



Barriers to women's actualizing a prosocial future identity and the shape of desistance

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Focus on 118 women, 5+ convictions

Drug users and sellers

5 or 6 interviews, including the life story interview

The shape of change for women who saw a prosocial future

Reintegration, reentry to self and situation **RARE**

Jenny, White/rural/35, HS but abusive stepdad → moved in with drug using man → meth convictions and 2 years prison. Old job back, custody of child, new man in her life. At work, woman was her “boss, landlord, friend, mom and sister.” “People came out of the woodwork,” boss helped get a car and license, plus training.

Vacillation due to hard times, setbacks, and relapses **COMMON**

Hope, Black/Detroit/44, kicked out pregnant at 15, 28 addicted and lost 6 children to the State, “I wanted to smoke crack and die.” 7 treatment programs, vacillated between using and not using.

Incongruities **COMMON** ESPECIALLY RE: GOOD MOTHER IDENTITY

Lynette, White/rural/32, signaled to the State of MI I could be a parent – volunteered, parenting classes, bible study. AFTER: DV, 7 controlled substances, drug house, meth lab.

Precarity – ON THE EDGE OF ECONOMIC SURVIVAL **COMMON**

Linsey, White/well to do suburbs & Detroit/37 Methadone clinic, raising child, new man she depends on for money, living in a motel. Identity change, desistance, but extreme poverty and nothing to do. Cannot find work due to drug and safe cracking convictions.

Example constraints on identity actualization: “Criminally disqualified” and supervision costs

Janelle (Black/White, high crime city on Detroit outskirts, 32)

BEGINNINGS age 12 sexual abuse → smoking crack to not be “around reality,” 16 on streets supported by men

SEEMED TO BE DOING WELL ON PAROLE 1st job at fast food (sporadic employment), SAT, MHT, anger management, homeless shelter. MPRI assistance (e.g. drivers license). Wants to do new things like movies, see Marvin Gay, and go to the gym.

LACK OF INCOME TO GET A LEASE, INELIGIBLE FOR FOOD STAMPS DUE TO CONVICTIONS, OWES SUPERVISION COSTS, moved in with man from the shelter, into drugs.

END CHEAP MOTEL, SUFFERING FROM EFFECTS OF CRACK COCAINE. LATER CONVICTIONS FOR AUTO THEFTS.

FUTURE “Death, everybody sayin, “You so pretty, you so pretty.” But I’m ugly to me because I know what I look like when I’m on drugs.,.,I got scars. I got scars on my body and stuff.”

Constraints on identity actualization: No living wage, benefit cuts

Jolene (White/small town /26)

BEGINNINGS Mom introduced to crack cocaine at 13. On adult probation, at 17 →7 months in jail (learned to cook meth), 3 months in boot camp, 5-month program on “being a success in society,” e.g., job interview skills.

PRISON substantial programming because realized killing self. PAROLE 90-day Residential in Detroit. Redemption through helping others in the program.

Returned to her small hometown, let a friend stay with her, he stole the rent money, she kicked him out, he relapsed and died. She relapsed to quell bad feelings.

Enrolled herself in a program that provided Suboxone to withdraw from heroin, **got a job, DHS cut Medicaid and food assistance. Made \$800 a month, rent \$700 a month, cannot afford \$197 a month prescription. JOLENE HAD MORE ACCESS TO HEROIN THAN PRESCRIPTION MEDS**

A year later, she had located and participated in a nine-month residential treatment program in Detroit and had stopped using drugs. No additional convictions.

Constraint on identity actualization: Housing discrimination and community

Raven (Black/postindustrial auto city/38)

SUPPORTING 5 CHILDREN, BENEFITS CUT → “Work First” led to no work, but food assistance and section 8 housing. “[I] obtained my medical assistance, my resident medical assistant, my phlebotomy, my patient care tech.” No job.

ON THE MARGINS OF FINANCIAL VIABILITY: Violating Parole by living with “a felon,” undependable contract work so living on the margins of financial viability – utilities about to be cut off.

ON THE MARGINS OF STAYING ALIVE:

Children sleep upstairs to be safe from stray bullets

Mondays church from 5-9, Tuesdays 4-8, Wednesdays 5-9, Thursdays 6-10, Fridays 5-10:30, Saturdays 9-12, Sundays 9-5.

Raven leaves house to search for jobs, check the mailbox, and walk children

Sees self transitioning to education as a social worker, but spending her time and energy protecting her children and herself. “Right now, all my time and energy go to my son, tryin’ to keep him out these streets.”

Constraint on identity actualization: Fast money communities

RACE → LOCAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY → UNEMPLOYMENT
Moderated by transportation ↗

Savana (Black/Detroit/27)

Cut off cash assistance, no job, cashed checks to take care of kids.

Desistance – Getting GED, working, getting CAN, stopped drinking.

Vacillation – 4 years later, conviction for delivery and manufacture of Marijuana.

Several women fell back on lucrative retail theft and boosting back in their communities. Selling drugs provided another “fast money” option.

Social and correctional policies that limit the actualized prosocial self

On again, off again safety net benefits interfere with movement towards a prosocial self

restricted because of criminal history (“criminally disqualified”)

restricted to women pregnant or parenting young children

difficult to get and keep disability without a good lawyer/doctor

How long will child tax credits last?

Housing benefits and cash assistance do not move people out of extreme poverty or high crime areas, and extreme poverty limits energy and opportunity to take part in prosocial opportunities.

Communities without jobs and without transportation, but with fast money opportunities make illegal behavior a tempting possibility to getting by, surviving

Supervision has monetary costs as well as future costs as women focus on paying fees rather than getting an education, better job, etc.

Jolene's analysis

I just feel like there needs to be more resources for ... the poor people. No, I just think that people that don't have, you know, I guess a whole lot of support....I think that, you know, there just should be more opportunity. ...What do people expect? **I mean they don't want people to commit crimes, but then they don't want to give people the resources not to. That doesn't make any damn sense to me. You know, like they want to punish people for being an addict. Like that's stupid.**

LIFE STORY TO A YEAR LATER – New charge for meth production, enrolled in a 9 mos. residential program in Detroit before going to court, convicted and put on probation. Expecting a child, which makes her want to stay clean.

Tina's analysis –probation/parole agents and clients are in a box

Tina (White/lakefront house/51)

On own at 14, foster mom abandons her, dancing and using drugs, but doing Ok in the end.

I think that there are some really good people who are probation officers. They are very limited, and they probably become extremely discouraged because they could probably do more to help individuals. But I think they're put in a box, and we were put in the box and the outcome I don't think was very helpful then for anybody. I mean [Agent 121] I will remember because he was, he was really, you could tell he cared. And ... I think you know given the opportunity to, he could of really helped some people. **But number one their caseloads were overloaded, and they didn't have the time or the resources to help people the way they wanted, he wanted to. ...They had limits, courts and rules and whatever. You know they were just as much boxed in as I was.**



The End

Demographics -- 118 Women with 5+ convictions

Race/Ethnicity			Age		
Black	36%	(42)	<26	3%	(4)
White	46%	(54)	26-29	12%	(14)
Multi	17%	(20)	30-39	34%	(40)
??	2%	(2)	40-49	35%	(41)
			50-59	16%	(19)

75 on felony probation, 41 on parole, 2 on both at start of the study

6 on probation had previous stays in prison, many in jail

40% 31 Detroit, 11 high-crime outskirts, 5 better off suburbs

23% 27 Former postindustrial auto cities (e.g., Flint, Pontiac)

10% 12 Rural areas

Findings from research on 402 Michigan women and various subsamples suggest the importance of resources

304/402 women on probation and parole (Morash and Kashy, in press with CJ & Behavior)

Do level and change over 4.5 years in individual, contextual, network, and financial resource variables predict subsequent recidivism?

INCREASED FINANCIAL NEED AND STRESS IS A STRONG PREDICTOR OF WOMEN'S SUBSEQUENT RECIDIVISM.

Findings from research on 402 Michigan women and various subsamples suggest the importance of resources

93/402 women on parole (Stone et al., 2018, *Feminist Criminology* 13: 382-403.

PROSOCIAL IDENTITY AND AGENCY → FEWER ARRESTS.

Prosocial identity = agency, generativity, prosocial future scripts, no contamination (permanent harm to identity from life events) → arrests

Qualitative : **OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE (roles, resources) EXPLAIN FEWER ARRESTS.**

260/402 women on probation or parole (attrition over 6 interviews) (Kashy & Morash, online, *Psychology, Crime, and Law*.

INCREASES IN EDUCATIONAL STRENGTHS AND DECREASES IN FINANCIAL NEEDS → GENERATIVITY. DECREASED FINANCIAL NEED → LIFE SATISFACTION

Prior findings -- continued

345/402 women on probation or parole (Morash et al., 2017, *British Journal of Criminology* 57:441-462.

LOSS OF MONETARY ASSISTANCE + NEW UNMET NEED FOR HOUSING AID → INCREASED ECONOMIC-RELATED RISK FOR RECIDIVISM.

RECEIPT OF SAFETY-NET BENEFITS → DOES NOT REDUCE THAT RISK

304/402 women on probation and parole (Morash and Kashy, in press with *CJ & Behavior*)

Level and change over 4.5 years in individual, contextual, network, and financial resource characteristics as predictors of subsequent recidivism

INCREASED FINANCIAL NEED AND STRESS IS A STRONG PREDICTOR OF WOMEN'S SUBSEQUENT RECIDIVISM.

Women with 5+ prior convictions

118/402 women on probation and parole (Morash et al., 2020, Sex Roles 83: 64-84.

WOMEN “MAKE GOOD” FROM CHALLENGES OF BIRTH/MOTHERING, TRAUMA, CRIMINAL HISTORY

ONLY REDEMPTION FROM CRIMINAL HISTORY BY DRAWING ON KNOWLEDGE TO HELP OTHERS WAS AT ALL RELATED TO RECIDIVISM.

RARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR REDEMPTION THROUGH EDUCATION OR WORK.

Constraint on identity actualization: The cost of lengthy supervision

Ariana (black/postindustrial city/28)

BEGINNINGS Limited problems growing up, lost job in a hospital, took up with an abusive man, got into drugs.

PROBATION Agent encouraged and motivated her to pursue dream of being a pharmacy technician. **No car, felony conviction, and three years to pay fines, fees, and restitution.**

END AND FUTURE Low Point – gave up this dream. High point, having a child, but “I still can’t go to school for what I want to go to school for. I’m stuck. (She works in a factory job.)

Constraints: Programs and policies that affect change

Grace (black/Detroit/54)

BEGINNINGS Stepdad molested starting at 5, mom's "ladyfriend" molested age 13, mom knew but did not act, ran and on the streets at 16, learned from guy to sell drugs, wrap and transport guns, used crack daily. Starting at 21 to now, suicidal thoughts, burned and cut self, tried to kill self and others.

PAROLE: In a helpful dual diagnosis program with social activities, material help. **NO MEDICAL INSURANCE** so only pay for Lithium, unstable, suicidal.

END Interviewed in prison.