).

Edward, Lance, Cheryl, Yvonne and several others - even those with visible signs of their disreputable past – say they have transcended *who I was* to the point where they are not concerned with controlling or otherwise keeping the residual self under management. They imported a conversation or have adopted self help to give new meaning to the subjective and objective markers which signify their past. They have largely resolved the main concern with an internal conversation which confronts the stigmatic evidence of their past with internal credentials of reform. They are surrounded by people who affirm

their normal self. The presence of this type of transcendence over *who I was* contrasts markedly with narratives where the residual self surfaced within the research interview. Some ex-offenders said things which point to a residual self which differs from merely seeing the physical manifestations of a disreputable past, or hearing a description of a past self which no longer exists in the present.

Reflecting on what I heard from my research participants, I imagined how others might react to their statements. The few ex-offenders considered here said things during the course of the interviews which provide at least two points for learning more about the residual self. First, the diversity of change experiences reported helps to understand the process of becoming an ex-offender as an ongoing, dynamic process which is different from the idea that being an ex-offender is the outcome of a single decision. Secondly and most important, the research participants *show different moments in the process of going straight*, from those with full credentials of having transcended a residual self, to those whose transformative work is “in progress”. These finer distinctions would not have been possible without the contrast of change experiences reported. The presence of these “marginal” narratives within the larger sample are critical to understanding the process of redefining oneself as reputable in the face of significant personal and social obstacles.

E. Bad Karma: Breaking Residual Rules

Given the profile which ex-offenders assigned to their previous thinking patterns which were associated with criminogenic choices in the past, reform means identifying the cognitive styles which preceded crime and then choosing alternative thinking and interpretive schemes (with the support of others).

Scheff (1966) uses the concept of “residual rules” to identify the norms which govern ordinary interaction which are so basic and taken for granted that they are difficult to articulate, nor is there a ready-made label available for those who break them. The examples he cites include failing to maintain proper eye-contact, not keeping the culturally appropriate level of distance from those with whom one is interacting, or the tendency to drift off and not follow a conversation. Most of us violate these normative expectations from time to time, but their meaning and significance is unaccompanied by a pre-existing label such as “ex-offender” (or others so labelled, such as the mentally ill, prostitutes, drug or gambling addicts, or sex offenders). Once the label is known, others confirm through a retrospective reconstruction of information they hold about the deviant: their odd behaviour is indicative of “something” they formerly sensed in the presence of an ex-offender (see Maclean, 1991).

What stands out in the data are the expressions of thinking which may lead listeners to feel as though *something is amiss* within the communication and cognitive styles they hear. For example, Beverly told me “I’m not good with the phone yet. I still don’t use the phones, like *the phone is this big monster thing*. I don’t like phones” (Beverly at 888). A reluctance to use the telephone at the end of the 20th century sets this person apart from others in the study. If coupled with the knowledge that she is a former addict and criminal, her declaration may lead others to infer that whatever deficiencies led her into addiction and crime remain in a residual fear of telephones. Perhaps it is not that complicated - people may just assume that being an addict is the result of some personal failing, and so is her fear of the telephone. Thus, social reactions to her fear will not allow her to fully address the main concern, which is to become reputable in the eyes of others.

The confession here should also be understood within the context of her uncertainty about “being normal”.

Other ex-offenders stated that they “weren’t social”, as does Bill.

Bill: But I’m not in the community as far as like socially, like for people that know me and that, I’m not a social person.

JFA: Is that because you don’t want to drink? Does that have something to do with it?

Bill: Mmm nah and I don’t really, the people that I like to deal with are mentally challenged people, teens, elderly people. *I don’t really have a lot of time for everybody else ah just because I find it a lot of horseshit. Everybody - you get involved with people, you get involved with all of their horseshit that they got going on in their lives and I don’t like doing that* (Bill at 1190).

The preference for not being social might be interpreted by others against the backdrop of Bill’s violent behaviour during his criminally active period. Brad made this assessment about the motives behind a professor who had graded one of his term paper.

Brad: I wrote a paper on capital punishment. [The professor] gave me an A+ and she goes, ‘It’s pretty easy for you being a fourth year student’. I says, ‘This is my first course’, right, and she was kinda shocked and then *she had the opportunity to get back at me a little* whereby I wrote the final exam and the answers were on back of the paper and the questions were on the front so you were flipping and I missed an entire page of questions. Dropped me from an A to a C. And people go, ‘Why haven’t you challenged it?’ And I said, What for? Now I know where this person’s coming from eh, *they’re just way too rigid*. Go out and live. You can’t be that rigid in life (Brad at 390).

In his view, the instructor wanted to punish him for surprising her with the news that he was not as advanced a student as she had assessed him to be. (A year later, he recounted the same event to me, but without inferring any ill motive on the part of the professor.

The difference between how he recalled this event at two different moments speaks to the processual nature of going straight, and how the changes reported by ex-offenders are

often deep and authentic). According to Beck (1999) interpretations such as these reflect a thinking error where “the offended person jumps to a conclusion regarding the cause of behaviour and thus ignores other possible explanations...” (p. 84). Although this style of thinking is not particular to ex-offenders, it predominates among those with histories of violence (Andrews and Bonta, 1993; Ford, 1991; Serrin, 1991). Importantly, what makes the style of thinking “residual” is the reaction it may invoke from others who will think *something is wrong with what I hear*, but not able to identify precisely why the discourse leaves them with doubts, fears or misgivings. Because conversations proceed quickly and without the benefit of recording and later analyses, participants in a dialogue may not be able to identify why they have negative reactions to others.

In a conversational exchange which caught my attention, an ex-offender who regularly attended Twelve Step group meetings told me that for him to be seen in a bar would be “bullshit”. He explains how he would be seen by others in such a situation.

Harry: Yeah, you know, hey [refers to his surname in third person] ‘cause the one thing I hate most in the world is being called bullshit.

JFA: Well especially where you are because –

Harry: (interrupts): Period. Never mind where I’m at now. Period. [Harry’s surname] you’re bullshit. I hate that and I’ve always hated that, *I like to have always kind of liked to, to garner some respect, you know* (Harry at 1989).

Later, he told me that his need for respect from others has sometimes led him to retaliate against those who fail to show it. The thinking style which comprised his former, discreditable self remains in a residual way, and control over it requires continual, internal monitoring.

The account advanced here concerns distance between the criminal identity which ex-offenders experienced in the past and the enduring residuals of that self today. Some offenders appear to have transcended *who I was* to the point where the self they present today is almost entirely devoid of a subjective identification about *who I was*. Others struggle daily to avoid thinking styles which they identify as antecedent to criminal or anti-social behaviour. Failure to manage the residual self may result in a temporary slip into old ways of thinking, feeling and acting. A permanent slip (and return to crime) is where the residual self “surfaces” to becomes the current self. *Who I was* overrides *who I am*.

If we accept the premise of symbolic interaction that things have value and meanings which are given to them through social interaction and negotiation (Blumer, 1969), then it follows that the residual self takes on the meanings ascribed and imputed by others and ex-offenders themselves. The residual self is not always or necessarily an anchor to a past disreputable self. It can be a resource for change.

F. Just Three Degrees to the Right: Using the Residual Self

Not all ex-offenders lose their identity as offenders when they retire from crime. It is possible for them to maintain the old identity, or the residual self, in ways which promote good work with others. To be “street-wise” or “con-wise” means that one *can identify* with the residual self which others may present because they themselves have “been there”, or to some degree even “live there” themselves. Ex-offenders are conventional in the sense that they live and promote conformist behaviour, and yet are familiar enough with their own residual selves to connect with and assist others facing the same struggle for normal status. Several research participants used their past selves as credentials for

acceptance into occupations where they work in helping relationships with inmates, ex-offenders or addicts.

The characterization of the residual self should not be seen as “a bad thing” to be kept under subjective surveillance. It is not so much whether the residual self exists in physical, contextual and subjective manifestations, but *how it is interpreted* by ex-offenders. I have already suggested that the residual self provides a certain type of credential when used in work with inmates or drug addicts, but it also can be seen as a former self with a set of “deviant abilities” or characteristics to be invoked in the straight life. Harry talks about his “aggressive personality” and how he turned it around for other uses.

Harry: I think I had about three year’s clean time, and was telling these people, and I’m trying to change here, you know, so don’t be offering me drugs and alcohol and I can’t be around you if you’re doing shit that’s not for me and I’m very vocal, from right out of the gate. It fits with my personality too, you know because *I’m an aggressive person so I just got aggressive about the recovery process* and I was prepared to inflict it on everybody (Harry at 2273).

He told me that his aggressive style worked in communicating with hardcore offenders, which is a requirement for his occupation. In a conversation with an ex-offender who became one of two key informants⁷⁷ in this study, I was told that there is merit to the claim, “once a con, always a con”.

JFA: You’ll hear snide comments, ‘Well once a con, always a con’. How would you deal with that kind of criticism if it were directed at you or at inmates, or former offenders generally?

Brad: I agree with them. Once a con, always a con. True. *I will do whatever it takes to get the job done.* That’s a con. Okay, now nowadays what it takes to get the job done is for me to go to school and get credentials, right. In the old days what it took to get the job done was for

me to take a gun and go get the money *so it's the same attitude, it's just now I'm in a different life* (Brad at 478).

Some listeners may discern the “same attitude” when he speaks and pass judgements on Brad accordingly. However, for him, that part of the problematic past is reconfigured, adapted and tailored to reach conventional pursuits and goals. Or, in the words of Harry, the task of helping offenders become ex-offenders is “to take all that’s there, and just tilt it three degrees to the right so that they’re not shooting up or killing each other” (field notes).

Several offenders understood their disreputable past as a historical self which contributed to becoming a richer human being. One woman said that “Every part of who I am now is a result of where I’ve been in my past and I brought those experiences with me to live today in a good way, because I know, through experience, what I don’t want to do” (Loni at 11). She described herself as having chameleon-like qualities in the present and during her criminally active period - character traits she felt necessary to cope with an abusive father (Loni at 1218).

Loni: The way I’m looking at [my life], my [criminal past] really helped me hone some good skills and those skills that I use nowadays to help me. It’s not just a survival thing anymore. I really believe that I have worked through a lot of it. Occasionally still something pops up but ah, there are some wonderful skills there that really helped me out and help me in my teaching work (Loni at 204).

At the time Jack was interviewed, he operated a “safe house” for ex-offenders with substance abuse problems. To set up the house and have it approved for referrals from other agencies and the government, the home needed extensive repairs. He did not have much money and was in poor health, so he employed others - any way he could - to do

the work which needed to be done. He drew upon the same skills which allowed him to manipulate others in his past life as a heroin addict:

Jack: This place was a hovel when I moved in, like it was a drug addict, alcoholic place. And every fridge was full of green ah food [inaudible] blood all over the walls, you know, it was just, just... and I only had a little bit of money so I had, if I wanted to get this up, I had to get people to help me. I went to the [Twelve Steps] program and I got a girl to buy me tobacco and I offered this guy [a temporary absence from prison] on the weekend so he got six hours off. You know, you go out for six hours and I know they are short of tobacco, especially before welfare days, for a bail of tobacco you can come in and help me for three or four hours in the house. Sure that's bucks, costs me five bucks to the Native girl that buys the tobacco on the Reserve for me, you know, I did all that because I know that's possible. And so... and they were happy to have the tobacco, they were happy to help me and it was a win-win situation all around but that, *that's being cheap - training from being an addict*, get me what you want, ah the cheapest way you can (Jack at 775).

The insights to be drawn from these passages are important because they confirm the subjective experience of the residual self and draw attention to *how it can be interpreted*. Having a residual self does not necessarily predispose one to remain within a criminal identity; what counts is how previous deviant skills or cognitive proclivities are interpreted in the present. Put differently, many of the ex-offenders say that the traits which became their identity *into and during their criminal years* are the same ones which accompany them *out of crime*. Past character traits are present but employed for worthwhile ends. Another reading of the data is to appreciate how ex-offenders are not "labelled" by society in a way which determines their behaviour, because they have the ability to interpret and affirm meanings they take from their past. Labelling and the ascription of a stigmatic condition are attributed through interactions with those holding a disreputable past, but there is no requirement that the latter conform to an identity imputed by others. In the metaphor used by one ex-offender when he was talking about

whether one has to accept the negative opinions of others, he said, “a bird can land in your tree, but you don’t have to let it build a nest there” (Jack, field notes).

The internal conversations or narratives which ex-offenders assemble to make sense of going straight transcend even the most virulent forms of stigma. The man interviewed for this study who was convicted of multiple sexual offences against children was able to interpret his stigmatic treatment by others as a resource for helping him to cope on the outside. In a recorded phone call, I asked him how he would manage the negative publicity once he was released on day parole.

Hector: Some people will decide that they don’t want to socialize with me the that’s certainly something I can deal with. That’s not, that’s not a huge stumbling block.

JFA: What helps you deal with that?

Hector: Well, I guess, having lived in prison for, well having gone through the media ostrasization and sort of becoming one of the lepers of society, ah, during my bail period and sentence hearing period and incarceration, ah have made me a stronger person in that and I’m no longer so dependent on ah the approval or opinions of others, as I was before (Hector, personal communication, June 27, 1999).

To summarize, the data reviewed for this study show common themes among a subset of ex-offenders whose identity partially resides within the self they have publicly disavowed. The primary manifestation of a lingering residual self is a current involvement in criminal behaviour. Those who continued to break the law were more likely to be censorious of authority, and two boasted about their past criminal identity or proceeds from crime. Other residuals which may come to the attention of others include thinking styles which draw curiosity or misgivings from others. Although ex-offenders may allow the residual self to surface, that does not mean that they have not changed

markedly from the self they once occupied. Further distinctions between *who I was* and *who I am* will assist them in negotiating a reputable self.

The markers of a deviant identity consist of visible markers and discrediting information held by authorities, former peers and significant others. The decision to go straight occurs in what ex-offenders recount as a transformative crisis which stands out from other crises in their lives. Breaking out of crime is unlikely to be an epiphany. It is more like a process of “going straight”, or incremental change through the helping interactions of others. Help consists of the importation of self-talk promoted by Twelve Step groups, the “lay determinism” of popular psychology, or discourses which make sense of past lives through supernatural guidance. These imported conversations resonate with wider cultural themes of confession and making amends. The proof of being an ex-offender is established with credentials which consist of insight, authenticity, doing good and experiencing new, constructive relationships with others and society in general. Ex-offenders report varying degrees of transcendence over *who I was*, and a subset of the research participants did or said things which would likely lead others to question their claim to have abandoned a previous criminal identity. Some have changed their behaviour, but refer to residuals of a past (violent) self which leaves them in closer proximity to *who I was* than reported by other members of the study group. Similarly, some ex-offenders disclose cognitive styles which may affect how they are perceived by others. However, the remains of a past, subjectively experienced deviant identity can be interpreted as a resource for doing good and making sense of that which cannot be transcended (such as an proclivity for anger or addiction).

Having now identified the main concern of ex-offenders and how it is differentially resolved, my next step is to provide a theoretically plausible answer to the problematic moral situation inherent in being an ex-offender.

9. Towards A Theory of Going Straight

This chapter further develops a theory which is supported by the data analyzed here. Grounded theory can be presented either as a well codified set of propositions or in a running theoretical discussion, using conceptual categories and their properties. I have chosen the latter option because the form in which a theory is presented does not make it one; it is a theory because it explains or predicts something (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 31 note 22). What does the grounded theory method explain about leaving crime? The answer to that question can be addressed from my study and discussed with reference to similar research efforts which explore exits from crime (see Chapter 2 and Figure 4.1 on p. 123 above). The balance of this chapter develops a theory of going straight by considering the following elements:

1. Criminal identities previously held by ex-offenders leave a residual self, and the origins and the extent of these residuals problematize the process of leaving crime. Developmental and life-course theories address those identities, and give clues to their origins and potential for transformation.
2. The decision to leave crime can be attributed to an existential crisis, a rational decision, or elements of both.
3. Leaving crime involves help which is generally necessary for aiding, transforming and negotiating a non-criminal identity. Help supports transcending the residual self by reducing its stigmatic properties.
4. The residual self is negotiated with others, and is subjectively understood and/or used as a resource to facilitate going straight.

Each of these points will be elaborated in the discussion below.

A. The Not-So-Bad and the Hardcore

The data presented here shows that the problem of the residual self varies to the extent that one formerly embraced a criminal identity. The variance in criminal identities, and their implications for leaving crime, is an original finding because almost all qualitative studies on the topic use hardcore ex-offenders in their samples. This selection of hardcore offenders does not allow for an analysis of contrasting immersions in a criminal self, and the implications of these identities for leaving crime.

The variation in former criminal identities among ex-offenders is twofold: those who took on a deviant self for a limited duration and those who had deeper criminal identities, or in popular terms, the “hardcore”. We know that rates of illegal behaviour among teens as measured by self-reports suggests that participation in delinquency may be a normal part of teen life. By the early 20s, the number of active offenders decreases by over 50 percent and by age 28, almost 85% of former delinquents desist from offending (Moffit, 1997: 12). Members of the criminally transient group discussed in Chapter 5 come close to representing what Moffit (2001) calls “adolescent limited” offenders whose peak crime periods occur during teenage and early adult years.

Fourteen ex-offenders interviewed for this study were coded as having transient criminal identities because their entry into crime was more likely to occur during their mid-teen years, last for shorter periods of time, and in some cases, did not come to the attention of the police. There was a sense conveyed through their accounts that they “weren’t really criminal” but had associated with the wrong people, made some bad choices, or reacted to family conditions in adolescence that had fleeting effects, at least in

terms of being responsible for their criminal involvement. The theoretical sampling employed here included their experiences for two reasons. First, these people identified and accounted for themselves as “ex-offenders” (see Meisenhelder, 1977 for a similar self-selection method). Secondly, I wanted to learn if going straight was a basic social process which explained those with backgrounds typical of most offenders, and not just the hardcore samples represented in almost all other studies.

Ex-offenders with transient criminal identities reported unremarkable or “normal” childhoods, and spoke in generally favourable terms about their upbringing except perhaps, for conflicts at home as teenagers. The drug and property crimes they committed were relatively minor and not likely to invite federal prison time⁷⁸. When they decided to get out of crime, the help they sought was more likely to be from family or friends. If help consisted of a mentor, residential treatment for drug abuse, or from members of a Twelve Step group, it lasted for as long as they deemed necessary to deal with cravings for drugs or alcohol. Aside from the official or personal knowledge which others may have regarding their former selves, the residuals of having been criminal are more likely to be undetectable. A theory of going straight should attend to their experiences as well, which is why the residual self reflects a continuum of personal and social deficits which people either bring into, and/or acquire from criminal activity, and which later affects their difficulty in becoming ex-offenders. Those with transient identities share many features with the hardcore in the telling of going straight.

The inclusion of people who became involved in serious crimes for a limited duration (e.g., Peter, Cheryl, Loni, and Francis) identifies those who did not get caught, but see themselves in a process of “going straight” nonetheless. For them, the decision to

leave crime did not require police intervention or some life-threatening crisis. The motive to change is recalled within an existential crisis of self. Future qualitative research with ex-offenders might specifically identify those with transient criminal identities and contrast their narratives against hardcore offenders who comprise the samples in most research on this topic. This type of focus would be useful for understanding young people who get involved in crime but “spontaneously desist”, that is, without treatment interventions or contact with criminal justice agents. We may find that the outcomes of crime are simultaneously rewarding and aversive, and not necessarily the “sneaky thrill” argued, for example, by Jack Katz (1998) in *Seductions of Crime*.

One exception to the focus on hardcore offenders is Biernacki’s (1986) study of addicts who quit heroin without treatment. Addicts who were totally immersed in the world of addiction (like the hardcore offenders discussed in Chapter 5) reported a significant experience which jolted them “into a new perspective on reality and result in their questioning themselves and their lives as addicts”. However, for those addicts who maintained involvements in other social worlds (analogous to those coded here as having a “transient criminal identity”), the cessation of drug use had the quality of “just happening” (p. 61). As I have discovered here with criminal identities, Biernacki’s study about the termination of addict careers is closely related to the degree that addicts were involved in other, more ordinary worlds, and to the extent that they had “spoiled identities” (p. 178). Some of Biernacki’s addicts were “passing through” the world of addiction and did not come to identify themselves exclusively as addicts (p. 182), much like the research participants here who entered crime but did not become “real criminals”. The comparable findings suggest that exit experiences from the similar categories of

crime and addiction are dependant upon the depth to which the people embrace a deviant identity.

With respect to hardcore offenders, coding the data confirmed impressions I had during the interviews themselves. Some ex-offenders were, in the past, “worse” than others. Not only in terms of the legal seriousness of their crimes, but the very identity they left was one which several of them described as “anti-social” or in similar words. Several inflicted serious or near fatal injuries on their victims, simultaneously recalling the emotional ease and cognitive rationales which accompanied these events or in recounting *who I was*. Given that criminal identities vary, one question concerns their origins. The question as to the genesis of the deviant self or *who I was* is answered by ex-offenders themselves which later sheds light on how they experience going straight. Ten ex-offenders in the present study reported childhoods characterized by one or more background deficits such as abandonment, parental abuse, sexual assault, severe head injuries, transient lifestyles, witnessing mothers or siblings being assaulted more than once, early exposure to alcohol and illicit drugs, difficulties with learning in school, and problems with anger or sexual promiscuity at a young age. These research participants were the ones I had earlier coded “hardcore”. Interestingly, prospective longitudinal studies cite background characteristics like these as comprising the origins of life-course-persistent, anti-social behaviours (Loeber and Hay, 1997; Robins, 1978; Moffit, 2001; West and Farrington, 1977). Their past experiences explain to ex-offenders and others why they entered crime and the problems associated with its exit. For example, Harry, Darryl, Brad and Bill all report having problems with explosive rage in childhood and relate those experiences to their present strategies of avoiding social contexts where they

might become aggravated (especially in bars or other drinking establishments). The residuals of the past self guide their current choices in the project of going straight. All ten of these ex-offenders have struggled with addiction to alcohol and drugs⁷⁹, or both, while those with a transient criminal identity largely described themselves on the periphery of substance abuse and no longer requiring the support of others to maintain abstinence.

For those whom I have classified as hardcore, origins of their deviance affirm professional and lay understandings as to how people become criminals (i.e., a version of the “bad parents” or “caregivers” explanation). This sense-making and partially exculpatory conversation explains, for them and to others, the underlying motive for their involvement in crime and any leftovers which remain to constitute *who I am*. As I mentioned in the last chapter, a few members of this group continue to engage in minor crimes, and may display lingering manifestations of cognitive and communicative styles which invites judgements that they are not fully reformed.

According to some researchers, the propensity for criminal behaviour begins early in life and is never entirely shed. “Life-course persistent offenders” show a stable pattern of anti-social and maladaptive behaviours from early childhood through adulthood (Caspi, Elder and Ben, 1987; LeBlanc and Loeber, 1998; Loeber, 1990). Also called “chronic offenders” or “career criminals”, a small proportion of offenders are responsible for a disproportionate amount of serious crime. Wolfgang, Figlio and Sellin (1972) followed the criminal careers of 9,945 boys in Philadelphia from birth in 1945 to when they became 18 in 1963. Using data from arrest reports, they discovered that 6% of the group fell into their category of “chronic recidivists” who had been arrested five times or more.

Within the entire group of arrestees, this small group was responsible for 52% of all offences and 71% of homicides, 73% of the rapes, 82% of robberies and 70% of the aggravated assaults. Similar findings replicate the findings in the Wolfgang et al. study of criminal careers research (Cheryl, 1988; Tracy and Kempf-Leonard, 1996; West and Farrington, 1977).

The question for many developmental criminologists and psychologists concerns the differences between three groups: those who never offend, those whose involvement in crime is limited to adolescence or early adulthood, and those make up the “criminal career” group. Several longitudinal studies suggest that for the latter group, there is a continuity of problem behaviour from childhood through adolescence and adulthood, part of which is their involvement in crime. For example, early aggressiveness is predictive of later serious criminal behaviour, including spouse abuse, traffic violations, and self-reported physical aggression (Huesmann et al., 2001). Moffit (2001) notes that “research on childhood conduct disorder has now documented that antisocial behaviour begins long before the age when it is first encoded in police data banks” (p. 94). “Life-course persistent” antisocial persons

... exhibit changing manifestations of antisocial behaviour: biting and hitting at age 4, shoplifting and truancy at age 10, selling drugs and stealing cars at age 16, robbery and rape at age 22, and fraud and child abuse at age 30; the underlying disposition remains the same, but its expression changes form as new social opportunities arise at different points in development... Life-course persistent antisocial persons lie at home, steal from shops, cheat at school, fight in bars and embezzle at work... (Moffit, 2001: 100).

Although such people do make transitions into work and marriage, “their injurious childhoods make it less likely that they can leave their past selves behind” (Moffit, 1994 in Laub and Sampson, 2001: 43).

Proponents of these latent trait models⁸⁰ argue that criminal behaviour is the outcome of personal traits such as deficiencies in intelligence (Farrington, 1989 in Loeber and Hay, 1997: 390), low self control (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990), behavioural and temperament problems, or a host of neuropsychological risks originating in the foetal brain (Moffit, 1997; 2001: 102). Early risk factors such as difficult temperament, hyperactivity and overt conduct disorders emerge in adolescence and are correlated with poor peer relationships, academic problems, covert conduct problems, associations with deviant peers, delinquency, and recidivism (Loeber, 1991; for the stability of aggressive behaviour, see Loeber and Hay, 1997; Huesmann et al., 2001). Similar findings have been reported among federal offenders who display “criminogenic needs” such as impulsivity, lack of problem-solving skills, empathy, aggression and hostility, a preference for risk-taking (Andrews and Bonta, 1993; Brown, 1998; Robinson, Porporino and Beal, 1998). Canadian research shows that youth exposed to risk factors such as witnessing physical violence, learning disabilities, punitive parenting and parental rejection are more likely to be involved in delinquency (Sprott, Doob and Jenkins, 2001). Children with these individual and social deficits are more likely than others to become involved in crime, suggesting a durability in underlying dispositions towards criminality. Evidence for this disposition can be found in other analogous, high-risk behaviours such as persistent drinking and/or drug abuse, spousal violence, fighting, smoking and a preponderance of motor vehicle accidents (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990).

From a reading of the literature which locates criminality within developmental years of early childhood, it may be tempting to infer that leaving crime is unlikely, or that for some, deviance is destiny. However, these studies do not inquire about the lived realities

of those who struggle to change a discreditable self, but tend to focus on antecedent conditions associated with the onset and cessation of problem behaviours by using quantitative models developed from structured interviews with samples of age cohorts and arrest data (Fagan, 1989; Loeber et al, 1991; Uggen and Piliavin, 1998). The remarkable finding from my own and other studies is that hardcore offenders with many of the aforementioned individual and background deficits do leave crime (Maruna, 2001; Laub and Sampson, 2001). Many of their narratives explain entering crime, and the problems associated with leaving it, by referring to their early childhood experiences which echo the findings from developmental and life-course theories (Loeber and Hay, 1997; Moffit, 1997; Piquero and Mazerolle, 2001).

The value of developmental theories is to help explain the variation in experiences about leaving crime among my sample of ex-offenders. Although the research methodologies differ, how I have conceptualized the residual self from the interview data fits within what we know about the origins of some criminal behaviour, what ex-offenders have to say about why they became criminals, and the difficulties associated with going straight. The self which later becomes residual begins before crime and extends after its exit, albeit in varying problematic manifestations. Although the grounded theory method used here does not allow me to be certain that ex-offenders with deep criminal identities have the same traits identified in developmental models, their lives exemplify the “kind of people” portrayed in these studies. Going straight means finding a means of transcending adverse background experiences and character traits which may be carried forward into the present. There is a way out of crime, and the life course literature provides a basis for understanding how that occurs.

Life-course or sociogenic theories are optimistic about the prospects for individual change. While they acknowledge the continuity in antisocial behaviour from childhood through adulthood, turning points can modify the trajectories⁸¹ of troublesome children or delinquent adolescents, or adults with histories of criminal conduct. Social institutions and “triggering life events” are turning points which modify trajectories and include contact and immersion in reciprocal networks of social bonding found within sites such as school, work, marriage and military induction (Sampson and Laub, 2001c: 243). The paradox which Sampson and Laub (1993) address is the finding that although adult criminality always seems to be preceded by childhood misconduct, most conduct-disordered children never become antisocial or criminal adults (p. 14). They also draw attention to the prediction literature which shows a high rate of false positives: those who were forecasted to be antisocial adults but never ended up being that way. Even those with personal characteristics and background variables associated with criminality and problem behaviours, can exit.

Although there is longitudinal consistency [in the relationship between childhood misconduct and adult criminality], research has established large variations in later adolescent and adult criminal behavior that are not directly accounted for by childhood propensities... there is some evidence that these changes in adult criminality are structured by social transitions and adult life events in the life course... underscoring the utility of a life-course perspective (Sampson and Laub: 1993: 16).

Those adopting the life-course position acknowledge that while adult behaviour is influenced by early life experiences, transitions into institutions of informal social control (e.g., school, family and work) occur regardless of individual differences in criminal propensity. The model explains desistance because “changes that strengthen social bonds to society in adulthood will lead to less crime and deviance” (Sampson and Laub, 1993:

21). Furthermore, while the tendency toward crime may be generally stable, delinquency has cumulative effects. Crime forecloses options at a later point in time or mortgages the future, much like labeling theory predicts (Becker, 1963). Sampson and Laub (1993) caution that the observed continuity may be partially illusory because it can be explained by a labeling process that severs social and institutional bonds that link adults to society. For example, an arrest or criminal record restricts the ability to participate in a significant bonding process such as employment. Once labelled, criminal behaviour is more likely to continue without the informal social controls inherent in school, marriage and jobs.

Although individual-level propensities for anti-social behaviour are recognized, the boundaries between developmental and life-course theories are frequently blurred (Vold, Bernard and Snipes, 1998: 293; Piquero and Mazerolle, 2001)⁸². Laub and Sampson (1993) argue that

salient life events and social ties in adulthood can counteract, at least to some extent, the trajectories apparently set in early child development... social bonds in adulthood – especially attachment to the labour force and cohesive marriage – explained criminal behaviour independent of prior differences in criminal propensity. In other words, pathways to both crime and conformity were modified by key institutions of social control in the transition to adulthood (e.g., employment, military service, and marriage). Thus, strong social bonds could explain desistance from criminal behaviour in adulthood, despite a background of delinquent behaviour (p. 19).

Life course theories are dynamic in the sense that the individual characteristics do not condemn a child to a life of crime. Traits which may facilitate criminal behaviour are mediated by the age-graded effects of social control at different points throughout the life course, including adulthood. Family structure, parental disciplinary styles, peer influences during school years, marriage and work are social forces which mitigate individual and background or structural factors associated with deviant behaviour

(Sampson and Laub, 1993; 2001b). Background factors like poverty, residential mobility, household crowding, having foreign-born parents, and mother's employment status influence delinquency - but only indirectly because these factors undermine parental effectiveness and family cohesion (Sampson and Laub, 1993: 81).

For hardcore ex-offenders, their residuals from a life of deviance have origins in points earlier than when they entered crime. It follows that the salience of residuals from a past life in crime shape the duration and intensity of the help sought in the process of going straight, the nature of credentials which offer proof of its accomplishment, and the structure of narratives which constitutes its telling. Collectively, the accounts reflected in my interviews tell us that leaving crime is a struggle which varies to the extent that character traits and visible markers, and how they are interpreted, require the "going" in "going straight".

B. Existential Crises or Rational Choices?

The qualitative literature reviewed in Chapter 2 is equivocal with respect to whether the decision to exit crime is the result of an existential crisis or rational choice. However, the issue is not a trivial one. Should the decision to leave crime be read as the outcome of choosing to avoid the aversive stimuli inherent to most criminal lifestyles, or is change better understood as initiated by an existential crisis of self? In this study, crises are cumulative events which bring ex-offenders to consider change, but one type of event is recalled as a "transformative", existential crisis of self. Parenthetically, there were two ex-offenders in my study who did not report hitting rock bottom or having an existential crisis of self. Both also carry residuals of a former identity, namely the censoriousness

which was identified in Chapter 8. For these two ex-offenders, the distance between *who I was* and *who I am* is narrower than those who do report the existential crisis.

We may never know “what really happens” in the decisive moment to leave crime, but we can see how crises serve at least three purposes in their telling. First, the stories of crisis which have accumulated throughout one’s criminally active period demonstrate the distance between *who I was* and *who I am*, and thus serve as credentials. Previous crises help make sense of criminal histories which are punctuated with calamity, limited new awareness, behavioural change, backsliding into crime or addiction, new crises, more new awareness, and eventually going straight. The second purpose of transformative crises is that this moment is embedded within the imported conversations (particularly from spiritual groups, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous). The “moment of clarity” which characterizes these accounts is one which Maruna (2001) finds within the discourse of Western conversion experiences and serves important symbolic and psychological functions (p. 24-25). Accounts of “why I changed”, in order to be accepted by listeners, will follow culturally endorsed vocabularies of motive (Scott and Lyman, 1969). Finally, there are similarities between the *rationality* inherent in the decision to leave crime, and the observation that ex-offenders are *pragmatic* in their efforts to transcend the residual self, and narratives which illustrate elements of both. Rationality and pragmatism may be different terms for the same or overlapping motives for leaving crime and the sense which is made of the experience. We should also be sensitive to how these terms may be descriptive categories superimposed on ex-offenders’ experiences by researchers. For many ex-offenders, going straight takes on the qualities of a self-crisis.

Maruna (2001) believes that “turning points” and “moments of clarity” are narrative elements in reform stories which are largely symbolic and hence, their value in desistance is overstated. There is nothing inherent in an event which makes it a turning point, but rather how it is interpreted at the time or in retrospect. One person’s reason for changing his or her life (“hitting bottom”) might be another’s reason for escalating their involvement in crime (“I’ve got nothing to lose”). Going straight is an ongoing process of maintenance or a perpetual process of arrival (p. 25-26).

Various studies using different qualitative methods tell us that decisions to leave crime are made in the context of crisis, some of which are further described as “self crisis”, or a moment of insight and clarity, much like an epiphany. It would be foolhardy to pitch the discussion here as a contest between the seemingly epiphanic descriptions of transformational crises reported by many ex-offenders, and ones which focus on the rationality of leaving crime. Both rationality and recollections about transformative crises at the decision-point to go straight are important dimensions of the explanation (see Chapter 2, above). However, understanding motives for leaving crime invites us to think about what may be crucial for facilitating these exits. If leaving crime is understood as a rational choice following either the deleterious consequences of a life in crime or the pains of imprisonment, then deterrence-based, crime control strategies may find support. Prisons and community correctional programs should become tougher because, after all, the sooner that offenders get the message that crime doesn’t pay, the sooner they will conform. Alternatively, if the motive for leaving crime depends upon a subjectively experienced transformative crisis, the solutions for promoting exits from crime are less

readily apparent, other than to provide supports for those who may become candidates for the type of help identified in this and similar studies.

C. Help as the Social Bond, People and Talk

Help is the antidote to the stigmatic qualities of the residual self, and is used here as a general concept for the human interactions which support going straight. What “others” are significant, and why? Although the descriptions of *what* is occurring are clear, *how* it occurs is less clear from the qualitative literature. It appears that the self-concepts of those who have been officially designated ‘deviant’ can be normalized through ordinary or non-stigmatizing human interaction.

My interviewees spoke of a diversity of help from family members, sponsors associated with Twelve Step groups, and agency personnel who all had one attribute in common: ex-offenders felt *valued* by these people. Help is conveyed through the attitudes, dispositions and regard conveyed in verbal and non-verbal interactions which acknowledge an essential goodness in ex-offenders, despite the harms which they have inflicted upon others, or the residuals of disreputable self which they may still present. Referents for this kind of help emerge when parents rescue and unconditionally take a drug addicted daughter out of “a hovel” and hide her from peers who have a score to settle (Dayna at 1306), or a Twelve Step group sponsor who is available anytime, day or night (Jerry at 708), or a social worker who tells an ex-offender to “just drop in anytime” if he is too disorganized to keep appointments (Brad at 348). It is the very real interaction of accepting, caring people which comprises help for going straight. Compassionate people who relate to ex-offenders help to resolve the problem of stigma, whether help is conceptualized in the abstract as the “social bond”, or in less abstract terms such as

“support and modeling”. Given that stigma is an attribute which is deeply discrediting and makes the bearer different, less desirable, tainted and discounted (Goffman, 1963: 2-3), the antidotes to stigma are the human relationships and interactions which work against the tendency towards devaluation and exclusion. Help alleviates, mitigates and transcends stigma.

Hardcore ex-offenders interviewed here more often sought enveloping forms of help, perhaps because they were more likely to need and receive that type of relationship to facilitate abstinence from drugs and/or alcohol. Biernacki (1986) writes about the “moratorium” that addicts have on their lives where the abstaining person “rarely ventures beyond the safe confines of the group or activities with which he is engrossed” (p. 98). Just as he found differing levels of commitment to the addict identity, Biernacki also identified those who “naturally recovered” from heroin addiction without anywhere near the same levels of intensive, religious-like commitments to helping others found among some members of his sample. The nature and intensity of help required and sought after is variable, depending upon the configuration of problems ex-offenders bring with them when they go straight. Hardcore ex-offenders are more likely to seek enveloping forms of help which consume their identity.

I have argued that the main property of help is the shared conversations which comprise the interactions between ex-offenders and the people they attribute as helpers. Ex-offenders assess themselves by framing their pasts within exculpatory narratives. Talk becomes a pathway to becoming reputable when others affirm and sustain these stories of reform. These are “imported conversations”: *imported* because they are externally available, adopted and shared by ex-offenders through *conversations* with helping others.

Second, the act of seeking assistance engages helpers in a transformative task with ex-offenders because it signals a sincerity about wanting to change. I was repeatedly told by helpers and ex-offenders alike that help cannot begin without the willing participation of the latter. By engaging help, one's status is elevated from incorrigible to salvageable, and their stigma is almost immediately attenuated ("The beginning of change is acknowledging you have a problem", "At least you're at a place where you can admit you need help", or words to that effect). Understanding help means appreciating the role of identity formation and negotiation within the looking-glass model of the symbolic interaction tradition. As ex-offenders share narratives of change with significant others, the stigma associated with *who I was* is reduced. In turn, others accept and behave towards ex-offenders' new identities, affirming *who I am* as a reformed ex-offender, perhaps even invoking their own altruistic sentiments to "give this person a chance". At some point, ex-offenders go on to act as helpers themselves, given that the therapeutic value in helping others is a well known feature of Twelve Step groups (Maruna, 2001: 125).

Other researchers draw attention to the salience of sense-making rhetoric in the transition out of a deviant status. Trice and Roman (1970) write about the vocabularies which assist in the re-acceptance of deviants who might be tainted with strangeness, immorality or evil. Alcoholics Anonymous uses the "allergy concept" (or, more recently, the "disease model") of alcoholism to neutralize stigma because drinking is presented as beyond control and personal responsibility (p. 540). Ex-offenders find exculpatory vocabularies in AA and other Twelve Step groups to make sense of their own internal states and the knowledge that they have victimized others. These vocabularies are shared

through open and non-judgemental social interactions which give primacy to the individual and not the deed. Other themes within Twelve Step groups include the repentant role and upward mobility from the bottom rungs of society.

A.A. stories about “hitting bottom” and the many degradation ceremonies that they have experienced in entering this fallen state act to legitimate their claims to downward mobility... by the emphasis on downward mobility due to drinking, the social mobility “distance” traveled by the A.A. member is maximized in stories. This clearly sets the stage for impressive “comeback accomplishments” (Trice and Roman, 1970: 543).

Twelve Step groups support a social process whereby a labelled deviant can become “re-labelled” as a former and now repentant deviant (Trice and Roman, 1970: 545).

Narcotics Anonymous uses the same narrative of badness, bottoming out, discovering the “real me” and atonement through good works. These culturally endorsed dialogues of reform explain why both of these self-help groups are attractive to ex-offenders: they reduce or overcome the problem of stigma and address their main concern. They give meaning and value to a past which might otherwise be seen as wasted, tragic or evidence of some enduring and deviant character trait. Behaviours which were previously seen as morally repugnant become increasingly understood within a new discourse of a larger disease (Brown, 1996: 442).

There are other ways of understanding what was told to me in my interviews with ex-offenders. Using a grounded theory approach to identify their narrative structure, Maruna (1997) analyzed 25 autobiographical accounts of men who left crime. He identifies a plot composition which closely resembles the imported conversations described in Chapter 6. “Contaminated origins” refers to a long period of passive victimization in childhood, similar to the “sad tales” told by institutionalized populations (Goffman, 1961), and the “denial of responsibility” in Sykes and Matza’s (1957) theory

of delinquency. These origins are followed by a “moment of clarity” within a tragic episode during their careers which leads offenders to cease criminal activity - or at least desist for extended periods of time. Drifting back into criminality occurs when ex-offenders encounter structural obstacles which prevent them from gaining respectability outside of criminal peer networks. The final “transformative experience”, often endowed with supernatural importance, calls into question their previous behaviours. At that moment, they find non-criminal opportunities to sustain a new, reformed identity which they credit to helping others. Atonement is sought for their past crimes and they begin to “advertise” a new identity with the mission of helping others not to make the same mistakes as they did themselves. The transformational experience of going straight “was something that happened to the narrator, rather than something the narrator brought upon him – or herself” (Maruna, 1997: 82). Like those whose narratives in my study told of metaphysical forces for some greater project, Maruna found that autobiographies tend to recast lives as “being planned” by a higher power for a certain purpose. These narratives are believable because Western audiences find them so (p. 83). However, just because the telling of going straight has similar features constituting a theme, that does not suggest that ex-offenders are being disingenuous.

In a more recent work, Maruna (2001) argues that “the development of a coherent story that can integrate past faults into a generative script for the future may contribute to the process of desistance from crime” (p. 88). “Making good” is where a shameful past is rewritten as a necessary prelude to a productive and worthy life. For example, the properties of making good are expressed in redemption narratives which discover the “real me”, apportion blame to things beyond the control of the ex-offender such as

addiction and peer pressure, and reinterpret a deviant past as a unique form of credential which empowers one with a purpose in life (pp. 85-100). What Maruna calls generative or redemptive scripts are not just stories told by ex-offenders to put a new spin on a bad past, but have therapeutic and healing power in their telling. As ex-offenders relate their stories of reform, the telling reinforces their commitment to conformity because they repeatedly make affirmations about *who I am*. It is because these narratives resonate with cultural understandings about identity and self-change that they are believable – along with those who tell them. These internalized narratives have an exculpatory function when their telling reduces the social disapprobation which might otherwise be directed at ex-offenders. But more than that: imported conversations are adopted because they work, for example, to displace drug cravings.

If part of making the break from the addiction involved a religious conversion, the [addict] might negatively context an emergent drug craving by defining it as a temptation of Satan and supplant the thought with prayer. The praying would continue until the craving passed and the individual became involved in some activity not related to drugs (Biernacki, 1986: 139).

Going straight means transcending the residual self through transitory or enveloping help. But how do outsiders judge whether help has worked or is working? It is important that others do accept the credentials of reform, or the work of transcending the residual self will not be accomplished. That seven ex-offenders were pardoned or in the process of applying for one suggests their value and how they constitute credentials. Similarly, it is noteworthy that Meisenhelder's interviewees spoke of "certification" - a social verification of individual reform by recognized members of the conventional community who declare that the offender is now to be considered essentially non-criminal (p. 329). Their desire for public certification was driven by perceptions that the wider society

considers deviance to be persistent, resulting in their ongoing, stigmatic treatment. The availability of criminal pardons in Canada (signed by no less than the Solicitor General) may illustrate a model of what ex-offenders in Meisenhelder's study had in mind. Certification can be achieved in other, more symbolic ways, such as the good works, amends, self-insights and restored relationships discussed earlier in this thesis.

Atonement, or making amends, appears to be a consistent feature of those who leave a disreputable self. Maruna (2001) finds that ex-offenders are able to manage the shame and guilt from their past through atonement to family members or significant others who stuck by them. But often the form of atonement was frequently an abstract one, where ex-offenders made up to society, the community or God. An ex-offender cited by Maruna (2001) sounds very much like what was told to me by Jerry, Darryl, Yvonne and Harry:

If I were to approach every person I ever ripped off and tell them I was sorry or whatever, one of them is going to go and call the police and I'd get thrown back in the nic [jail]... I think I can do the universe a bit more good out here (male, aged 30) (Maruna, 2001: 123).

In the conceptual scheme developed here, amends serve the purpose of dealing with the pangs of conscience, but were also presented as credentials because ex-offenders saw them as evidence which attested to deep change.

D. The Residual Self and Going Straight

Although I have generally focused on what stigma *does to* ex-offenders for explaining their resolve in going straight, I would be remiss not to discuss what ex-offenders *do* with stigma. There are positive sides to deviant identities if they "offer temporary or relatively stable solutions to life problems despite the fact that they represent the lower order of human existence" (Lemert, 1967: 48). The deviant can be an

active agent in overcoming stigma rather than succumbing to it (Osborne, 1974: 71).

Several ex-offenders in this study are able to benefit from their former selves in their current work, or their former immersion in organized crime, drug underworlds, or prison experiences makes them a novelty in some social contexts.

For ex-offenders, the residual self never disappears, but is accommodated, maintained or transcended by monitoring the information made known to others, avoiding social contexts which will test their decision to remain crime-free, and internalizing imported conversations to make sense of emotional and cognitive states which may be precursors to anti-social behaviour. These ex-offenders are likely to continue carrying many of the same attributes which led them into crime in the first place. Those who describe themselves as having been anti-social do not suddenly become sociable, but while going straight, their lack of interest in socializing is understood when framed within narratives of early childhood or prison experiences, or when offered as a coping mechanism for staying “in recovery” from alcoholism or addiction. Alternatively, for those whose participation in crime is framed by relatively ordinary lives, their residual self largely remains as a fear of discovery, or that they will be judged on the basis of stigmatizing information without having the opportunity to negotiate its meaning. There is always the prospect that others will stigmatize them. Those with transient criminal identities are obliged to negotiate a self within a contaminating shadow of shaming information, that is, if and when it surfaces.

The lingering, subjective aspects of the residual self are not completely original findings, however, they are cast within differing conceptual frameworks. In her study of

role-exits, Ebaugh (1988) notes that former roles are not abandoned, but inherited into new roles as a “hangover identity”.

The ex-role constitutes a unique sociological phenomenon in that the expectations, norms and identity associated with it do not so much consist in what one is currently doing but rather stem from expectations, social obligations, and norms related to one’s previous role. In a very real sense, the process of becoming an ex involves tension between one’s past, present and future. (p. 149).

Patricia Adler’s (1992) study of ex-drug dealers describes their ability to reintegrate themselves into legitimate society as variable, depending upon the degree to which they had moorings in conventional life before they became immersed in the drug world. When they decide to leave the illicit drug trade, the nature and range of their social capital constitutes the “bridge back into society”. She also notes that in the post-crime phase, some dealers had originally entered the dealing world “to secure freedom for their ‘brute being’ and would not endure the shackles of becoming an employee” (p. 121).

Reintegration to conventional work is difficult if they have accrued a history which is devoid of the usual “career building” stage of their lives. In a passage which captures the residual nature of a criminal identity, Adler notes that the post-crime lives of drug dealers are affected by identities of having spent years in the drug world.

The attitudes, values, and life-style they adopted during the active phase of their dealing careers remain nascent within them. Most are straight for pragmatic rather than ideological or moral reasons. The “quick buck” and the “sweet” deal thus remain embedded within their vocabulary of motives... In an era when most middle-aged people are former marijuana smokers, party drinkers, and general revelers, these ex-drug traffickers still like to have adventures. It remains a part of their lifestyle and new identity, carried over from earlier times. Thus, although they have shed the dealing occupation, *many retain some proclivity for deviant attitudes and life-styles*. They are post-dealers but not completely reformed deviants (Adler, 1992: 125; my emphasis).

Devlin and Turney (1999) tell us that getting out of crime is one thing - but keeping out of it is quite another. Consistent with my findings, they write about the variance in the residual self.

Some of our interviewees have experienced such a radical psychological change that for them... crime is simply 'no longer on the agenda' whilst others still view themselves as failures because of what may have happened many years ago. *Some ex-offenders still see themselves as at a constant risk of re-offending* or can visualize a situation, however remote, which could cause them to re-offend, although by the nature of things such fears are likely to be hidden (p. 27; my emphasis).

In Biernacki's (1996) study of heroin addicts who spontaneously desisted, definitions of the self as addict or junkie, along with the physical cravings of the drug, became "nearly non-existent". Alternatively, other former addicts gave their former identity a relatively low status, but managed the craving phenomena by using other drugs such as marijuana, Valium, or alcohol (p. 25). Some memories of addiction were likely to linger for years, occasionally waking a latent desire "by the appearance of a cue that is associated with some aspect of the past drug use (p. 137). The trigger for drug cravings could be sparked by the smell of a burnt match (previously associated with "cooking" heroin to change it from a powder to a liquid). In a world full of such cues, there is a kernel of truth to the adage, "once an addict, always an addict". The difference now is the response to the cues, and how these lures to a previous self are interpreted and managed.

Maruna (2001) notes that "criminogenic traits", indicated with a standardized personality test administered to his sample of ex-offenders and active criminals, showed statistically significant correlation with the constructs of "agreeableness" and "conscientiousness". The former measure includes items like "is a reliable worker" and "perseveres until the task is finished", while the latter contains items like "likes to

cooperate with others". Desisting ex-offenders retain many of the personality traits typical of active criminals. Apparently, ex-offenders dislike taking orders and refuse to be obedient, especially if that means accepting a low paying, menial job. Collectively, these traits raise the chances that an individual will engage in criminal activities when facing certain circumstances (p. 58-59). Despite different methodologies employed, much of the research reviewed here implies that deviant identities, traits and behaviours persist from a past life of crime into the present of those who, by their own pronouncements, or in official records, have become "ex-offenders"⁸³.

Neither my findings nor Maruna's (2001) suggest that ex-offenders are doomed to a life of hidden crime, or suggest that they are fundamentally deviant. Past identities or traits may become the problem for those "going straight", especially those who have had a deep immersion in criminal values. Depending on the sense they create of their pasts, these residuals may become enabling for success and acceptance in the conventional world.

1. Resources Within the Residual Self

During the interview stage of this study, I recall walking with Harry to the parking lot outside a church at an AA meeting which I attended at his invitation to "see what goes on". He had arrived on his foreign-built motorcycle decked out in leathers and other symbolic residuals of his past membership in a biker gang. As we stood near his motorcycle, an older AA participant named "Ed", a former policeman whom Harry appeared to know quite well, walked over to admire the bike. Their ensuing conversation underscored the meaning of the residual self. Both men slipped back into former identities in an amusing, mostly humorous dialogue involving insult and counter-insult

about how the police were tough with bikers “in my day, when there was no fuckin’ Charter” countered by, “yeah, well cops are just frustrated, wannabe bikers anyway” and followed by mutual laughter (field notes). For the ten or so minutes that they played within these former identities, it was enough for me to wonder just how much either man had left their former selves as biker and cop. Aside from the defining fact of having abandoned his criminal ways, Harry very much identified with the biker he used to be during his criminally active period. He has never tried to stop being a biker, but follows the advice he gives to others by taking what he is and “tilting it three degrees to the right”.

Similarly, Brad continues to be who he is, lifting weights to maintain his muscular physique and working at two jobs. He is a counsellor for inmates in a prison, and works as a host (or less euphemistically, a “bouncer”) in a “stripper bar”. He straddles conventional and deviant worlds, and can remain close to the street scene without being part of it. Both hardcore ex-offenders continue to go straight, despite the overwhelming residuals that might or should have defined their futures. In creative ways, they and other ex-offenders have used their past to make sense of who they are in the present.

David Brown noted in his study of professional ex-s that “one’s deviant identity is not an obstacle that must be abandoned prior to exiting or adopting a more conventional lifestyle” but can rather be interpreted to facilitate rather than inhibit the exiting process (p. 440). Taking note of the high proportion of ex-s employed in counselling positions (72% of people working in 10,000 US substance abuse centres), he argues that becoming a professional ex- means interpreting one’s past as a call to a counselling career, resolves lingering self-doubts about remaining abstinent, and results in an identity transformation.

A lingering deviant identity can facilitate the exit process because an ex- can “capitalize on the experiences and vestiges of their deviant career in order to establish a new identity and role in a respectable organization” (p. 440). Thus, a formerly deviant identity becomes a resource for negotiating one’s reformed self, offering new status and a means of transcending social stigma. Brown’s findings are consistent with ex-offenders in the current study who say they use their past as a lamp for leading others out of the dark. Half of the 24 ex-offenders interviewed here were either employed by agencies who offer services for offenders, addicts, alcoholics, or were in the process of gaining educational or training credentials for doing the same. Rather than a source of shame, *who I was* becomes a credential for working with similarly stigmatized clientele. Counselling others out of a past which one used to occupy requires that one remain a “role model” for others: *going* straight becomes *doing* straight.

E. Stories of Change

A narrative is talk organized around consequential events which takes listeners into the worlds of others to make a point, often a moral one. Narratives are means by which ex-offenders renegotiate their identities (Scott and Lyman: 1968: 59). These narratives do not mirror some objective reality, but are constructed, creatively authored, and interpretive (Riessman, 1993: 4-5).

When talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths. The truths don’t reveal the past “as it actually was”, aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experiences... Unlike the truth of the scientific ideal, the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self-evident. We come to understand them only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and to the world views that inform them (The Personal Narratives Group (1989) in Riessman, 1993, p. 22).

It is not just the absence of criminal behaviour which makes one trustworthy, but how compelling the narrative is in a process where credentials offset the stigma of having been a criminal. The stories here are cast within the themes of sin, redemption, doing good works and the triumph of the will. Maruna (2001) argues that narratives of reform are necessary for desistance in order for ex-offenders to make sense of their lives (p.7). Sampson and Laub (2001c) underscore the construction of personal narratives, superimposed on disorderly lives to make sense of ambiguity, change and contraction (p. 256). Despite the apparent proximity of formerly deviant and presently struggling selves, what rescues us from yet another reading of enduring criminological traits is that criminals really do change. The change may never be entirely complete in some idealistic sense, which is why it is called “going straight” to signal an ongoing process.

The process of going straight can be understood in two general ways. First, my research participants speak to an objective reality of “what happened” to make them decide to leave crime. These are personal, social and material contingencies of going straight. Second, the narrative reality speaks to how events and people are selected from the past to make sense of *who I am* in the present. Retrospective interviews may give us data which are not factual in some positivistic sense, but they do speak to ways in which research participants remember the process of leaving crime. In so doing, they draw meanings from their experiences, provide a moral account of themselves to others, and make future decisions based on this reality. As these men and women have defined their situations as real, they are real in their consequences (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1927). Making sense of disreputable lives is constructed through narratives, and this study concurrently reveals stories of reform which capture the main concern, and its resolution,

for ex-offenders. These stories are means by which people relate the past to *who I am*, available for retrieval and reliving in the present to explain and justify their life experiences (Richardson, 1990: 125-26).

F. A Theory of the Residual Self

While the theoretical model proposed here may make intuitive sense for understanding hardcore offenders, it also addresses a range of going straight experiences, including those whose backgrounds resemble that of Jack Ramsey, the RCMP-officer-turned-sex-offender discussed in Chapter 4. Even though it was a single crime which took place over 30 years ago (followed, presumably, by decades of going straight), the social disapprobation attached to sexual offences against children leaves him vulnerable to much the same stigmatic treatment afforded to those I have coded as hardcore offenders. The residual self for Ramsey is made up of the social interactions which reflect back on him, mirroring a disreputable self to the exclusion of other statuses which he may hold, such as having been a Canadian Member of Parliament. Anyone with a similar residual self lives with a fear that a past crime will be made known and interpreted as traces of who they “really are”. Secrecy is their best protection, but that may sometimes fail, as it did with Jack Ramsey.

I have argued here that ex-offenders can and do change for the better, despite the challenges raised by the residual self in its threefold manifestations. Some of the ex-offenders interviewed for this study were “the worst of the worst” in their past identities, but nevertheless changed by removing themselves from criminal peer networks, ceasing their addictive relationships to illicit drugs, obtaining conventional occupations and continue going straight to this day.

G. What Can Be Done?

Is there anything meaningful to be made of this study, and others like it? Can our cumulative findings improve lives, shape social policy, or provide directions for wider reform? Two examples, at different sites of change, have been suggested by others.

Shover (1983) suggests that his findings about the ability of persistent thieves to change challenges the arguments made by proponents of the death penalty, mandatory and determinate sentencing and “similar crime-control measures”. These are justified by the existence of “intractable offenders” (p. 216) which his research show to be sometimes amenable to change. In the conclusion to his 1996 book on persistent thieves, Shover writes:

I cannot help noting that crime-control policies constructed on the notion of crime as choice are aimed almost exclusively at increasing risk of criminal participation. This ignores the theoretically obvious: Offenders' behaviour can be changed not only by manipulating the threat but also by increasing legitimate opportunities and by decreasing illicit ones. Increasing legitimate opportunities extends the choices available to men who otherwise choose criminal ones. It is poor science and poor public policy theoretically to ignore the fact that disadvantage, disrepute, and the cultural capital they spawn limit options (p. 185-86).

After their reanalysis of the Glueck's (1950) longitudinal data on the lives of 1000 boys, Sampson and Laub (1993) underscore the ability of the most criminally inclined to integrate themselves within the fabric of conventional society through marriage, work and military service. They are critical of state-sanctioned punishments which ignore the structural context of crime and neglect the basic, integrative institutions of society, such as family, school, and work. Getting tough on crime via three-strikes legislation, punitive shame, and the current imprisonment binge in the United States will not make society safer (pp. 253-257; see also Laub et al., 1995: 103-104). It makes more sense to

implement social and economic policies which help to keep families intact, children in school and people employed. The social capital possible from these human relationships is both preventative and reintegrative.

1. Promoting a Wider Discourse About Change

When I thought about the “applications” for a study like this one, I recalled what my research participants had uniformly expressed about why there were participating in this study, and what they hoped might come out of it. They wanted their stories to be told, to show others that “people really can change”.

As we become aware of narratives which tell us the process behind leaving a deviant identity, we have an opportunity to create forums for those experiences in several sites: in the lecture theatre, published works, the mainstream media, the committees which consume our discretionary time, and the talk we engage in as academics. We can let people tell their stories to provide a counterbalance to the “once a con, always a con” mentality which finds its way into public discussions about supporting half-way houses, parole and other conditional releases. As knowledge that people can and do change from highly stigmatized conditions, it may help convince others in those same conditions to make alternative choices with their lives (Biernacki, 1986: 193).

In an effort to assist in the decision to go straight, the vocabularies of motive and imported conversations must be supported by institutional arrangements which go beyond John Howard Societies, Twelve Step groups and religious organizations which actually practice forgiveness. The availability of pardons under Canada’s *Criminal Records Act* is one such example, and may provide incentives for people with criminal histories to go straight. The symbolic certification, or re-certification, that one is trustworthy reverses

“status degradation ceremonies” (Garfinkel, 1957) inherent with contact in the criminal justice system. Alternatively, it may be possible to influence the popular discourse of criminality much in the same way that Alcoholics Anonymous has promulgated the idea that its members are *afflicted* with the disease of alcoholism (Trice and Roman, 1970: 540). Stigma might be attenuated if the motives for criminal behaviour were contextualized within a wider discourse which emphasizes the structural and biological factors over which many offenders have little control.

2. Last Word

If I mention to others that I have received a pardon under the *Criminal Records Act*, their next question inquires about the offences for which I was exonerated. Once I’ve established that I was neither a sex offender nor a heroin addict, I am almost always assured by the listener that they too shared the same youthful delinquencies, only they tell me, “I was just lucky enough not to get caught”. So I am accepted by others because of our respective fates, or because of the distance between the self I present now, and the one which others say they “can’t imagine” me being. I remember my own rock bottom experience vividly after receiving my longest prison sentence over 30 years ago, but continued to dabble on the periphery of crime for several years without getting convicted. I finally managed the process of going straight after getting a job which I wanted to keep, and which promised a career.

Although I’m rarely tempted to break the law, to this day I worry about crossing international borders, having already been twice refused entry into one country because my past crimes involved *moral turpitude*: a stigmatic condition which includes shoplifting but not driving while impaired, and applies to minor offenders but not to

Presidents found guilty of lying to Congress. If I want to travel with a clear conscience to one favourite place in the sun, a bureaucrat in the receiving nation will decide if I can enter, for how long, and under what conditions. In Canada, when I fill out official forms which question if I have a criminal record “for which I have not been pardoned”, law enforcement agents circumvent this narrowing of inquiry by verbally asking me if I “have ever been in trouble with the police”. It is important that they know, because for categorical thinking, the presence of an arrest, charge, conviction or time spent in prison signifies an enduring, disreputable quality which they can use to disqualify me from the innermost sanctums of official trust.

I worry about what my child will think of me when she is old enough to understand that her father was not always a good person. I have ideological foes who would use my past to discredit or explain away my public pronouncements about the fallacies of Canadian drug policies⁸⁴. Despite the passage of time, “paying my debt to society”, and fulfilling all the credentials of good citizenship, I am keenly aware of how my disreputable past can be made consequential by those in officialdom. These aspects of my past which cause me anxiety from time to time constitute my residual self - something which my research participants helped me understand for myself. To them I am grateful.

I have also been able to use my former status as a federal parolee as a resource, such as securing an important field placement in a large metropolitan centre with the Correctional Service of Canada when I was an undergraduate student. My own narrative about going straight is useful in the classroom when I hear expressions of the “once a con, always a con” mentality. My life experiences gave me the motivation to select this

topic for inquiry. I hope this work shows what my research participants told me they had hoped for, that is, to demonstrate that people really can and do change.

10. Appendix A – Statement of Informed Consent

Statement of Informed Consent

This research project is intended to study the experiences of people who have made a decision to go straight or "get out of crime". You will be asked to discuss that experience and answer questions in an interview conducted by John Anderson, a graduate student at the University of Victoria. You will also be asked for some demographic information (gender, age, socioeconomic status, etc.). Your participation should require about an hour or two of your time.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time, without explanation. You have the right to refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

All data collected in this study will remain confidential; the audiotaped interviews will be transcribed and then erased. Only John Anderson and members of the supervisory committee at the University of Victoria will have access to the transcribed data. Your name will not be attached to any published results, and your anonymity will be protected by using a code number to identify statements you have made. A password-protected computer copy of your transcribed interview will remain in my possession for use in academic articles.

The results of the study will be used to write a Ph.D. thesis entitled, "Getting Out of Crime: Accounts of Becoming an 'Ex-'" which will likely be retained in the University of Victoria library. Quotes from what you say during the interview may later be published in a scholarly journal.

Interviewee	John Anderson
Principal Researcher	John Anderson, BA, MA (Crim) Ph.D. Candidate Department of Sociology University of Victoria, B.C. Victoria, B.C. Ph. (250) 721-7572
Thesis Supervisor:	Professor Dan Koenig, PhD Department of Sociology University of Victoria Victoria, B.C. Ph. (250) 721-7575

11. Endnotes

¹ The research participants tell us that leaving crime is about transcending a *discreditable self* (Goffman, 1963). In a sociological classic entitled *Stigma*, Goffman distinguishes between *discredited* and *discreditable* people on the basis of information held by others (1963: 41-42). The discredited have been publicly labeled deviant, making them ineligible for full social acceptance within the circles of those who know. Their deviant characteristics or behaviour are known and so they cannot credibly present themselves as anything other than individuals with a “spoiled identity”. Alternatively, a discreditable individual possesses secret, stigmatizing information about him or herself which is not publicly known. There is almost always the risk of being found out by others. My participants consisted of both types, with the discreditable having distanced their past by space, time and confessions to only the most trustworthy.

² Steven Reid was an ex-offender who was well-known in publishing circles for his book, “Jackrabbit Parole” and his marriage to poet Susan Musgrave. On June 9, 1998, he was arrested after a bank-robbery and police pursuit where shots were fired. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation gave coverage to Stephen Reid’s fall from grace and also invited public feedback on their story. The letters they received and published were almost entirely condemnatory of Reid (see CBC News - In Depth: Stopwatch at <http://cbc.ca/news/indepth/stopwatch/letters.html> (June 15, 2000)). Reid was convicted of multiple armed robberies, kidnapping and attempted murder and sentenced to 18 years. See Reid’s interview with Hana Gartner (CBC Television) about his return to crime at: <http://cbc.ca/news/indepth/stopwatch/magazine.html> [August 21, 2000].

³ The National Parole Board notes that a pardon does not “erase a conviction”. A pardon “does not allow a person to say that they do not have a criminal record”. The correct response is: “Yes, I have been convicted of a criminal offence for which I have received a pardon.” (See “Frequently asked questions about pardons” at http://www.npb-cnrc.gc.ca/infocntr/factsh/pardonfaq_e.htm [February 5, 2002].

⁴ The very concept of what constitutes “crime” is challenged in criminology, and has been at least since the late 1960s. According to most criminologists, crime is a violation of societal rules of behaviour as interpreted and expressed by a criminal legal code created by people holding social and political power. Individuals who violate these rules are subject to sanctions by state authority, social stigma, and loss of status (Siegel and McCormick, 1999: 20). Radical or conflict criminologists understand crime to include not only the legal definition of crime, but also actions of the state such as imperialism, racism, sexism, exploitation of the Third World resources, environmental pollution, price fixing, police brutality and war-making, and blocking the opportunity to participate in democratic decision-making (Lynch and Groves, 1989: 32).

⁵ Not all crime invites negative social reaction, such as speeding on highways or violating copyright laws by downloading music from the World Wide Web and creating compact disks for enjoyment. Similarly, not all deviance is criminal, such as butting into a theatre lineup, but would almost always invite social condemnation.

⁶ Menzies and Chunn's observations about the discipline in 1999 were predated by Thomas Fleming's (1985) call for a "criminology for the working class" some fourteen years earlier in *The New Criminologies in Canada*. Along with other scholars in this edited collection, he criticized the discipline for its domination by mainstream liberal academics for its asocial and ahistorical bent, lack of meaningful praxis and control of the research agenda by state funding (pp. 5-12). Brian MacLean's (1986) edited collection, *The Political Economy of Crime*, similarly castigated the discipline on a number of counts, namely the conceptualization of crime as being a "thing" rather than a social process and the "correctionalist" orientation generated by power based on inequality. As a result, the "criminogenic characteristics of capitalism" are left unexplored which leaves criminology committed to a correctionalist agenda which prevails in Canadian criminological theory and policy.

⁷ Using the terms "ex-offenders" and "ex-offender" in the title field, a search of *Criminal Justice Abstracts* and *Sociological Abstracts* electronic indexes in July and August of 2001 revealed 81 studies, almost all of which were program evaluations assessing the effectiveness of prison or community correctional programs assessed with quantitative methods. Using the same process, the search term "desistance" revealed 16 studies in *Sociological Abstracts*, and 30 citations using "ex-offenders". *Sociological Abstracts* searches 635,000 citations from 1963 to 2001; *Criminal Justice Abstracts* has over 85,000 entries from 1968 to 2001. Searches of the National Criminal Justice Reference Service revealed the same resources as those captured by Criminal Justice Abstracts (see <<http://www.ncjrs.org/>>).

⁸ Glaser (1998) advises grounded theorists to use the literature "as data". Treated this way, the literature enables me to refine or expand the concepts developed from my interviews by using the grounded theory method. My later task is to weave in the findings of previous research which identifies similar processes to show how my work makes contributions to the literature (p. 207). According to Glaser (1998):

Grounded theory's very strong dicta are a) *do not do a literature review in the substantive area and related areas where the research is to be done*, and b) when the grounded theory is nearly completed during the sorting and writing up, then the literature search in the substantive area can be accomplished and woven into the theory as more data for constant comparison (p. 67; my emphasis).

The rationale for leaving the literature review on qualitative studies of ex-offenders to a latter part of the and writing process is to avoid getting "grabbed" by other peoples'

concepts that do not fit or are not relevant, or developing a “professional” problem defined by others which may lead one astray from what is really going on in the data. An immersion in the literature early in the process also encourages speculation informed by what others have found, rather than letting the grounded theory method identify the context and contingencies for how things fit together. There is also the risk of being “awed out” by other authors or pundits in the field which detracts from one’s self valuation as a theorist, or becoming “rhetoricalized” and parroting the work of others as opposed to maximizing one’s own theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1998: 67-68).

⁹ Developmental criminology refers to temporal within-individual changes to explain patterns of offending and focuses on two areas of study. The first is a focus on the development and dynamics of offending with age which is largely descriptive and concerns the processes of behavioural development. The second focus is on the identification of causal factors that co-occur with the behavioural development and have an effect on its course. Together, these foci “make it possible to shed light on the causes of individual’s initiation into offending, how their offense patterns may become more frequent and more serious over time, and how offending may cease” (Le Blanc and Loeber, 1998: 117). For an overview of developmental criminology, see Vold, Bernard and Snipes (1998: 284-315.).

¹⁰ Similarly, the methodological approach taken may account for different degrees of importance given to events which are recalled as life-transforming. For example, Margaret Hughes (1998) conducted in-depth interviews with 20 inner-city men between the ages of 18 and 28 with a history of destructive behaviour. She used Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) method of qualitative inquiry to uncover factors that facilitated their decisions to desist from criminal activity. Her study provides descriptions of leaving crime which are organized along four “significant factors” informing the decision to desist: 1) respect and concern for children, 2) fear of physical harm or incarceration, 3) contemplation time (usually while under some form of state supervision) and 4) support and modeling from mentors (pp. 144-146). The most significant factor for leaving crime among her participants is described as “respect and concern for children”:

Perhaps because of their unhealthy experiences, these young men sensed the critical importance of a healthy childhood. Participants revealed the development of a deep-seated respect and concern for their children. They alluded to experiences involving children as playing a role in their decision to change (Hughes, 1998: 146).

To illustrate her point, she quotes one of her respondents who tells of a vengeful robbery victim who spared him injury or death because his baby son was present at the time.

I robbed this dude one day, and I was high, and I had my son. He might have been like six months. He ran up on me with a gun, and he said, ‘I won’t kill you right now because your son’s in the carriage, but next time I see you man, it ain’t no tellin’ what I’ll do’. So after that, I was like, man *I can’t do this anymore. I*

can't do this. My son could a got hurt. You know bullets don't have no name
 ("Ronnie" in Hughes, 1998: 146 my emphasis).

This event is one which I would have coded as a crisis using the grounded theory method. "Respect and concern for children" may help explain the exits of those with children, but a "transformative crisis" envelopes all traumatic events which are recounted as turning points from crime. The variation in how the events are interpreted speak to the differences in the level of abstraction between descriptive accounts and those which seek to develop concepts to form an explanation for resolving the main concern of those with a disreputable past.

¹¹ The notion that prison may not be a deterrent to crime is supported by other qualitative research conducted by Benaquisto (2000). There was a absence of rational decision-making behind the crimes committed by the 100 Canadian prison inmates he interviewed, leading him to believe that "most offenders do not calculate their actions in terms of the potential risks they may face if they engage in a given illegal act" (p. 212).

¹² There were a number of methodological problems with this study acknowledged by the author, including the fact that offender's participation in the program was voluntary (p. 112). The prospect that offenders self-selected themselves into the program may have filtered out the "high risk" inmates, leaving the Exodus Group to work with those who were motivated to go straight.

¹³ Glaser (1992) urges researchers to abandon or suspend previous theoretical commitments to their thinking about how things "fit". One technique for achieving this challenging task is to identify an area of inquiry without conducting a literature review. Another strategy is to not discuss one's research with others because the temptation is to formulate hypothesis prior to discovering emergent themes and their theoretical linkages. Discussing developing concepts and theoretical linkages also runs the risk of being criticized for not following deductive sociological methods.

¹⁴ Symbolic interaction and interactionist methodology encourage us to understand social behaviour by immersing ourselves inside the worlds of meaning as individuals of our interest see it. In the current study, I assumed the role of three "others". As a sympathetic researcher and personally familiar with the stigma of being an ex-offender, I could put myself in the place of the research participants as they were being interviewed, leaving myself open to understanding their accounts of why these past lives were often characterized by self-destructive and victimizing behaviours, the feelings they previously experienced, and what was going on for them in telling of the past in the present moment. I am cognizant of another wider social audience who are less sympathetic towards these people in light of their confessions, regardless of the time passed since their exit from crime. Two people at separate times asked me why I "would ever want to" study ex-offenders once they learned of the research. One complained that offenders get all the attention while victims are ignored. The other questioned why I would want to listen to the crimes they had committed. The stigmatizing voice which maintains that "once a con,

always a con", or its proxies, is very much a part of the experiential reality of ex-offenders. A third "other" of which I am aware is the reaction to these accounts by human service professionals or criminologists who might interpret what I was hearing from some offenders was evidence of a "latent trait" which determines their relationship to anti-social behaviour (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Wilson and Herrnstein, 1985). Psychologists such as Aaron Beck (1999) provide a framework for understanding thinking styles underlying aggression and hate, and anyone trained in cognitive psychology or having years of experience with "the way cons think" constitute part of the "other" which I, as a listener, represent. Their voices interact with the sympathetic researcher.

¹⁵ There is precedent for using "interactionism" and "symbolic interaction" as interchangeable terms (Fisher and Strauss, 1978). The basis for the interactionist perspective was formulated by George Herbert Mead and other members of the Chicago School, notably Edward E Park and W.I Thomas. Symbolic interaction was coined by Herbert Blumer (1969). Blumer's version of Mead and symbolic interactionism is often taken as representative of the interactionist position today, although several other variants exist, including the positivistically-oriented Iowa School, Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical sociology, labelling theory (Becker, 1963), phenomenological sociology (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Garfinkel, 1967), structuration theory (Giddens, 1976) and the sociology of science (e.g., Kuhn, 1962). For an overview of these variants, see Prus, 1996.

¹⁶ The generalized other is "an organized structure of attitudes believed to be common to all and is defined in terms of a universe of discourse growing out of the symbolic interaction of a community of individuals" (Garretson in Manis and Meltzer, 1967: 337). Collins (1985) provides some alternative imagery regarding the self and generalized other. The self as a kind of checker board on which 'me' (or several me's) are the checkers and the 'I' makes the moves while the generalized other is the light hanging over the board to make the moves intelligible (p. 198). The generalized other also acts as social control:

It is in the form of the generalized other that the social process influences the behavior of the individuals involved in it and carrying it on, i.e., that the community exercises control over the conduct of its individual members (Mead, 1934: 155).

¹⁷ Gary Fine (1993) notes that symbolic interaction now embraces a number of methods, including experimental, statistical, secondary analysis of survey data, conversation analysis and policy-relevant applied sociology. To that list we might add biography analysis (Denzin, 1989) and a range of specifically feminist research methods (Reinharz, 1992).

¹⁸ Labelling theory has been criticized as not being a real theory, mainly because of poor conceptualization and the inability to falsify its hypotheses, or specify the conditions

under which labelling occurs. It lacks empirical support because the degree to which labels are internalized are variable. People can choose to find reference groups which provide alternative definitions for themselves. Another common criticism of labelling theory is that social reaction theorists have spent too much time focusing on the micro-level analysis of deviant imputation while ignoring the larger macro-perspectives or “structural ones”.

¹⁹ Goode (2001) has tried to resolve the dilemma between definitions of deviance which see the phenomena as a violation of norms, irrespective of the social audience (e.g., Clinard and Meier, 2001) and those who understand the concept as having its existence only through the social reaction of others (e.g., Adler and Adler, 2000). He proposes that deviance constitutes the “behaviour, beliefs, or characteristics that some people in a society find offensive or reprehensible and that generate – or would generate if discovered – in these people disapproval, punishment, condemnation of, or hostility toward the actor or possessor” (p. 37).

²⁰ Francis was one of the last ex-offenders who I interviewed. By then I was confident that most ex-offenders had experienced an ontological crises somewhere in their decision to get out of crime. Although Francis had much to say about leaving a lifestyle of drug-trafficking and rubbing shoulders with the criminal underworld in a major Canadian city, I was able to direct her back to the turning point (or “transformative crisis”) in her life, assuming there was one. Her crisis was not the surface features which she described at length such as physical deterioration of her mental and physical health, or her near brush with being charged by the police for her involvement in a fraud. What led Francis to her existential crises was when she could not bear to face her mother whose trust she felt she had betrayed. Once I began to inquire about that moment in more detail, she revealed a moment where she confessed to her mother “who she really was” which constituted, in her mind, the turning point from crime.

²¹ The intention is to see how the study population sees the world, how they define the situation and what it means for them. As Clifford Geertz (1979) noted, “the trick is to figure out what the devil they think they are up to” (p. 228). Concepts will emerge as the analyst compares and codes. This is one of the first junctures the analyst must guard himself against: that of slipping into preconceptions instead of listening carefully to each incident in order to figure out what the research is truly a study of (Glaser, 1992 p. 43).

²² I was “theoretically sensitive” to recognize a criminal identity for two reasons. First, a broad reading in criminology heightened my knowledge about prison dynamics and the values inherent within the prison subculture. Secondly, my own life experiences as an offender, inmate and correctional officer made it possible to identify phrases associated with the prison culture or “street” argot of criminals.

²³ Ex-offenders also described the types of crimes in which they were involved which suggests the kind of person they were in the past. These passages were coded differently (e.g., property, prostitution, trafficking, using drugs and violent). Coding the transcripts

for the crimes which were committed under a different heading than “who I was” still allows for combining different codes under different categories. Thus, a “code family” or category representing “violent offenders” can include “Crime/violent” and “WHO I WAS/Crim/Enjoyed violence & intimidation”.

²⁴ Some word processing software packages, such as Microsoft Word TM allow for ‘comments’ to be invisibly tagged to a passage of text. This tool allows qualitative researchers to reflexively monitor their conceptualization of emergent themes and linkages between concepts.

²⁵ Karen Locke (1996) notes that in her disciplinary field (organizational management), the use of grounded theory has been cited as informing the methodology behind several publications in the *Academy of Management Journal*. However, she notes that the grounded theory method has been selectively rewritten without the core aspects of the methodology. Theoretical sampling is not discussed, in fact it

is being written out of the analytic process. This smacks of an “anything goes” approach to research in which we may indiscriminately pick and choose data gathering techniques and analytic operations. For example, when we claim to be using a “grounded theory approach” in a study in which participants to be interviewed were “randomly” selected, as at least one study did, we are clearly confusing analytic traditions as well as procedures. Any study in which observations were randomly selected violates one of the central analytic tenets and operational procedures of the grounded theory method (Locke, 1996: 243-244).

²⁶ Glaser (1992) chastised Anselm Strauss for creating a step in grounded theory called “axial coding” which demonstrates “shocking neglect” of the original grounded theory method written by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 (Glaser, 1992: 61).

²⁷ For Glaser (1992), to code theoretically is to examine the emerging categories for their linkages to other categories and their properties. For example, Glaser and Strauss (1964) coded their field notes and interviews according to “perceived social loss” of a patient by nurses and the quality of care and medical attention received by the former.

There are basically two types of codes to generate: substantive and theoretical. Substantive codes conceptualize how the substantive codes may relate to each other as hypotheses to be integrated into the theory. For example, two substantive codes generated for an intensive care unit in a hospital are social loss and attention. They may be theoretically coded into a hypothesis as cause based on degree. Thus, the higher the social loss, the more attention received by nurses (Glaser, 1978: 55).

²⁸ One feature in my word processor (Microsoft WordTM) is a “document map” which appears on the left side of the screen as I am typing, much like an outline which is always present and allows me to move directly to any heading or subheading. While writing, I

can tell at a glance what heading I am writing under, and monitor whether the discussion is relevant to the concept identified in the heading. This is a useful tool for staying on track, and continually sorting where theoretical memos “fit” under the emergent theory. The document map also delivers me from speculating about human motives or systemic processes which cannot be grounded in the data. The temptation in writing qualitative research is to lapse into dense description without providing any concepts to categorize the data, or theoretical links to tie concepts together. This tool is also invaluable for the “carry forward” analytic rule which Barney Glaser (1978) describes on p. 123 of *Theoretical Sensitivity*.

²⁹ Later on, when the request for research participants became more publicly known, I received three phone calls from people who made inquiries about a) whether leaving a lesbian relationship qualified as ‘going straight’ and b) if abandoning a ‘counter-culture lifestyle’ would be of interest, and c) whether becoming a ‘born-again Christian could be considered ‘going straight’. All three offers for an interview were declined because none had a disreputable past.

³⁰ Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) recommend that soliciting respondents through advertising and the media be used “only as a last resort... when they are used, special care be given not to reveal all the criteria of eligibility for the study nor too few of them” (p. 149).

³¹ Research using interviews with offenders and deviant groups has a long history in criminology and sociology. Edwin Sutherland interviewed professional thieves in 1937 to explain behaviour systems among this subgroup of offenders. Whyte (1955) and Leibow (1967) befriended and interviewed leaders in the inner city to study their communities to understand emerging gangs. More recently, interview methods have been employed in a wide range of studies, including the defendant’s experience in the Canadian criminal justice system (Ericson and Baranek, 1982), accounts by murderers regarding homicide in Canada (Boyd, 1989), victims of marital rape (Finkelhor and Yllo, 1990), the extra-legal factors taken into account by court personnel when sentencing skid row alcoholics (Wiseman, 1993), and the “neutralizing accounts” of convicted rapists (Scully and Marolla, 1985).

³² The original design for this research contained a list of questions which I assumed would be addressed by participants as they told their accounts of leaving crime. As the interviewing progressed, I opted for asking questions which were more pointed and directional, focusing on *the problems of leaving crime* as they unfolded. This became the topic which ex-offenders really wanted to talk about and, in many cases, the list of questions which I had prepared were answered without me asking them. The lack of formal, structured questioning permits an elaboration of what participants think is important in leaving crime.

³³ The stigmatic treatment towards deviants can be found, in part, in our Judeo-Christian morality. Referring to the original contours of western society’s reaction to deviance,

Erikson notes that many religious underpinnings may have now abated in our reaction to deviance, but our response continues to decontextualize the harmful act from its context:

We are still apt to visualize deviant behaviour as the product of deep-seated characterological strain in the person who enacts it, rather than the product of the situation in which it took place, and *we are still apt to treat that person as if his whole being was somehow implicated in what is often no more than a passing deviant episode* (Erikson, 1966: p. 198; my emphasis).

³⁴ While some members of his constituency organization still endorse his role as MP, his own Reform Party members distanced themselves from him, and others called for his resignation. Preston Manning, the Reform Party leader, removed Ramsay from the party caucus until his legal proceedings are over, including an appeal of the conviction. Later, Ramsay's bid to remain with the new Canadian Alliance Party was terminated by the co-president, Clayton Manness, who justified the decision by referring to their party constitution: "It [the constitution] says membership in the Alliance shall be terminated for just cause ... including conduct judged improper, unbecoming or likely to adversely affect the interests or reputation of the Alliance as determined by the national council" (*National Post*, June 29 2000).

³⁵ The inverted cross is known as a "jailhouse tattoo" and signals to others that the owner has done prison time. They are commonly tattooed on the flesh between the thumb and forefinger, or in some instances, on the forehead.

³⁶ Richard Speck stabbed nine student nurses to death in Chicago on July 14, 1966. The lone surviving nurse at the crime scene identified Speck with the help of this tattoo, "Born to Raise Hell", a moniker which then became popular with deviant groups like biker gangs and inmates. Charles Manson carries a swastika on this forehead, between his eyes, a symbol that has been copied by some inmates in Canada.

³⁷ I once had a tattoo on my forearm – a "peace sign" which a peer had engraved with a pin and India ink during a period at a Jesuit boarding school. It was a single colour and crudely applied. Before I had it surgically removed, many people made derogatory comments about the sign ("Is that a *peace sign*? Were you a hippy?", "That looks like a symbol for a Mercedes Benz!", or "Were you in jail?"). The decision to have it removed came right after I was hired as a correctional officer in 1983, on the advice of one of the recruiting and assessment officers.

³⁸ This same tendency of former inmates to recognize others who have "done time" has been reported to me by other ex-offenders throughout my career as a correctional officer.

³⁹ Kirk used the word "fuck" or "fuckin" over 300 times in a two hour interview, a communication style that stood out from the others interviewed. As an interpreter for various audiences (a researcher, the "generalized other" of society and professional therapeutic groups), the use of profanity will likely not signal a full conversion from the disreputable self. This is a trace of a disreputable self for Kirk which, combined with his

tattoos and involvement in minor crime, will signal to others that he still has “one foot in crime” or “can’t be trusted”.

⁴⁰ Darryl reflects this situation when he notes that others actually tried to make him swear:

Darryl: - and I said just for today I won’t swear, I mean I never ever made it, and I had friends that kind of egged me on, tryin’ to get me to swear, but over a period of time I just stopped that, now I go in to schools and I speak in schools and I don’t use [inaudible] swear words at all (Darryl at 627).

⁴¹ On September 18, 1998, Health Minister Alan Rock announced that the federal government would help Canadians infected with Hepatitis-C through the blood system between 1986 and 1990. The \$525 million would go to victims of the tainted blood and their families.

⁴² Edwin Schur is one of the sociologists who expanded labelling theory in the 1970s. Building on Goffman’s concept of retrospective interpretation, Schur noted that once a person is labelled a criminal, others will examine past, innocuous events and behaviours to reinterpret the new label to “fit” that person. For Schur, “deviance is viewed not as a static entity but rather as a continuously shaped and reshaped outcome of dynamic processes of social interaction” (1971:8).

⁴³ Section 5 of the Act reads as follows:

The pardon

(a) is evidence of the fact

that, in the case of a pardon for an offence referred to in paragraph 4(a), the Board, after making inquiries, was satisfied that the applicant for the pardon was *of good conduct* and

that, in the case of any pardon, the conviction in respect of which the pardon is granted or issued *should no longer reflect adversely on the applicant's character*; and

(b) unless the pardon is subsequently revoked or ceases to have effect, vacates the conviction in respect of which it is granted and, without restricting the generality of the foregoing, *removes any disqualification* to which the person so convicted is, by reason of the conviction, subject by virtue of the provisions of any Act of Parliament (Chapter 47; my emphasis).

⁴⁴ The Privacy Commissioner of Canada reviewed the criminal history records maintained by the RCMP in 1996. With respect to the maintenance of criminal histories where “diversion” has been granted by the Crown (that is, where an offender is spared a court appearance for a minor offence, and is often required to fulfill some obligation in lieu of appearing before a magistrate), the Privacy Commissioner writes: “The RCMP’s policy regarding these [diverted] charges is to not enter them in the CHR [Criminal History

Records]. Their rationale for this is that diversion was originally created as a means of disposing of charges *without branding an individual*, who was not a threat to society, *as a criminal*" (my emphasis). The language and logic employed here is instructive because it suggests that the opposite must be true: that someone with a criminal record *is branded as a criminal*. "Branding" refers to the medieval practice of marking felons with a hot iron in a conspicuous place on the body to ensure that others would know that they had committed a crime.

For more information, see Privacy Commission of Canada, "Study of Criminal Records History as Maintained by the RCMP" (May, 1996), available at: http://www.privcom.gc.ca/english/02_05_e_02_e.htm#001 [May 23 1999].

⁴⁵ A "Declaration Regarding Criminal Convictions" used by the Correctional Service of Canada to process security checks asks, "Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offence for which you have not been granted a pardon, or an offence for which you have been granted a pardon and such a pardon has been revoked?"

⁴⁶ This matter was brought to my attention by a former RCMP police officer who has asked to remain anonymous, and verified when I sought an "advanced security clearance" from the RCMP in 1993 to work on a community policing project.

⁴⁷ Stebbins (1971) made several generalizations about the conditions facing professional and non-professional offenders, some of which can be applied to ex-offenders. For example, being questioned by casual acquaintances about aspects of one's past is an unsettling experience for this group. Furthermore, where the physical evidence of criminality signals the ambiguous moral status of ex-offenders, curious stares from others can be disconcerting. While interacting with others who may be unaware of their deviant past, ex-offenders may face unanticipated requests for information which they will feel to be discrediting, or they may hear "humiliating truths" about how non-deviants view others like themselves (Stebbins, 1971: 159-160). The effect of these interactions convey the social disapproval which most people hold toward those with a disreputable past.

How successful a conventional career will be after one has been labeled a deviant, even if he has committed only one alienating act, is a question for research. Perhaps he will be forced into or committed to the marginal status of semi-deviant. Whatever the reasons, it seems plausible to hypothesize that *the longer the deviant career and the more publicly known and seriously regarded the deviant's acts, the more difficult it is to reenter conventional life*, although at least partially successful entry is by no means impossible (Stebbins, 1971: 16; emphasis added).

⁴⁸ Years after beginning his new life free of crime, Larry was tried and convicted for possession of stolen property, even though he had an alibi supported by faculty and researchers in a Canadian university. The judge reluctantly accepted his story but invoked a non-custodial sentence. Part of the reason why the police believed Larry had been

involved in this crime was because, as they told him, “nobody else could have done this”. Criminals (and sometimes ex-offenders) who are notorious to police for certain offences, such as sex offenders and “cat burglars”, are frequently singled out for investigation.

⁴⁹ Criminalization carries with it not only stigma, but also collateral damage to families. When one family member has been stigmatized, others within the family may face a loss of community respect and increased social hostility as well (Fishman, 1988).

⁵⁰ The referents to social aspects of the residual self need not be based upon objectively discernible facts. Edward, when in the company of former friends who knew him when he was a drug dealer, recalls feeling some relational distance with his school peers 20 years after the fact, despite having all the credentials of an upper middle-class, professional executive:

Edward: Well when I go to Rockvale , ah, I went back for my 23rd , ah, was it 23, yeah 23rd high school reunion and the people were fairly accepting but I remember people who wouldn't have anything to do with me when I was going to high school because, you know, I was selling drugs and stuff like that, that in, that in-group, that cliquey kind of group that was there, ah, wouldn't have anything to do with me, wouldn't have anything to do with me when I was at school, now all of a sudden, I was okay. A [post-secondary degree], I had a couple of kids, I was LIKE THEM but *still I wasn't, there wasn't this, you know, this closeness...* (Edward at 582).

A few minutes later in the interview, Edward commented that his intention to gain further educational credentials would “handle things” within the peer group from which he felt excluded, implying that he believed he could overcome the many or all of the social penalties associated with his residual self in the eyes of others. However, it was clear throughout the interview that Edward's main concern was with what others might infer about who he is in the present, based on what he had been involved with in the past. His subjective experience underscores the adhesive qualities of having been involved in crime.

⁵¹ When I interviewed Kirk, he was without the “helping vocabulary” characteristic of many ex-offenders. Kirk puts it this way when he weighed the wider public opinion of who he was (speaking in the third person at first):

Kirk: Yet he did, yet he's, he's good in sports, he's a great fuckin' ball player, yeah he does all the fuckin' odd jobs but, ah I'm still recognized as nobody in the eyes of some sort of people. *I'll never fuckin' change.* They don't want to believe that. And sometimes for me that bothers me a lot because is anybody going to give me this chance and what to I have to do to prove this? (Kirk at 1343).

Kirk said he felt trapped by an identity which he no longer occupied, and saw few ways to entirely transcend this stigma because he had few credentials for demonstrating change. For him, the important opinion was from a woman he was soon to marry, despite the fact that the wider community still regarded him as untrustworthy and mysterious:

Kirk: I've told her about my past, like I'm telling you, I've told her. I've shared in wide-open with her and she's just [inaudible] fuck, I think I read about that. You were the guy? I was probably him. Really? Wow. Holy Cow. Does that bother you and she said, no. (Kirk at 1320).

⁵² During one federal sentence, Darryl recounts encouraging an inmate who was openly contemplating ending his life, to "go ahead, get it over with, kill yourself - who gives a shit?" Years later, on a New Years Eve and abandoned by criminal associates because he was "too scary, too violent", he slashed his wrists and nearly died from a loss of blood. The disjuncture between who he believed he was, and a new awareness that he needed help was the necessary transformative crisis which motivated him to change. He began making distinctions about who he was in the eyes of others, why he was that way, and the self was capable of becoming (informed by help).

⁵³ Priscilla, for example, reports that her street friends who were themselves involved in drug trafficking, prostitution, procuring the services of prostitutes ("pimping") eventually took her to a treatment facility when her drug consumption habits became self-injurious. Similarly, Harry talks about being "nursed back to health" by leaders of an organized crime group when his drug habit threatened his health (and the secrecy of the drug trafficking enterprise run by the criminal organization in which he was a part).

⁵⁴ Dayna was hidden by her family from former drug-world associates who believed she owed them money. They also assisted her in making a critical move to another part of Canada to begin a new life with a new identity.

⁵⁵ Most of the insights into the role of helpers came from discussions with three of the research participants who are paid counsellors in prison after-care or addiction programs. In addition to the interviews which form the basis of this substantive, grounded theory, I scheduled separate interviews with paid helpers to get more insights into "what needs to be in place" before meaningful change can occur among offenders.

⁵⁶ The use of "sayings" and "one liners" is a hallmark of AA and those who use their services. For a list of 122 of them, see Bimini Bound <<http://biminibound.com/recovery/liners.html>> [May 23 2001].

⁵⁷ The phrase, "it's not the caboose that kills you" is one among many metaphors which are used within Twelve Step groups. These metaphors are powerful to those who use them because they capture a great deal of meaning very succinctly.

⁵⁸ Some Internet sites featuring the 12 Step program of AA or NA have CGI on-line calculators for determining the exact number of years, months and days during which a person has been clean and sober (called a "clean time calculator"). A person enters the date of their commitment to be alcohol or drug free and receive back the time they have been abstinent. See Narcotics Anonymous - British Columbia Region at <<http://www.bcrsna.bc.ca/count.html>> [June 26, 2000].

⁵⁹ Warren's only manifestation of the residual self is through the treatment he receives, or fears he will receive, from those with official records of his involvement in trafficking drugs. He stated in the interview that he was "basically the same person" now as he was before serving a prison sentence for trafficking. It does not appear that Warren endured a "transformative crisis" because he reports no self transformation typical of the other ex-offenders, and was ambiguous about whether or not he continued to smoke marijuana.

⁶⁰ The Serenity Prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr goes as follows:

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

⁶¹ Although a few passages from the interview transcript cannot provide the best illustrations for the presence of Native spirituality as an imported conversation, Wayne and John provided numerous examples of sayings which were derived from the cultural teachings which formed the background for their decision to leave crime:

Wayne: *They say you'll fall to the bottom, you have a chance once you hit bottom that you will fall the rest of the way, or you can climb back to the top of where you should be* (Wayne at 450).

John: *...what I've been told, is when the student is ready, the teacher appears and there was, you know, like then [John's mentor] come in and started the sweats* (John at 794).

⁶² Alan Dershowitz has written a book entitled *The Abuse Excuse and Other Cop-Outs, Sob Stories and Evasions of Responsibility* (1995). A prominent American lawyer, Dershowitz argues that the "abuse excuse" has a negative impact on the operation of the legal system, and is symptomatic of a wider trend where people are unwilling to take responsibility for their own behaviour. These same sentiments were explored from an academic perspective by James Q. Wilson in *Moral Judgement: Does the Abuse Excuse Threaten our Legal System?* (1998) who recommended sweeping legal reforms to prevent the guilty from going free on the basis of "expert" testimony in front of gullible jurors. Another indication of general scepticism toward biological, sociological or psychological explanations for criminal behaviour appeared in a cartoon in the August, 1999 edition of *New Yorker* where the caption read, "I know he cheated on me because of his childhood abuse but I shot him because of mine".

As an indicator of Canadian sentiments on this issue, my experience as a university lecturer teaching criminological theories often raises questions from students who claim that they too faced many of the structural, familial and biological forces which purport to explain crime, yet did not use drugs or violate the law. How can their conformity be explained? Many Canadians are skeptical of the influence of sociological and

psychological variables influencing behaviour, preferring to believe that anyone can make it if they are motivated.

⁶³ Davis (1980) surveyed 73 Canadian companies and discovered that only 22 (30%) would ask about prior record on a regular basis, and 67 (92%) expressed a willingness to consider a previously convicted applicant.

⁶⁴ The twelfth step of Alcoholics Anonymous says "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs." The AA Big Book underscores the necessity to help others:

Practical experience shows that nothing will so much insure immunity from drinking as intensive work with other alcoholics. It works when other activities fail. This is our twelfth suggestion: Carry this message to other alcoholics! You can help when no one else can. You can secure their confidence when others fail. Remember they are very ill (p. 89).

⁶⁵ Several John Howard societies throughout Canada operate programs where ex-offenders visit schools to speak with school-age children about the outcomes of making bad choices. The programs are supported by provincial governments.

⁶⁶ A criminal pardon reads

His excellency the Governor General in Council, on the recommendation of the National Parole Board, is pleased hereby to grant to [name] a pardon in respect of the offense of [offence or offences listed] (...)

And this pardon is evidence of the fact that the National Parole Board, and after making proper inquiries, was satisfied that the said [name] was of good behaviour and that the convictions should no longer reflect adversely on his [her] character and, unless subsequently revoked, this pardon vacates the convictions in respect of which it is granted and, without restricting the generality of the foregoing, removes any disqualifications to which the said [name] is, by reason of such convictions, subject by virtue of any Act of the Parliament of Canada or a regulation made there under.

In a letter accompanying my pardon, the Solicitor-General wrote, "I am pleased to inform you that the Governor in Council has granted you a pardon under provisions of the Criminal Records Act (...) Your criminal record is now sealed and it may not be disclosed without my prior approval (...) I hope that all will be well with you. Please accept my best personal wishes for your future success". The eight by fourteen inch official pardon document and the kind words by Canada's top law enforcement official constitute the symbolic recognition that one is no longer a bad person.

⁶⁷ Some ex-offenders, especially those who were students or otherwise did not have public work associated with being an ex-offender, kept their participation in Alcoholics Anonymous and/or Narcotics Anonymous secret and asked me to keep their membership

secret from others. Participation in the help they need may be stigmatizing for some, and affirms their residual self.

⁶⁸ The notion of atonement for one's past sins is a characteristic of Judeo-Christian beliefs which provide the moral rationale for the response to wrongdoing in many Western societies. Punishment is the deliberate infliction of pain on another, informed by the belief that a wrong can be compensated through suffering, or *paying for your crime*. Within this cultural context, it is not surprising to hear many ex-offenders to speak of the steps which they have taken to do good or make amends for their past, and thus relieve some of the stigma associated with having been formally designated as disreputable. Atonement is taking steps to provide reparation for wrongs committed through an act of shaming, self-inflicted suffering or performing good works to make compensation.

⁶⁹ Darryl provides us with one such example:

Darryl: I've talked to my brothers and sisters and made all my amends there, I had one brother, the oldest brother, he wants nothing to do with me. **JFA:** Still? **Darryl:** To this day. I send him a Christmas card every year just to piss him off [laughs] (Darryl at 1014).

⁷⁰ There may be situations where any form of amends are deemed impractical. Francis encountered a dilemma concerning the impracticality of making amends to a friend from whom she had stolen firearms to pay for a "cocaine lifestyle". But rather than make public, symbolic amends, she chose to keep her past secret in the belief that confronting this victim would have done more harm than good:

JFA: Did he find out about the guns? **Francis:** No. God no. Oh my God. Even to this day he doesn't know and I don't think I'll ever say because, you know what, *it doesn't matter, it's in the past, so why bring it up?* We're just starting to rekindle our relationship so what's the point of, you know, yeah it was quite a stupid thing to do (Francis at 665).

She also did not feel compelled to make any symbolic amends to society through good works because most of what occurred in her past was secret and constituted a relatively "victimless crime" of cocaine use.

⁷¹ Only one offender in the sample reported that he "was no different", other than more mature, than he was before he decided to get out of crime. Warren believed that his convictions for trafficking in an illicit substance were fundamentally unfair.

⁷² The Canadian National Parole Board has published an information kit entitled, "Parole Decision-Making: Myths and Realities. Myth 7 tells us that contrition is not enough, and that offenders must have understanding or insight into their past:

7. Myth: The Board grants parole to offenders who express remorse for the offences they have committed.

Reality: Whether or not offenders express remorse is only one of the many factors that the Board considers in assessing risk. Of greater importance are whether the offenders *understand their offences, the factors that contributed to their criminal behaviour*, the progress they are able to demonstrate as a result of their participation in treatment programs, and the soundness of their release plans (emphasis added).

See the National Parole Board Information Centre at <http://www.npb-cnrc.gc.ca/infocntr/infocn_e.htm> [June 29, 2001] for more information.

Additionally, Section 2.1 of their Policy Manual states:

After identifying the major case specific factors, the Board members shall consider any evidence of change in the offender, in particular efforts targeted at mitigating the risk factors, and other information from correctional authorities and others which pertain to risk, including: (....)

information from the offender which indicates commitment to, and *evidence of, change; degree of insight into criminal behaviour and factors in the offence and the gravity of the offence*; acceptance of responsibility; and understanding of crime cycle indicators and relapse prevention and risk management skills (emphasis added).

The Policy Manual is online at <http://www.npb-cnrc.gc.ca/infocntr/policym/polman_e.htm>

⁷³ Deviance theorists employ a similar concept, “tertiary deviance”, to describe the work of marginalized groups such as the disabled, homosexuals and mentally ill to “normalize” their deviance (Kitsuse, 1980).

⁷⁴ At the time of the interview, Darryl had a wife and a step-daughter and was integrated into his work – helping to set up a half-way house for recently-released inmates with substance abuse problems. Work and family had brought him a new network of friendships which he had never previously experienced.

⁷⁵ I also recognize that it is unfair to claim some monopoly on the interpretive work behind what we call reality. Converse and Schuman (1974) remind us of this dilemma for the qualitative researcher:

One begins to wonder – could it be that these alternative conceptions of reality offered by the respondent’ may have some grain of truth? Could it be that their values, different from mine, may be as legitimate as mine? Sitting in the university, one can see the limitations inherent in the social locations of other people and their perceptions of social reality. But one wonders, too, if the perceptions of the objective social scientists are not bounded by their own, but similar limitations (p. 8).

⁷⁶ In both cases, the research participants told others that they were being interviewed for a study on ex-offenders. The people they told had perceptions about them which, in their view, made them ineligible to be considered “ex-offenders”.

⁷⁷ A key informant is a term which I have borrowed from sociological field work to describe someone who is especially knowledgeable about a particular phenomenon of interest. Harry and Brad are both long-term ex-offenders and have spent years working with men who have backgrounds similar to their own. They took an interest in the research from the very beginning and accepted offers to read the chapters as I wrote them.

They later told me - tongue in cheek - that they would prefer not to be known as “informants” - given their past use and understanding of the word.

⁷⁸ In Canada, a prison sentence of less than two years is served in provincial facilities. Federal offenders, or those sentenced to more than two years, live out their sentences in facilities operated by the Correctional Service of Canada.

⁷⁹ According to some research, hard drug use is “the best predictor of the continuation of criminal activity” (Ouimet and LeBlanc, 1996: 94), irrespective of other life experiences such as marriage and employment.

⁸⁰ According to those advocating an approach which identifies some underlying propensity for antisocial behaviour, the causes of crime at one age identify the causes of crime at any other age, and developmental theories are unnecessary (Hirschi and Gottfredson, 2001). Any declining participation in rates of crime suggests that criminal desistance is the outcome of fewer opportunities for crime as offenders with a latent trait (i.e., “low self-control”) experience the biological effects and reduced opportunities for crime which are inherent with aging (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990, 2001; Rowe, Osgood, and Nicewander, 1990). The individual propensity for crime remains *static* throughout the lifespan. While the absolute number of crimes which offenders commit may drop as years pass, relative to others in the same age cohort, their prevalence in crime is a distinguishing characteristic (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990: 124-144). Any correlation between desistance and major life events such as employment, marriage or military service occurs after *a decision has been made* to enter into these institutionalized relationships. Put differently, the decision to go straight is an act of agency (or self-control) which is followed by a drop in criminal behaviour.

⁸¹ Trajectories are pathways or lines of development over the lifespan such as work, marriage, parenthood, self-esteem and criminal behaviour and refer to long-term patterns and sequences of behaviour (Sampson and Laub, 2001: 23).

⁸² While the stability of troublesome behaviour throughout the life-course is a feature of developmental criminology (Farrington, 1989; LeBlanc and Loeber, 1990; 1998), the contribution of social processes and causes are also recognized in the same literature. For

example, in their review of the research on aggression and violence, Loeber and Hay (1997) note that some children are at a heightened risk for violent careers from social forces over which they have no control: insecure attachments in infancy, harsh disciplinary practices, single parents (associated with type of neighbourhood), low parental interest in boy's education, authoritarian parents, having a parent with a criminal record, rejection by peers, and living in impoverished neighbourhoods have all been identified as contributing to the developmental pathways of adult offenders (pp. 394-398). Researchers are just beginning to explore the later life consequences of delinquent involvements, in part because of the scarcity of panel studies that stretch across the lifespan (Hagan, 1997: 121-22).

⁸³ Using an entirely different method and a sample of 403 British males comprised of those never convicted, "adolescent-limiteds", "low-level chronics" and "high-level chronics", Nagin et al. (2001) made a finding which appears consistent with the concept of the residual self developed here. Using longitudinal data from David Farrington's (1995) Cambridge study, they observed that adolescent-limited offenders (or "ALs" - those whose criminal careers begin in adolescence but do not carry into adulthood) grow up to have occupational histories and marital relationships which are little different from those who were never convicted. However, the authors describe their reformation as "less than complete":

They (ALs) continued to drink heavily, use drugs and get into fights. While their official criminal records ceased many years before, they were still committing criminal acts, such as stealing from their employers, according to their self-reports (p. 174)

These findings make the conceptualization and measurement of desistance problematic, especially if they are seen to display behaviours which imply little change in an anti-social trajectory over the life-course, or what I have called the "residual self". One way of partially resolving these issues is to understand "termination" as the time at which criminal activity stops, and "desistance" as the causal process that supports the termination of offending (Laub and Sampson, 2001:9-11). From the perspective of qualitative research regarding ex-offenders, "going straight" is desistance, albeit without the etiological vocabulary used by criminologists.

⁸⁴ I have two articles which were originally published in local papers. See "Morality and Marijuana" on the Cannabis Link website at <<http://www.mapinc.org/newstcl/v00/n599/a03.html>> [August 7, 2002] "D.A.R.E or Reality-Based Education?" on the Media Awareness Project website at <<http://www.mapinc.org/letters/2000/11/1te59.html>> [August 7, 2002].

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