



Identity Management Post Incarceration: The Role of Disclosure for Desistance

By

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ABSTRACT

More than 7,000 prison residents are released from federal institutions annually (Correctional Service Canada, 2019). Despite employment being considered critical to successful community re-entry and desistance from crime (Laub & Sampson, 1993; Visher et al., 2011; Uggen et al., 2005), formerly incarcerated individuals face stigma tied to their criminal identity that impedes their employability (Anazodo, 2019). To overcome this challenge, most formerly incarcerated individuals adopt disclosure strategies (Harding, 2003; Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2018). Building on past scholarship on desistance and disclosure, this study examined the relationship between desistance and disclosure, recognizing employment as key to the successful reintegration of the formerly federally incarcerated individuals. I employed a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the narratives of 24 formerly federally incarcerated individuals to understand their employment experiences better as they navigate their community re-entry. The study showed that disclosure and desistance influence each other as formerly incarcerated individuals navigate employment and employment seeking. Centralized in this relationship is the concept of 'self,' demonstrated by the participants' intrinsic motivations and desires to desist from crime by engaging in legitimate stable employment and having agency during disclosure. The study identified employment as a 'hook' for change but found out that other agents of change, such as social networks and employment programs, are vital for long-term positive change in behaviour.

My findings support the prohibition of mandatory disclosure due to the detrimental impact of always reducing an individual to their prior identity when criminalized.

KEYWORDS: Desistance, disclosure, 'self,' wounded-healer, hook-for-change

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Several theoretical approaches are offered to explain the desistance from crime process (Giordano et al., 2007; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Maruna, 2001). The human agency theorists explain desistance as emanating from a personal decision. These theorists place the individual as central to the desistance process (Bushway & Paternoster, 2014; Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). Despite the perspective one engenders, employment is considered as key to successful reintegration and desistance from crime (Giordano et al., 2002; Laub & Sampson, 1993; Pager, 2003) as well as being fundamental to self-identity (Harding, 2003). Sustained employment becomes critical to formerly incarcerated individuals' change of identity, transitioning from the identity imposed by the label of a criminal record (Uggen et al., 2005). In Canada, the value of employment to formerly incarcerated individuals' reintegration is well recognized, such that some programming to support future employment is offered in prisons and the community (Ricciardelli, 2014; Ricciardelli & Peters, 2017). However, formerly incarcerated individuals wear a stigma (Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2018), which is tied to perceptions of their past actions, leaving them marked as possibly untrustworthy and even aggressive (Anazodo et al., 2019; Pager & Western, 2009; Pogorzelski et al., 2005).

Scholars have revealed how even when former prisoners secure employment, they are primarily employed in precarious jobs (Sheppard & Ricciardelli, 2020; Western, 2015). For instance, Adams et al., (2017) note that formerly incarcerated persons encounter difficulties securing work in specialized fields and jobs with 'good' benefits. Travis et al., (2014) write of former prisoners' challenge in attempts to secure sales and clerical jobs, as well as positions that

require direct customer interaction and cash handling. Also, Ricciardelli and Peters (2017) reveal a former prisoner's employability may depend on the type of criminal act underpinning their conviction. For example, Albright and Denq (1996) have shown how even though employers may be willing to hire persons with a criminal record, they are reluctant to hire persons convicted of violent offenses or crimes against youth.

Hesitancy in hiring can be tied to stigma (Goffman, 1963). Charland (1985) explains how former prisoners who had previously completed serious crimes are perceived as displaying “profound personality deficits” – they are stigmatized. Moreover, released former prisoners are stigmatized, which impacts employability (Decker et al., 2015; Schwartz & Skolnick, 1962), particularly when their criminal record is known (Bushway & Apel, 2012). Some employers choose not to hire formerly incarcerated individuals due to their perception that they could be liable for any unauthorized actions of these employees, particularly if such employees are people with a criminal record (Connerley et al., 2001). To manage the stigma, people on parole adopt disclosure strategies that allow them to exert some semblance of control over how others see them (Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2018). Others adopt identity management strategies as they navigate employment (Anazodo et al., 2019).

Although many scholars have studied desistance from crime (Farrall & Calverley, 2006; Laub & Sampson, 2001; Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009) and disclosure strategies adopted by formerly incarcerated individuals (Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2018), little work to date has thoroughly analyzed and examined the corresponding relationship between desistance and disclosure. I intend to bridge this gap by adding to the existing literature on desistance and disclosure. To this end, I address the following research questions:

1. What is the role of disclosure in an individual's desistance from crime?

2. What changes happen during an individual's desistance from crime?

1.2 Study relevance and purpose

My study is relevant for several reasons. First, I fill a research gap in the reintegration literature, explicitly how formerly incarcerated individuals navigated identity disclosure in the context of their employment seeking. In the United States, researchers have shown that around 1.6 million men and women are incarcerated in states and federal prisons, with 700,000 prisoners purported to be released each year for the foreseeable future (Sabol et al., 2009). The 2019 Corrections and Conditional Release Statistical Overview in Canada shows about 40,117 people are in custody, with 7,616 prisoners released in 2015-16 (Correctional Service Canada, 2019).

However, few opportunities exist to successfully reintegrate these formerly incarcerated individuals into their communities (Sabol et al., 2007). Studies support formerly incarcerated persons are stigmatized and discriminated against—particularly during the hiring process when/if, through whatever means, their past criminal history is revealed (Decker et al., 2015). As a hiring practice in Canada, employers often request the Canadian Police Information Centre perform a criminal record check before employing a potential candidate (Harris & Keller, 2005; Holzer et al., 2006; Pager, 2003; Pager & Quillian, 2005; Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2018). The request has sparked renewed interest among scholars in desistance research.

Others have focused on stigma management strategies—particularly the disclosure strategies adopted by formerly incarcerated persons to manage the stigma on their identity (Anazodo et al., 2019; Harding, 2003; Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2018). Although useful, most of these studies fail to account for the relationship between desistance from crime and disclosure strategies. Here, I unpack this relationship as complementary to ongoing intellectual discussions on the reintegration of former prisoners.

1.3 Thesis structure

I organized this thesis into six chapters. Chapter One, the general introduction, gives a brief background to the study by highlighting the research questions, the purpose, and relevance of the study, and describes the structure of the thesis. Chapter Two, the literature review, presents and discusses existing literature in the study area. In the chapter, I define and explain historical and current literature on stigma, discuss formerly incarcerated individuals' challenges to community re-entry—particularly challenges to successful employment, and explain the identity disclosure strategies adopted to douse these challenges. Chapter Three describes and justifies the research methodology I used. Other key information, such as the details of the study area, data sources, characteristics of study participants, ethical procedures, and analysis methods, are highlighted in the third chapter. Chapter Four presents the study's results. The chapter examines participants' narratives as they navigate community re-entry. Chapter Five discusses the study's results and compares them to other relevant literature. The chapter shows the relations between desistance and disclosure as participants experience employment and employment seeking, including the influence of 'self,' and the changes participants undergo as they enact desistance. Chapter Six summarizes, concludes, and makes recommendations for policy implementation and further research.

CHAPTER 2-LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In the current chapter, I review the scholarly literature on the barriers to employment and identity disclosure among formerly incarcerated individuals. Recognizing employment as key to the successful reintegration and desistance of formerly incarcerated individuals (Laub & Sampson, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 2003; Uggen et al., 2005), I present an overview and carefully elaborate on the barriers to successful employment of formerly incarcerated individuals. However, most formerly incarcerated individuals bear the mark of a stigma (Ricciardelli and Mooney, 2018), causing them to be discriminated against by employers and hiring managers in their search for employment (Pager & Quillian, 2005). As such, after unpacking the concept of stigma, I present some of the stigma management strategies— particularly identity disclosure strategies adopted by formerly incarcerated individuals to manage stigma.

2.2 Theoretical framework: stigma

Goffman's (1963) theory on stigma explains the experiences of underprivileged and marginalized people. Several researchers have adopted Goffman's (1963) theory on stigma to analyze the experiences of formerly incarcerated persons (LeBel, 2012; Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2018), racial minorities (Crocker, 1999), the overweight (Crocker et al., 1993), and people with mental health needs (Overton & Medina, 2008)—to name just a few applications.

According to Goffman (1963), the term 'stigma' refers to a deeply discrediting attribute; the bearer becomes perceived as tainted and discounted, thereby reducing their life chances. Prior to the definition of stigma by Goffman, the term 'stigma' could originally be traced to the Greeks and referred to bodily branding or marking intended to showcase the bearer (a slave, a criminal, a

traitor, or ritually polluted) as distinct and separate from others (Goffman, 1963). Goffman acknowledges that although the term ‘stigma’ has progressed from its original meaning of a mark of disgrace, it has retained much of its original significance.

Goffman (1963) identified and distinguished between three forms of stigma: stigma of tribal identity, stigma of physical deformity, and stigma of character traits—particularly, having a history of incarceration. Unlike the stigma of tribal identity and physical deformities, which are immediately visible and evident on the spot, making them discredited, the stigma of character traits can be hidden or concealed. A person with a character trait stigma is initially considered ‘discreditable,’ but they become ‘discredited’ when their specific character trait identity becomes known or is discovered. Goffman’s character trait stigma is synonymous with Falk’s (2001) ‘achieved stigma.’ According to Falk (2001), people with an achieved stigma or a stigma of character trait earn such a stigma through their actions; thus, they play a significant role in attaining the stigma.

Although embedded in an attribute, stigma is pronounced in relationships between the stigmatized person and others. As such, a person with a criminal record and/or history of incarceration is not immediately discredited but instead remains ‘discreditable’—only to be discredited if/when their stigma-bearing attribute (i.e., their criminal history) is revealed (Ricciardelli and Mooney, 2018, p. 345). A person with a blemish on their character traits is perceived as weak-willed, domineering, having unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and being dishonest (Goffman, 1963).

Just like Goffman, other researchers associate stigma with a person’s attributes. For instance, Stafford and Scott (1986, p. 80) explain stigma “as the attribute of an individual which contrasts with the norms of a social unit.” Also, Crocker et al., (1998) see stigma as a person's

attribute debased by others within a particular social setting. According to them, a stigmatized person is someone whose social identity, membership in some social category, or full humanity is questionable.

Link and Phelan (2001) posit 'label' as playing a key role in the stigmatization of people. According to them, stigma occurs when labeled differences are linked to stereotypes. That is, people in society are usually categorized into a designated group with their social label creating a means of difference upon which they could be discriminated. According to Lemert's (1974) 'labeling theory,' the application of a criminalized label could lead to the person internalizing stigmatizing attributes, withdrawing from conventional society, and conforming to a deviant identity. However, this is not always the case. For instance, Kitsuse (1980) in the explanation of tertiary deviance argues that individuals who are labelled as deviants employ 'countermoralism' or 'counter pride displays' to challenge the labels. That is, the labellees actively reject or resist the stigma associated with their label, often by embracing their deviant identities and behaviours as legitimate or even desirable.

Link and Phelan (2001) also conceptualized power as essential to producing stigma. From their perspective, one must hold power to label and stigmatize another individual. They proposed 'stigmatizers' have strong motivations to keep other people down, in or away, and at best achieve these aims through stigma processes that are indirect, broadly effective, and hidden in taken-for-granted cultural circumstances (Link & Phelan, 2014, p. 24). Stigmatizers seek to attain power and control, with the intention of 'keeping people down,' ultimately striving for elevated social status through domination or exploitation of others (Phelan et al., 2008).

Bos et al., (2013) pointed out how stigmatization occurs at societal, interpersonal, and individual levels. They identified four useful types of stigmas based on Pryor and Reeder's (2011)

earlier work. According to them, at the core of all forms of stigmatization is ‘public stigma,’ which represents people’s social and psychological reactions to someone perceived to have a stigmatized condition. It involves typically automatic and immediate responses followed by controlled and thoughtful responses.

As individuals start to recognize their public stigma, they become apprehensive and begin to internalize the adverse beliefs and emotions linked to their stigmatized condition. Bos et al., (2013) referred to such a process as ‘self-stigma’. Self-stigma projects the social and psychological impact of possessing a stigma. To mitigate this, stigmatized individuals adopt various coping strategies (Bos et al., 2013).

Contrasting the other forms of stigma by Pryor and Reeder (2011) is ‘stigma by association’ (Bos et al., 2013). This parallels Goffman's (1963) ‘courtesy stigma’ and refers to the social and psychological responses directed at individuals connected to stigmatized persons, such as their family and friends. Under this stigma, people are discredited even when they have an arbitrary connection or close proximity with a stigmatized person (Pryor et al., 2012). For instance, Ouellette et al., (2017) have shown South Carolina's people are apprehensive about living in the same neighbourhood with formerly incarcerated people. Although most expressed safety concerns for themselves and their families, others believed that the presence of former prisoners in their neighbourhood could even cause the houses in their neighbourhood to drop in value.

Bos et al., (2013) point out ‘structural stigma’ exists when societal institutions and ideologies perpetuate and exacerbate the existing social inequalities. For example, Visher et al., (2011) study to ascertain the experiences of stigmatized groups, particularly formerly incarcerated persons who have been successful in locating employment, discovered that state laws and restrictions play a vital role in determining the employability of formerly incarcerated individuals.

For example, where state laws were less restrictive regarding employing criminalized people, former prisoners studied in Texas and Ohio found more work after release in comparison to those studied in Illinois.

In their literature review on stigma, LeBel (2008) identified stigma as the core of the social identity of formerly incarcerated individuals. Moreover, studies have shown employment is key for the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals (Laub & Sampson, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 2003; Uggen et al., 2005). However, formerly incarcerated individuals bear stigma (Ricciardelli and Mooney, 2018), which is linked to perceptions of their past actions, resulting in them being marked as potentially untrustworthy (Anazodo et al., 2019; Pager & Western, 2009; Pogorzelski et al., 2005).

2.2.1 Criminal record stigma and employment

Criminal records can affect employment outcomes (Waldfogel, 1994; Western, 2002, 2007; Western & Pettit, 2005) and evoke stigma or even discrimination (LeBel, 2012). For example, Chui and Cheng (2013) show that although an employer may unknowingly employ a formerly incarcerated person, they may find ways of terminating the employment when the criminal record is revealed. Also, Pager and Quillian's (2005) research, which considers the relationship between employers' attitudes toward hiring formerly incarcerated individuals and their actual hiring behavior, uncovered how although employers indicated a greater likelihood of hiring formerly incarcerated individuals, they were unlikely to hire them in practice. Employers' hesitance to hire formerly incarcerated individuals is primarily due to their concern about employees and customers safety and reaction, and the notion of former prisoners being disruptive to the work environment (Giguere & Dundes, 2002; Harris & Keller, 2005; Pager & Western,

2009). This leads to the screening out of formerly incarcerated individuals during the hiring process (Holzer et al., 2004).

Ricciardelli and Peters (2017) pointed out that the type of criminal act plays a key role in the employability of former prisoners. Even when employers show high receptibility to hiring formerly incarcerated individuals, there may be notable exceptions for some employers when hiring people with a violent criminal history (Bumiller, 2015). The heightened concern stems from their conviction that these people will likely fight someone at the workplace, sell drugs on the property, or recruit people for gangs (Bumiller, 2015). Also, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) write that a person with a violent criminal history is likely to lack self-control and, therefore, unwilling to engage in sustained prosocial behaviour essential for employment in legitimate work. According to Albright and Denq (1996), although employers may be willing to hire persons with a criminal record, they decline to hire people convicted of violent offenses or crimes against youth. Also, Mann et al., (2021) indicate that people convicted for sex offenses are usually discriminated against in terms of employment when their criminal history is known. As such, these sex offenders occupy the least status positions in society and prison (Ricciardelli & Moir, 2013; Ricciardelli & Spencer, 2014).

2.2.2 Demographic and personal factors

Demographic and personal factors can be detrimental to the employment opportunities of formerly incarcerated individuals (Decker et al., 2014; Pager & Quillian, 2005; Waldfogel, 1994). Bracken et al., (2009) examined desistance and social marginalization among criminalized Canadian Indigenous people. They discovered the impact of colonialism—coupled with long criminal histories, limited education, and little job skills, has been the experience of too many indigenous people. This cumulative disadvantage makes it difficult for indigenous youth to gain

employment, and in some cases, can be at least in part, the impetus for gang affiliation (Bracken et al., 2009). Correspondingly, data from the United States reveals that formerly incarcerated individuals who are part of racialized groups face widespread discrimination when seeking employment (Holzer et al., 2006; Pager, 2003; Pager & Quillian, 2005; Pager & Western, 2009). Pager (2003) reveals individuals from racialized backgrounds with a criminal record face a double stigma linked to their criminalized status as well as their racialized identity. Other scholars have found some formerly incarcerated individuals undergo double discrimination due to their biological features—especially black former prisoners face additional obstacles in finding employment due to widespread discrimination in the labor market (Holzer et al., 2003; Pager, 2003). Also, Bushway (2004) saw from data collected in the United States that employers may assume that gaps on an applicant’s resume were due to their involvement with the criminal justice, particularly when a job applicant is Black. Moreover, Waldfogel (1994) studies indicate that men with first-conviction experience have a limited chance to find meaningful employment in the United States, leading to minimal incomes.

Graffam et al., (2004) identified mental health challenges as common among former prisoners—particularly psychiatric needs. Kethineni and Falcone, (2007) have revealed that most prisoners are unemployable because they are blighted with a medical condition that inhibits them from gaining employment. About 21 percent of prisoners in their sample had a medical condition inhibiting their ability to complete employment responsibilities. Consistent with this argument, Visher et al., (2011) pointed out that former prisoners with chronic physical and mental health conditions who have been successful in locating employment work fewer months than those without these health factors.

2.2.3 Interpersonal factors and relationships

Cherney and Fitzgerald, (2016a) communicate that social networks are important to formerly incarcerated individuals, especially parolees, to secure employment. According to them, parolees manage stigma on their identity through assistance from close associates—partners, relatives, family, and friends. These associates link them to job opportunities and help them secure work by vouching for them, thereby winning over reluctant employers and helping neutralize the stigma associated with the parolee’s criminal past. Visher et al., (2011) found parolees often attribute their success in finding work to the role of two groups: informal family and friends network and employment providers. For many of their participants, friends and family are important because they link them with employment opportunities. Harding et al., (2014) assert social support is essential for former prisoners to achieve upward mobility in life post-release. They emphasized that family members or romantic partners play a crucial role by assisting former prisoners secure improved employment opportunities that offer a decent income, benefits, and career prospects.

According to Rhodes (2008), social networks contribute to employment acquisition through knowledge sharing of job opportunities. Former prisoners, particularly those actively on parole, have access to parole officers, CSC staff, and halfway house staff, who can help create social networks and serve as references. The development of social networks and the potential employment prospects of former prisoners are enhanced by the community and government agencies involved in their supervision (Visher et al., 2004). Also, some former prisoners can secure work by contacting a former employer or look out for bosses who know about their criminal past and deem it irrelevant. These employers look past the criminal record or, in other instances, value the effort for the employee to ‘go straight’ (Goodman, 2020).

However, Gunn et al., (2018) discovered that married women who have experienced incarceration lack social networks because they have to deal with stigma from their partners. According to Gunn and colleagues, such women bear the mark of a former prisoner, and this status cast her as an unacceptable wife because her prisoner status violates the gendered norms of acceptable womanhood. This stigma marks her as permanently undesirable, inhibiting her ability to forge a lasting romantic partnership needed for employment (Gunn et al., 2018). Upon release, formerly incarcerated individuals—including women—may fear returning to their communities; they choose to live in isolation and loneliness and distance themselves from families and old friends (Hale, 2020). Due to the challenge of some former prisoners re-establishing family ties (Mowen & Visser, 2016), their employment efforts are hampered since social capital and networks are vital for job attainment (Rhodes, 2008).

2.2.4 Precarious jobs

Other studies have uncovered that even when former prisoners secure employment, they are positioned mostly in precarious jobs (Sheppard & Ricciardelli, 2020; Western et al., 2015). Adams et al., (2017) noted how working in specialized fields and jobs that provide good benefits are particularly difficult for formerly incarcerated individuals to secure. Travis et al., (2014) write it is tough for former prisoners to find work in sales and clerical positions, and especially in jobs that involve customer interaction and cash handling. According to Western et al., (2015), it is uncommon for formerly incarcerated individuals to find steady full-time employment after release. Even among those who manage to secure jobs, many work in precarious employment such as “day labor often doing construction, home improvement, and, in the winter, snow removal” (p. 1529–30). After tracing the lives of about two dozen formerly incarcerated individuals in Michigan, Harding and colleagues concluded that those who manage to secure stable employment (and, in a

few cases, even upward social mobility) mostly begin with precarity and instability and anticipate that their hard work would be noticed, and good luck will enable them to achieve their medium-term goals (Harding, et al. 2014; Herbert et al., 2015).

Cherney and Fitzgerald, (2016b) recognize that former prisoners in Queensland, Australia, undertake precarious work as a stigma management strategy. These former prisoners assume that with precarious jobs come less stigma from employers because there is no criminal record check. Again, studies by Bumiller (2015) in two middle-sized cities in the Northeastern United States exploring the factors that promote employers' receptivity to hiring people with criminal records show employers are motivated to hire former prisoners because they perceive them to accept precarious employment. This encourages employers to make allowances for these employees even when it may be challenging for the employers. Bumiller (2015) further states some employers give a second chance to formerly incarcerated individuals. Although these employers recognize the plight of former prisoners, to them, precarious jobs offered to formerly incarcerated individuals serve as a placeholder in the legitimate economy and an opportunity for the formerly incarcerated to refashion a new identity, which helps them gain the recognition of human significance that comes with acquiring paid employment (Bumiller, 2015). Commonly, staff at many re-entry programs explicitly encourage former prisoners to have modest expectations and aspirations in their quest to secure employment (Halushka, 2016). For instance, Halushka (2016, p. 86) argues in their ethnography of a community-based re-entry program that staff try to teach former prisoners some acceptable performative workplace behaviors to enable them manage the stigma associated with their repertoire of nondominant cultural capital and facilitate interactions with employers. Sheppard and Ricciardelli (2020) revealed formerly federal prisoners in Canada, usually become employed in low-wage, non-gratifying, manual labour jobs even when supported with pre-

employment and employment placement programming. This unpredictability after release has resulted in high anxiety, isolation, and unease among formerly incarcerated individuals (Western et al., 2015).

2.2.5 Educational background

Literature suggests formerly incarcerated individuals lack employment due to their low educational background, little or no training, and employment history (Holzer et al., 2003; Waldfoegel, 1994). CSC report, from 1995-2005, eight in every ten individuals in federal custody did not have a high school diploma, and 20 percent of new admissions have less than a grade eight education (Boe, 2005). Since education and work experience are prerequisites to employment (Western, 2018), very uncommonly do former prisoners possess the employment histories required for skilled and well-paying jobs (Graffam et al., 2004; Holzer et al., 2003). Albright and Denq (1996) have revealed formerly incarcerated individuals with white-collar work experience, a college diploma, or a skill in vocational training before their incarceration are more likely to secure employment post-imprisonment. Imprisonment is thought to impede literacy, social competencies, job skills, and prior work experience (Decker et al., 2015; Fletcher, 2001; Nally et al., 2011; Waldfoegel, 1994)— creating gaps in opportunities to develop such skills. As such, formerly incarcerated individuals will encounter setbacks when seeking or sustaining employment (Visher et al., 2011). To ameliorate this difficulty, CSC (2019) offers employment and training programs through CORCAN initiatives, the Community Integration Program (CIP), and Aboriginal Intervention Centres (AICs), as well as an innovative educational crediting opportunity through Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) (Correctional Service Canada, 2018, 2019).

2.2.6 Structural barriers

Structural barriers have been recognized as a challenge to the employability of formerly incarcerated individuals (Mann et al., 2021; Pager & Quillian, 2005). Former prisoners are often released with only a meager sum of money and struggle financially since they lack personal savings (Nagin & Waldfogel, 1998). Mann et al., (2021) write that most former prisoners, particularly sex offenders, are under constant surveillance, undermining their opportunities for support and fostering meaningful familial relations. This diminishes formerly incarcerated individuals' access to employment-seeking opportunities (Graffam et al., 2004; Moore et al., 2013). Also, gaps in resumes, background checks, and reference verifications can thwart formerly incarcerated individuals' efforts to conceal their past identity when seeking employment (Harding, 2003). Besides, many former prisoners lack stable accommodation (Brianna, 2017; 2021), a mailing address or phone number for follow-up, and appropriate clothing for interviews (Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2018)—all of which are challenges to securing employment.

Advancement in technology, particularly social media, has further worsened the employment difficulties of former prisoners by making it easier for employers to access abundant information about a potential candidate (Atkin & Armstrong, 2013). In countries like Canada, as a hiring practice, employers may request a criminal record check to be performed by the Canadian Police Information Centre before employing a potential candidate (Harris & Keller, 2005; Holzer et al., 2006; Pager, 2003; Pager & Quillian, 2005). In California, persons convicted of misdemeanors cannot receive unemployment benefits and are pariahs to certain professions, making it difficult for them to find employment in healthcare organizations, childcare institutions, real estate, law and education (Kethineni & Falcone, 2007, p. 42). Other states have laws that exclude formerly incarcerated individuals from occupations involving contact with 'vulnerable

populations' through mandatory criminal record checks (Jacobs & Crepet, 2007). Also, state regulations and licensing mandates that prohibit individuals with criminal record from working in certain professions makes it impossible for employers who wish to hire formerly incarcerated individuals (Bushway & Sweeten, 2007). Again, numerous indirect barriers like city, county, and state regulations authorizing employers to deny job applicants with criminal records from employment without regard to the nature and extent of the records make it impossible for employers to employ formerly incarcerated persons (Harris & Keller, 2005). Also, restrictive conditions, such as landline check-ins, curfews, random drug screening, and case management meetings, hinder sustained employment (Buck, 2000). Again, geographical boundary restrictions imposed on former prisoners (Lussier & McCuish, 2016) distance them from their social networks and limit their participation in vocational activities essential for securing employment (Mann et al., 2021).

Sered (2021) reveals that formerly incarcerated women on parole are denied the opportunity to obtain a house because landlords may do criminal background checks. Even more difficult than this for former prisoners is finding suitable accommodation, managing limited finances, accessing everyday necessities and services that can enable them to participate in the labour force (Baron et al., 2013; Luther et al., 2011). Furthermore, Ouellette et al., (2017) discovered that former prisoners in South Carolina may encounter difficulty acquiring accommodation from the government because many citizens disapprove of the government allocating resources to support former prisoners with housing. Only half of the sample believed that post-release housing should be a high-priority state policy, and less than 60% supported temporary housing programs (Ouellette et al., 2017). Again, the study revealed South Carolinians have no worries about working alongside recently released prisoners but were uncertain about

living in the same neighborhood with them, generally expressing concern for personal and family safety.

2.3 DISCLOSURE AS STIGMA MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

According to Anazodo et al., (2019), former prisoners usually feel stigmatized in society. To manage the stigma on their identity, former prisoners adopt some stigma management strategies when disclosing their criminal history—especially during job interviews. This allows them to exert some semblance of control over how others view and perceive them (Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2018). Harding (2003) identified three (3) strategies of identity disclosure adopted by former prisoners that help them manage potential stigma from others: full disclosure, conditional disclosure, and no disclosure, to which I will now turn.

2.3.1 Full disclosure

According to Harding (2003), full disclosure becomes perceived as the only option for an individual who wants to work in an institution where a background check is required. To Harding, when former prisoners fully disclose, they take control of the social interaction and present themselves as hireable despite their criminal history; the process necessitates "perseverance, self-confidence, and the ability to be an adept performer" (Harding, 2003). Formerly incarcerated individuals who choose to utilize this approach are driven by a belief that they are not being truthful to themselves if they lie or conceal details about their criminal past (Cherney & Fitzgerald, 2016b).

2.3.2 No disclosure

Harding (2003) introduces another strategy termed 'no disclosure.' According to Harding, former prisoners adopt the no disclosure strategy because they feel discomfort with others knowing about their criminal past. Harding's no disclosure aligns with Goffman's 'passing' strategy

(Ricciardelli and Mooney, 2018, p. 248). According to Goffman (1963), 'passing' is the effort made by stigmatized individuals to conceal their stigma and blend in as people without stigma (Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2018). Also, Cherney & Fitzgerald (2016b) present 'non-disclosure,' which parallels Harding's 'no disclosure.' They discovered that their participants of adult parolees who employ the 'no disclosure' strategy believe that disclosing served no purpose; rather, it endangers their ability to find and retain a job.

2.3.3 Conditional disclosure

Harding (2003) used 'conditional disclosure' to describe former prisoners' tactic of withholding their ex-prisoner status. They take time to demonstrate their value to their employer and reveal their criminalized past at an opportune moment. Cherney and Fitzgerald (2016b) regarded this strategy as a delayed approach to disclosure. They indicated that although formerly incarcerated individuals felt compelled to be open and honest with an employer, they revealed their criminal past or parole status after proving themselves as 'a good worker.' The criminalized participants in their study reasoned that an employer would overlook their past crimes and see them as having moved on only if they could demonstrate their abilities and commitment to being capable and reliable employees. Formerly criminalized individuals adopt the 'delayed disclosure' strategy to minimize any potential adverse reaction from employers and hiring managers (Cherney & Fitzgerald, 2016b).

According to Ricciardelli and Mooney, (2018), Harding's 'conditional disclosure' resembles Goffman's (1963) strategy of 'covering.' An illustration of this strategy is shown by Anazodo et al., (2019) when they revealed that some former prisoners in disclosing feel they could control the breadth, depth, and duration of when and what to reveal. Affirming this strategy, Cherney and Fitzgerald (2016a) uncovered from a data drawn from a sample of 50 parolees in

Queensland, Australia, who were convicted for serious forms of crimes that they prefer to minimize the sense of seriousness related to their criminal record or parole order when disclosing. Often, this involved criminalized people downgrading the severity of their criminal offense or avoiding reference to their current parole status. According to Harding (2003), conditional disclosure becomes an effective strategy for dousing anticipated stigma when full disclosure may be ineffective.

2.3.3.1 Strategies of Conditional Disclosure

Anazodo et al., (2019) identified four key considerations when employing conditional disclosure: *opportune timing, interpersonal dynamics, criminal history, and work ethic*. Choosing an opportune time to disclose is best applicable when the former prisoner can exercise self-control, communicate effectively, and cope with the disclosure outcomes (Anazodo et al., 2019). To Anazodo and colleagues, interpersonal dynamics are a basis for conditional disclosure. This is possible when there is trust, largely dependent on the nature of the relationship between the former prisoner and the management at work. Ben depicts this strategy by agreeing to reveal his criminal history to the boss but conceals it from colleagues (Anazodo et al., 2019). Again, they argue that the nature of one's crime may influence the strategy to be adopted. Former prisoners may engage in 'selective transparency' and be upfront about their incarceration but not the crime when they believe their criminal history could lead to outright rejection/denial (Anazodo et al., 2019). Moreover, Anazodo et al., (2019) demonstrate that some former prisoners who do not want to disclose their criminal past employ an identity management strategy that focuses on displaying a good work ethic and commitment to their work after being hired because they see these as attributes most employers consider essential.

Building on Harding's (2003) disclosure strategies, Ricciardelli and Mooney (2018) suggested that these strategies change over time as releasees dissociate from their criminal past. Former prisoners readily 'fully disclose' their criminal past when first released. Over time, they lean toward 'conditional disclosure' as they begin to dissociate themselves from their prison experience. They adopt 'no disclosure' when they realize their current self is fully dissociated from their criminal past. Other researchers have made a similar claim that a person who bears the mark of a stigma may progress from using one strategy to another (Darling, 2003). That is as former prisoners desist, they continuously dissociate their current self from their past self, reclaiming a new identity (Bushway and Paternoster, 2009; 2014).

2.3.4 Pre-emptive disclosure

Ricciardelli and Mooney (2018) introduce 'pre-emptive' disclosure as another stigma management strategy. According to Ricciardelli and Mooney (2018), 'pre-emptive' disclosure involves being forthright about one's criminal past and even disclosing when such disclosure may not be necessary. To scholars, this strategy helps former prisoners eliminate the anxiety of being uncertain about who knows their criminal past. They found pre-emptive disclosure aligning with what Winnick and Bodkin (2008) termed 'preventative telling.' Ricciardelli and Mooney's (2018) pre-emptive strategy is similar to what Cherney and Fitzgerald (2016b, p. 24) described as 'voluntary self-disclosure.' Cherney and Fitzgerald's 'voluntary self-disclosure' strategy involves being forthcoming to employers about one's past crimes. This strategy depicts the jettisoning of their past criminal identity and taking on a new identity incompatible with characteristics associated with criminality, such as deceit, dishonesty, and denying responsibility (Cherney and Fitzgerald, 2016b). This strategy attempts to convince others about the authenticity of criminalized

peoples' efforts to transform themselves. To Cherney and Fitzgerald (2016b), 'voluntary self-disclosure' at the workplace offers opportunities for parolees to articulate a 'redemption script.'

However, Ricciardelli and Mooney (2018) revealed that a pre-emptive disclosure strategy can increase the risk of rejection. Utilizing data from an ethnographic fieldwork spanning eight months at a community-based prisoner re-entry program nonprofit agency called 'Second Chance' in a Northeastern United States city, Halushka (2016) discovered that staff members in hiring agencies for former prisoners prepare clients to avoid revealing too much information about their criminal past and advise them to refrain from certain body mannerism that could cause employers to alienate them. Here, formerly incarcerated individuals were advised to give employers the minimum amount of information they are legally required to report because giving out too much information put them at risk for unemployment (Halushka, 2016).

2.3.5 Selective disclosure

Ricciardelli and Mooney (2018) showed 'selective disclosure' as another viable form of stigma management strategy and as an alternative to 'conditional disclosure.' With 'selective disclosure,' former prisoners disclose their criminal past only to specific persons. This allows them to control what people hear, enabling them to mostly attribute their past criminal actions to extenuating circumstances (Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2018).

2.3.5.1. Forms of selective disclosure

Goodman (2020) interviewed formerly incarcerated individuals in Greater Toronto to explore how criminal record holders describe seeking work. Goodman discovered three (3) key 'selective disclosure' strategies for managing stigma. According to Goodman (2020), the first selective disclosure strategy formerly incarcerated people use to manage stigma is 'lying.' Some

participants in the study asserted to be prone to lying when applying for work. They indicated checking the box that they have no criminal record. The participants indicated that even though they might have lied, they try to leave an imprint when employed, hoping that a good impression at the workplace can help them gain favour from their employers.

According to Goodman (2020), the second selective disclosure strategy communicated mainly by the study's participants of formerly incarcerated people is leaving the application question about criminal records blank. The participants adopt this beguiling approach because they think that employers are prone to reject applicants who mark the box indicating a criminal history. To them, not answering questions about their record signifies a readiness to discuss their past but not through a detached and context-free checkbox on a job application form. Many who used this strategy expressed doing so puts them in control of their lives and helps them determine who hears of their past, how they hear it, and when they hear it.

The third selective disclosure strategy Goodman's (2020) participants adopted includes responding with ambiguity and reluctance when asked whether they are 'bondable.' They opt to withhold details about their 'bondability.' Goodman (2020) recognizes that in the Canadian context, bondability is typically understood as determining whether an insurance company will extend coverage to a worker. However, many of the study's participants classified bondability as a strategy hiring managers and employers adopt to inquire about a wide range of indiscretions. These inquiries encompass more than just criminal offenses and extend to various offenses that a standard criminal record inquiry would not typically cover.

Also, Halushka (2016) revealed a different selective disclosure strategy formerly incarcerated individuals could employ when seeking jobs is to 'avoid answering no' to questions about their past criminal convictions since most employers undertake a criminal background check

for prospective employees. According to Haluska, being honest and upfront helps dispel employers' negative perceptions about former prisoners, such as being manipulative 'convicted felons,' and instead being seen as reformed civilians who could fit in at work despite their criminal past.

2.3.6 Withdrawal

LeBel (2008) recognizes withdrawal as a disclosure strategy. According to LeBel, withdrawal involves avoiding social interaction with 'normal' others and instead spending time with similarly stigmatized people who know about and tend to accept one's stigmatized condition. Correspondingly, Gunn et al., (2018) pointed out that women with substance abuse labels choose to either temporarily or permanently withdraw from intimate relations and others to manage perceived stigma. They withdraw to safeguard their recovery and avoid stigmatization.

These strategies may be important to the ex-offender's sense of self because most former prisoners internalize the stigma attached to their former criminalized status (Aresti et al., 2010).

2.4 CONCLUSION

In reviewing existing literature, I explored the challenges posed to the successful reintegration of formerly incarcerated people—paying particular attention to barriers to their successful long-term employment. From the review of the above literature, I recognized stigma as core to the social identity of the formerly incarcerated. The stigma becomes apparent in former prisoners' relationships with others, particularly during job interviews when the identity of their criminal past is revealed. The review acknowledges that most of these jobs are precarious even when former prisoners manage to secure employment.

However, former prisoners can minimize the negative reaction from others to their identity when they adopt an identity disclosure strategy. Although numerous identity disclosure strategies exist, former prisoners weigh the anticipated impact of a particular disclosure strategy on their long-term employment before settling on the most suitable. Additionally, the severity/seriousness of the crime influences the strategy adopted.

Disclosure strategy is revealed as necessary for the long-term employment of former prisoners. For example, selective disclosure helps them manage their identity stigma. Moreover, long-term employment is key to successful reintegration, and essential for desistance.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I focus on the methods of the research project. First, I present the research design of the study. After that, I discuss the methods used to obtain data, including the study area, data sources, sample size and sampling techniques, procedures for recruiting participants, ethical procedures, and data analysis. Additionally, the justification for selecting a descriptive qualitative design and the rationale behind choosing the sample are discussed. The final section presents the ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Design

I adopted a qualitative approach for this study. Qualitative methods encompass various approaches to data collection, enabling researchers to offer cultural and contextual explanations and interpretations of social occurrences, including the personal experiences of marginalized populations (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). Qualitative research is a structured and subjective approach that sheds light on and provides interpretations of the daily life experiences of individuals, imbuing them with significance (Burns & Grove, 2009). It allows participants to recount their experiences and have their voices heard while diminishing the power imbalances between the study participants and researchers (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

After reviewing the various qualitative approaches available, I employed a qualitative descriptive thematic analysis because such an approach allows researchers to analyze narrative materials of life stories (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Thematic analysis condenses data content by recognizing and explaining crucial aspects of the data, guided by the research question. Thematic analysis can uncover recurring themes within the data concerning participants' life experiences, opinions, and perspectives, as well as their behaviors and practices, within and across data (Clarke

& Braun, 2017). Thematic Analysis interprets large and small data-set. That is, from case study research involving 1–2 participants (Cedervall & Åberg, 2010) to even large interview studies comprising 60 or more participants (Mooney-Somers et al., 2008). This qualitative descriptive study aimed to identify the relationship between desistance and disclosure comprehensively.

3.2 Study Area

The study was carried out at the formerly St. Leonard’s Society of Toronto (SLST), now John Howard’s Society of Toronto. Toronto is the capital city of the Canadian province of Ontario. It is Canada's most populous city and North America's fourth most populous city. Toronto is an international business, finance, arts, sports, and culture center. It is recognized as the most multicultural and cosmopolitan city in Canada.

The study focused on the SLST because the organization's main goal is to enhance public safety by providing programs and services to support individuals in becoming healthy, productive, and prosocial community members. The organization believes that its clients' needs should be addressed on an individual basis in an atmosphere of mutual respect, understanding, and dignity. To accomplish this, the Klink program, an employment reentry program, was instituted under the KLINK Coffee Social Enterprise.

The KLINK program was funded through the sales of KLINK Coffee. It seeks to provide employment assessment, training, placement opportunities as well as social and professional support to persons navigating their re-entry processes after experiences of federal incarceration. Specifically, the Klink process was designed to assist individuals with a criminal record and history of incarceration in attaining and maintaining community stability—including housing—through employment placement and case management.

Reunion Island Coffee roasted KLINK Coffee. The company also served as an employer providing employee placement opportunities to the clients. It sold to support training and assist individuals who were hoping to expand their work related skills and experiences. The placement training has, at times, been subsidized by Dixon Hall, which provides participants with subsidized wages that contribute to their success in their paid employment placements.

Beyond the coffee itself, the idea behind the initiative is to reintegrate people into society while negotiating the obstacles (e.g., employment) that can hinder successful reintegration. The ability to ‘make it’ in society may negate the ‘attraction’ of criminal activity and thus encourage desistance.

3.3 Sources of Data

My study used transcribed interviews as the primary source of data. I used the transcript to explore the experiences of formerly criminalized individuals as they navigate their community re-entry processes. The data was part of a data set for a broader project titled “Masculinity, risk, desistance, and lived experiences: incarceration and beyond.” The project's principal investigator is Dr. Rosemary Ricciardelli, who is the Research Chair of Safety, Security and Wellness at the School of Maritime Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland. The data was obtained after the cohort group of participants were followed over a period of three years, from 2012 to 2014. Qualitative longitudinal data generated is important because it is iterative and builds on previous knowledge to understand what has evolved, promoting the creation of a narrative that spans over time (Carduff et al., 2015).

Since my study builds on Ricciardelli and Mooney (2018) research “The decision to disclose: Employment after prison” the transcribed interviews had already been thematically coded

using Nvivo software. Preliminary themes were developed, organizing the interview information into the following categories: biographical information, reintegration, stigma, thoughts regarding the social enterprise, incarceration experience, employment, interpersonal, and parole. However, I will use interview information on stigma, community re-entry, and employment for this study.

The theme of stigma contains interview transcripts on participants' criminal history and record, and disclosure strategies. This information provides a detailed account of participants' past crime and the various identity disclosure strategies they use to manage stigma. The theme of community re-entry is useful for my study since it captures all the necessary information about the participants' desistance narratives and their employment needs as they navigate community re-entry. Also, the theme of employment is beneficial to the study because it provides participants' narratives on a wounded healer, which focuses on the prosocial behaviours participants exhibit when desisting from crime.

3.4 Participants, Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Former prisoners are regarded as vulnerable (Mechanic & Tanner, 2007). Finding sustained employment is an important component of the transition from prison to the community for exiting prisoners because jobs provide a sense of structure and responsibility to former prisoners as they return to the community (Visher et al., 2011). Stable employment contributes immensely to desistance (Laub & Sampson, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 2003).

Participants for the research were individuals on conditional release who participated in the day reporting center program designed to support individuals who have experienced federal incarceration. The program supports participants as they navigate the re-entry processes by

providing them with social and professional support as well as employment. All participants in the program were eligible for recruitment in the study conducted.

Six cohort groups comprising 24 participants were followed over three years, from 2012 to 2014. The age and gender distributions of all six cohorts are outlined in Table 1 below.

Of these 24 participants, 23 were Canadian citizens. Their self-identified ethnic or racial backgrounds are outlined in Table 2, along with the group's educational profile and their indicated places of residence at their final interview.

Thirteen individuals self-identified as parents, all of whom had biological children except for one participant, who acknowledged having stepchildren. One participant was married upon entering prison and maintained their marriage after release. Another was engaged at the time of the study, and two admitted to being in a committed relationship. Among the three parolees in long-term common-law partnerships upon entering prison, one was single after release. Two participants were divorced, with one having since remarried. Eleven participants were single both before and after serving their custodial sentences.

Of the 24 participants, 11 had served a prior provincial sentence(s) and 10 had been charged as youth and served time in a closed-custody youth facility. Twenty-two participants were released after serving their first federal sentence, and two after a second or third federal sentence. Most participants were on statutory release rather than parole. Based on the detail given, sentences ranged from a minimum of two years to life, with participants serving prison term between 16 months and over 22 years. One participant was uncertain about the time served, and this was not further investigated.

All participants had pre-warrant expiration dates during interviews, and two had Long Term Offender designations. Criminal convictions ranged from domestic violence-related criminality; drug-related convictions (including both possession and trafficking); property, cyber, and violent offenses (including assault, robbery, forcible confinement, possession of firearms; sex-related convictions; attempted murder; manslaughter; and first and second-degree murder[s]). Each participant had served some time in reception; 9 had served in a maximum-security facility, 20 in a medium, and 12 in a minimum-security facility. The participants demonstrated a variety of outcomes in terms of employment and desistance. Four participants were reincarcerated during the study, including one who had successfully secured full-time employment. Another had their conditional release revoked. Subsequent to the study's conclusion, an additional parolee was reincarcerated, and six participants remained unemployed.

More encouragingly, at the study's conclusion, seven participants had secured and maintained full-time employment (including two in managerial roles). Additionally, one participant maintains a part-time job, while two have transitioned to full-time schooling, having previously been employed.

Table 1. Age and gender distribution of the six (6) cohort of participants

Cohort	N	Age range	Mean age	Median age	Female (n)	Male (n)
1	9	22-45	32	31	-	9
2	3	25-53	41.5	47	1	2
3	4	21-47	32	30	-	4
4	3	25-37	29	26	-	3
5	3	30-38	32.5	30	-	3
6	2	21-26	23.5	-	1	1

Table 2. Distributions of participants’ self-indicated ethnic/racial identities, educational profiles, and places of residence.

VARIABLES	N
Self-indicated ethnic/racial identity	
Black	13
White	7
East Indian	1
Hispanic	2
Hispanic/Black/Aboriginal	1
Educational profile	
GED	18
Less than high school	1
Some college	1
Some university	2
University degree	2
Residence	
Halfway house	15
Aboriginal healing shelter	1
With a family member	4
Homeless shelter	2
Room in a boarding house	1
Apartment	1

3.5 Procedure for Recruitment of Participants

The study’s participants comprised 24 men and women on conditional release. The eligibility of these participants for recruitment was based on their participation in a program provided through a day reporting center aimed at aiding releasees as they transition to workforce after prison. The program focused on equipping participants with skills needed for employment, such as resume writing, interview skills, budget/finances, and computer skill development,

together with a social enterprise pilot initiative designed to provide participants with work placements and potentially open doors for longer-term employment opportunities. Although participants' participation in the program was voluntary, they were mandated to make contact with the day reporting center.

The primary investigator (Ricciardelli) used longitudinal, in-depth, semi-structured interviews for the project. These interviews were conducted with the participants over a three-year period from 2012 to 2014.

The interview structure was created with the objective of revealing the participants' experience as they navigated their identity as former prisoners living in the community to seeking employment. As a result, the interviews aimed to uncover their challenges, factors that eased the program, and aspects of the program that were helpful and unhelpful.

The desistance narratives of the participants were collected using interviews. The interview sought to ascertain their motivation, struggles, and the factors helping them. Participants were interviewed multiple times over the three-year period as they sought to secure employment and live prosocial lives. Some participants were successful desisters and others returned to prison, but also struggled with disclosure of their criminal history.

Initial interviews were accompanied by follow-up interviews three to six months later, then at 12-18 months, and finally, as the study approached its conclusion. The rationale was to gain insight into how participants' experiences evolve over time as they integrated into the community and the job market.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary at every stage, and prospective participants were informed about the study through case workers associated with the day reporting center where the employment program was offered.

Despite diligent attempts, follow-up interviews were not at precise intervals due to challenges like parole revocation, recidivism, and the unfortunate deaths of certain participants. A demographic survey was employed together with the interview to document criminal and institutional histories. The demographic questions from the study were posed verbally.

Consequently, this information was gained during the interview process (often at the end of the conversation). Moreover, this project's principal investigator (Ricciardelli) had access to participants' criminal records and could utilize this resource to fill any gaps that arose.

While interviews were in person during the first year, some were conducted over the phone when in-person interviews were not feasible for follow-ups. There were no noticeable disparities in participants' responses based on the mode of interview – whether in person or via phone. This was evidenced in the follow-up discussion and the rapport established throughout the course of the long-term study.

An interview guide was prepared and utilized but discarded when the conversation flowed. The interviews had a minimum one-hour duration, and research assistants transcribed the audio recordings.

3.6 Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews were thematically coded using NVivo software, beginning with a priori coding scheme (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This was developed using the interview guide. These preliminary themes organized the interview information into the following

categories: biographical information, reintegration, stigma, thought regarding the social enterprise, incarceration experience, employment, interpersonal, and parole.

After the initial analysis, a semi-grounded approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was employed to identify and catalog themes that emerged in the interviews. The transcripts were thoroughly read and re-read multiple times, which facilitated the identification of emerging themes and the comparing patterns of similar experiences across cases. During this phase, a coding scheme was created, incorporating a mix of a priori and grounded codes.

The transcripts were coded, and the coding was cross-checked to establish a qualitative variant of interrater reliability (Armstrong et al., 1997). This process helped safeguard against personal bias and ensured the consistency of the coded content.

Following this exercise, axial coding (Saldana, 2015) was employed to disaggregate and connect the emerging subthemes, resulting in the development of a cohesive and organized image of the challenges releasees encountered during employment reintegration. The subsequent step involved merging and reclassifying some of the nodes, leading to a cohesive categorization of topics in the interview. This helped facilitate the comparison of experiences and sentiments across cases (Boyatzis, 1998).

The NVivo Annotation tool was employed throughout the analysis process to help track coding strategies or directions.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations protect research participants by determining/spelling out the acceptable and unacceptable modalities that should be employed to obtain information from the participants (Connelly, 2014). Ethical consideration in research is critical when conducting

qualitative research, most notably when the research involves using vulnerable groups as participants (Arifin, 2018). Ethical approval for this study was sought from and given by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Humanities Research (ICEHR) at Memorial University, St. John's, Canada. The principal investigator whose data was used had earlier sought ethical approval from the University of Toronto and University of York. Again, the principal investigator got permission from STSL to use their adult clients (males and females) for purposes related to her studies.

CHAPTER FOUR-ANALYSES

4.1 Abstract: In this chapter, I analyze the self-narratives of formerly federally incarcerated individuals to understand their employment experiences better as they navigate their community re-entry. I structure the results such that I first unpack how formerly incarcerated people enact and understand desistance. All participants were interested in employment, although interest in desisting was less apparent among some participants. Nevertheless, all participants had a ‘plan’ for their lives outside to some degree. Next, we turn to how barriers to desistance, especially employment is in tension with the self-narratives or desistance goals, including how this is affected by disclosure. Making meaning out of participants' self-narratives as they negotiate employment challenges helps grasp the relationship between desistance from crime and disclosure strategies.

4.2 Introduction

Employment has been identified as a ‘hook’ for successful long-term desistance because employment provides desisters with a sense of purpose, gives hope, and supports them with a pathway disentangled from criminalized behavior (Laub & Sampson, 1993). Nevertheless, the path to securing employment as a formerly incarcerated individual is difficult for an array of reasons and is laden with barriers (see Chapter 3). In the current chapter, I analyze the reintegration experiences of formerly federally incarcerated individuals during their transition to community living. I do so first by exploring their interests or intentions to desist from crime and their narratives around how they plan to enact desistance, including the supports and resources they will require. I look at the centrality of the concept of ‘hope,’ which plays a key role in former prisoners’ successful desistance from crime (Burnett & Maruna, 2004), and can wane with every encounter to a barrier to desistance from crime. Maruna (2001), for instance, has shown that although

persisters believe they are ‘doomed to deviance,’ desisters construct a positive self-narrative on hope, which makes them see desistance as possible in the face of obstacles.

Next, recognizing scholars like Giordano et al., (2002) who argue that key to desistance is the ‘hook for change’—something criminalized individuals hold tight to, as the ‘hook’ provides a purpose, meaning, and a way forward or a path, I present the barriers to employment as described by participants. I use their words to show how even if one is ready for desistance, the barriers make desistance difficult and life very psychologically, and financially challenging (as well as legally, socially, etc.). I then look at how disclosure enters, challenges, or can support the self-narrative (i.e., that desistance from crime has to come from within).

4.3 DESISTANCE NARRATIVE

Formerly incarcerated individuals desisting from crime construct a redemption script, referring to a powerful narrative that helps them make sense of their past, find fulfillment in productive behaviours, and be in charge of their future. Thus, when desisting, formerly incarcerated individuals provide a logical, believable, and respectable self-story about why their present prosocial behaviour is rationally possible (Maruna, 2001). Successful desistance is only possible after the formerly incarcerated is convinced that positive change is right for them and are willing and determined to change. Of the participants, seven-pointed out that long-term desistance from crime is centered on the ‘self.’ These participants traced their desistance experience to their personal drive and commitment to change by proving to themselves that they are capable of changing when others have failed. Examples are provided below:

“The program is working; I’m not expecting it to work for everyone and I just tried to make it work for me. So, for me as a hustler as a person like this the last thing you do is give me

an opportunity cause I'm going to do it and I'm going to take it to the good side of life now instead. I'm just helping in the good sense now. I had someone tell me the other day I'm a good worker and I said if I can work the extra three hours I'm going to work it you know what I mean? I love to have things and I love to have money and at the end of the day if you're going to give me a job with overtime and all of that for sure I'm going to work it. I come from work I'm still going to go work out you know? I just try to take advantage you know? You give me the opportunity and I don't take advantage of it and later on I say I wish I could get a job and all of that. So believe me I don't want to be back in the position I was in. It's just going backwards right?" (C1 P2I2).

"I can't live in the past anymore. I gotta live for the future. Trying to live a lifestyle that I can't live anymore, I've got to go the other way now" (C3 P2I1).

"I think that I wasn't focused on staying out. I didn't take it that seriously. I think I was surprised that they would breach you so easily. The first sentence, twice was, there was a thing called team supervision at the time which is now in hand supervision. For parole it was like for not calling in or being missing for a day" (C2 P1I1).

C1 P2I2's words show the participant is willing to succeed by taking full advantage of opportunities available and working extra hard to make a legitimate earning to help provide for their personal needs rather than resorting to criminalized behaviour. This decision shows the participant having a personal drive to go through long-term desistance from a criminalized act successfully. C3 P2I1's words suggest that the motivation not to re-offend comes from one's self. Here, the participants decide to forgo the past lifestyle which leads to criminalized behaviour by turning away from their past criminal predisposition and adopting a new lifestyle free of criminality. C2 P1I1's comments depict the participant's previous unwillingness to desist from

crime successfully due to the lack of focus and drive to succeed, causing the continuous breach of the parole condition. The participant is now successfully desisting from crime because they focus on staying away from criminalised acts.

The self is central to long-term successful desistance from criminalized acts, particularly having the personal drive and commitment to stay away from crime. This is expressed differently by these three participants, but common among their expressions is focusing on staying out of criminalised acts.

To remain out of prison, participants also found social ties and support critical to their desistance narrative. A participant emphasized this below:

“Yeah, the other day I told her what was going on and she said are you sure you’re not lying? But that’s moms, they’re all the same. And I was like yeah – she said I drink coffee and I said I’d bring her some and she said to bring it to her and all of that. So now she’s saying how I got a job and all of that. I don’t know, I want to make her happy. I’m a parent, you’re a parent so you have your expectations for your kids and when they go against them it makes you sad or angry so for them to exceed your expectations is the day you’re waiting for so I want to give it to her” (C1 P2I2).

C1 P2I2’s words suggest social ties and support are essential for long term desistance from crime. They find satisfaction and motivation in their child – wanting to bring happiness and pride – which informs their motivation to desist.

Participants felt their prison experience also informed their motivation for successful long-term desistance from crime. This motivation can be a result of not wanting to return, from learning about themselves, or simply missing free society. To exemplify:

“ah I love life. Since I got out of jail this time, after doing so long, you just love the little things. I don’t know You don’t really appreciate, you lose touch you know, when you go to jail, it’s like to be able to get up and go outside and you know like not be monitored its quite liberating. I don’t know” [C.1.P.1.I.1].

C.1.P.1.I.1’s comments reveal how the prison experience shapes their interpretations of their lived experiences. C.1.P.1.I.1 expresses appreciation for their personal freedom, which increases their tenacity and resolve to stay away from criminalized acts. Therefore, the participants’ ‘self’—their drive and determination to enjoy their personal liberty—pushes them to desist from criminalized acts.

Participants also reflected on the support of re-entry programs in their desistance journey. Re-entry programs provided employment assessment, training, placement opportunities, and social and professional support to formerly incarcerated individuals navigating their community living. The support and training given to participants helped them create a positive view and develop the willpower and personal initiative to overcome emotional behaviours—such as anger and depression that makes them susceptible to criminalized acts. For example:

“I don’t know, like going through the gatehouse program helped me out tremendously with like my anger and depression and stuff like that. Ever since I finished stage one of that program I’ve felt way better about life and work. And now I’m going to phase 2 now starting in September so there’s 3 phases all together right, and each phase is 15 weeks so, and I figure if I just keep doing that the healing comes through that, I’ll be a happy positive person”.

C.1 P.1.I.2 reveals that re-entry programs were integral to helping support their cessation of criminalized ways of living. For instance, participants described the ‘Gatehouse’ program as supporting them in learning to control their emotions and cope with the realities of their incarceration by assisting them with the skills to manage their anger and depression. Mastery and control over their emotions helped them live healthily and become productive and prosocial members. But always, key is that the ‘self’ – personal desire and interest – underpins any programme's success. Here, personal drive and commitment are centralized, but other agents of change, such as family support and employment, are necessary to bring about a long-term positive change in behaviour. Desistance then requires a strong ‘Self,’ a desire from within, which pushes an individual to develop the drive and commitment to make use of limited available opportunities in the face of obstacles.

Now, we turn to how some participants enact desistance by becoming a ‘wounded healer’—they strive to provide assistance and support to dissuade young people from engaging in criminalized behaviours. By this action, the decision to desist by becoming a useful citizen emanates from the ‘Self.’

4.4 WOUNDED HEALER

Brown (1991) defined ‘professional exes’ or ‘wounded healers’ as individuals who have ceased deviance by replacing their career with a movement toward the provision of support to those in need. According to Maruna (2001), formerly incarcerated individuals’ lived prison experience helps with gaining valuable knowledge and skills to be shared with others for information or as a deterrent. Of the participants, six were interested and willing to help support prisoners and other criminalized people. Providing assistance was viewed as part of their desistance journey; helping others would serve as the ‘hook’ for positive growth and change. Some

participants described how others would benefit from support, including when incarcerated. For instance, a participant said:

“I want to work with people who have maybe done one time in jail and maybe just need someone to be a part of their lives and stuff like that and I didn’t have that and I had some uppity white people telling me ‘don’t do this and don’t do that’. And I didn’t see where it was coming from, and I didn’t understand” (C.1 P.8 .I.1).

Another echoed:

“... you know my goal is to – like I lived on the streets from the ages of 12 till I was 22, I was a prostitute for 10 years of my life, I wanna get into working with male prostitutes, [it] is something that I’ve always had a goal of doing. It’s something that I’ve been looking to do” (C.1.P.1.I.1).

C.1 P.8.I.1’s words reveal their interest in providing assistance for change—positive self-growth—to other criminalized people who may listen, given their own personal lived experience (rather than being told by seemingly unknowing people). C.1.P.1.I.1 too takes their lived experience into consideration in thinking about how he/she/they could make a difference in the lives of others. As a former prostitute, he/she/they wants to work with others on the same career path to help support desistance from crime and occupational living. Both participants share an interest in using their lived experiences to help others change their life trajectories.

Consistently, some participants experienced prison as a place for character reformation and a learning experience. They learned to value their freedom and liberty when incarcerated, pondering the ‘little things’ they can do to divert others from the same fate. In other words,

participants adapted to a ‘new way’ of life when incarcerated and were compelled to help others either not have such experience or cope better with incarceration:

“I would tell them what I went through, and I’d say bottom line they need to know it’s going to be fun, but it always ends up badly. Do you want that? because there’s only two ways – death or prison” (C.1 P.8 .I.1).

Mostly along those lines. But also at this stage in time I’ve come to appreciate priorities like family and the freedom itself. (C.2. P.1.I.1).

C.1 P.8.I.1 words show that the instant gratification that some crimes may support pales in comparison to the consequence. The participants appreciate life in a free society and feel their experiences could perhaps dissuade others from such actions. C.2.P.1.I.1 describes an appreciation for freedom. C.1.P.1.I.1, who had experienced incarceration multiple times, recounts:

“Yeah. More indifferent to life in general. Mostly along those lines. But also, at this stage in time I’ve come to appreciate priorities like family and the freedom itself, [although] the changes I went through in prison for the majority of time [in prison], was mainly negative change; only the last one was positive. The positive thing is, I don’t know how to say it, it’s a lifestyle that you almost think that occupational hazards come with the territory, and I totally disagree with that. I think that there’s a lot of beauty in life if you try. One thing I found was that I was doing the institutional job as a peer health counselor. I learned from that job more conflict resolution because you must resolve challenges, and that’s where I’m at right now. Sometimes things are beyond your change or your ability to change so you must accept your limitations.”

C.1.P.1.I.1 reveals that prison made him sober after reflecting on the importance of personal freedom and liberties. The participant agrees to learning life impactful skills in prison—being patient with life and accepting weaknesses, which is now beneficial to them in the free world.

C.2. P.3.I.1 was interested in activities that help community development through outreach:

“You would? Well I want to do the outreach work. The outreach work in the community.”

(C.2. P.3.I.1).

C2P3I1 shows willingness to engage in community development activities, particularly outreach programs. This new identity starkly contrasts the past ‘self’ who engaged in criminalized behaviour.

Participants’ words suggest self-change, specifically the movement from rule-breaker to abider. Accompanying this transition is a dissociation between their past and current self, and the interpretation of their prior experiences as a possible point of learning for others—even a preventative mechanism through education to help others stay disengaged from crime.

Becoming a wounded healer is a personal ‘self-driven’ decision. Desistance, too, must be ‘self-driven,’ the process is difficult and requires a ‘hook’—a motivator to change (Giordano et al., 2002).

4.5 EMPLOYMENT

Employment supports the transition from prison to community re-entry of formerly incarcerated individuals (Gillis & Nafekh, 2005; Laub & Sampson, 1993; Uggen, 2000). Arguably a source of informal social control (Laub & Sampson, 1993), employment provides daily structure and routine (Raphael, 2010). Of the participants, many mentioned financial stability as necessary

to support their journey toward desistance from crime, viewing financial stability as garnered from gainful employment as a central factor supporting their community re-entry. Of these participants, 16 stated needing a stable legitimate job to save money for rent after their residence at a halfway house was served. The participants explained:

“Yeah, because you’ve gotta do so much stuff. You’ve gotta find a job, find a way to eat, everything. If you don’t have a job you can’t eat properly, you can’t have clothes on your back, you can’t have a house. Inside, it’s all provided for you right? I don’t know if my mind is playing tricks on me or, I don’t know what it is, but out here you’re just out in the open” (C3 P2I1).

“9-5, a job that’s stable. In order for me to get my electrician, I need a job that’s a long term and I can save up money and I don’t want to go to an agency where every day I go to work and they could call me up and say that they don’t need me anymore. That would mess up my saving plan and if you save up however much it costs to take a course. To try to get certain grants and stuff and I think that’ll be difficult because you have to be a certain age up to 29. I need a job that will start at 7:30 in the morning and I get off at 3:30. If I have to work on weekends sometimes I’ll do that” (C5 P2I1).

“I subsequently failed, well maybe it’s not failure but I was reoffended. Um, and I’ve mentioned openly that I think that because I wasn’t using but I in the past had used criminal endeavours to make money, and resurface. So that’s why I um, honestly feel that employment is an area that needs to be addressed, because otherwise you fall back in old practices” (C2 PIII).

In the first excerpt, C3 P2I1 shows the numerous challenges inherent to community re-entry, challenges that include acquiring the resources for meeting their basic life needs. To the participants, these needs can be met when there is gainful employment, but without employment, they feel vulnerable in society and in a position of relative poverty. The participants acknowledge the support that came with federal incarceration, where the government met their basic needs – food, shelter, and clothing. But such support terminates at warrant expiration, which informs new stress – that of finding where to live within their means, meet their basic needs and refrain from returning to prison.

The second excerpt also speaks to the value of financial stability for desistance, C5 P2I1 describes a focus on long-term savings deemed essential for successful reintegration. The participants believe that the long-term uninterrupted savings plan they desire can only be achieved through the successful pursuit of stable employment, supported by a positive attitude toward work.

C2 P1I1 acknowledges how their prior recidivism was directly related to a lack of gainful employment, articulating a dependency on employment to ensure desistance in the future rather than a second return to prison. They admit that without employment, the impetus to return to crime was too pronounced due to their need for financial stability, and this requires remedy for successful community living. Here, the concept of ‘self’ also emerged since employment would support participants as they strove to “keep my head straight and keep busy” (C3 P3I1). Thus, beyond meeting the key needs for survival, employment also provided participants with a sense of ‘self’ and purpose, thereby eliminating the need to engage in criminalized acts.

Thus, collectively, employment can present as a desistance ‘hook,’ supporting people in their re-entry journey and their desire to resist criminal engagement. Legitimate stable employment provides financial stability, removing the economic need for crime.

4.6 BARRIERS TO DESISTANCE: WHEN EMPLOYMENT AND COMMUNITY RE-ENTRY DO NOT FACILITATE DESISTANCE

4.6.1 ECONOMIC MOTIVATION

Criminalized acts may be motivated by economic gain, where one completes a crime to overcome financial barriers (Wu & Wu, 2012). Among select participants, they expressed completing criminalized acts due to the motivation of economic gain. Here, seven participants described how ‘needing’ additional funds inspired their actions, either as they experienced financial hardship or found ‘legitimate’ employment to be unfruitful economically. Examples here include:

“yeah, but it’s money, but for me, you know the minimum I made per date was like 100 bucks and sometimes you’d make a couple thousand. That’s the problem with that lifestyle though, you get addicted to the money.... no that’s right and they’re like who wants to go work at McDonalds at 10 bucks an hour when I can sell myself to somebody and make that in 2 minutes, you know what I mean” (C1 P.1.I.1)

“ahh, for me I guess it was my love of money was the cause from the beginning I guess. And it just I wanted to succeed at a faster rate and when I didn’t want the slower way working 9-5 it seems no matter what I do, I come back around full circle to being 9-5. I guess now ill try to stick with it” (C1 P.2.I.1)

“Ok, I had six children and I had to provide for them so I had to do what I had to do” (C.6 P.1.I.1).

C.1.P.1.I.1’s words suggest that criminalized acts for economic gain were sought to provide enough money to maintain a lifestyle when legitimate employment failed—means of legitimate

employment are considered few and without financial sustenance. The result was financial needs or desires encouraging recidivism rather than desistance. Said differently, when the means for desistance financially are lacking, there is a greater push toward criminalized acts to support their living circumstances. This makes desistance more difficult.

C1 P.2.I.1's words depict how time must pass to encourage success with legitimate means of employment. There is a re-entry process that includes more than employment that underpins successful prosocial living. During these processes of becoming reabsorbed in prosocial living in communities, legitimate employment provides a means for continued engagement but is hindered by opportunity and personal readiness. For some, moving back to crime was more comfortable, particularly if accompanied by a return to prison—than trying to find a new way of life in society.

C6 P.1.I.1 speaks to how having dependents—a very large family—encouraged the participant to return to criminalized acts. The financial needs associated with having dependents, particularly without stable gainful legitimate employment, create a challenge to desistance. As such, participants identify diverse elements informing recidivism versus desistance, which include sustaining their lifestyle. This was interpreted in diverse ways, such as these three participants who expressed financial stability as key to staying out of crime and sustaining the current lifestyle they are used to, described by some as 'lavish.' C3 P.2I.1 said:

“So, it was really just about money and lifestyle”.

Said differently, involvement in criminalized acts was largely to make money to sustain a seemingly lavish lifestyle. C1 P.2.I.1, for instance, depended on criminalized acts to live within their means. To remain out of prison, participants desired and valued stable legitimate

employment, which was also gainful and could support the lifestyle they were accustomed to or desired. C1 P.2.I.1 explained:

“oh for me its good to be financially stable, like for me thats one of the main thing that fuels my crime. you know, my wants got to be alittle bit, maybe alittle watered down a bit more and not so high, and take my time to get there. But at the same time I have to be used to the lifestyle that im living, if its different than the lifestyle that im used to. so it would all be financially stable, having a place and being furnished or whatever and taking care of liabilities or whatever, responsibilities. doing things like that which takes time to you know getting myself situated and I think by working full time or doing something that I love to do kind of think helps and benefits me the most way of staying legit, if you’re going legit and its working you stick with it, just like when I was illegit and it was working and i stuck with it right. Not realizing the risk but being legit theres not much risk there if you have a , you lose your job right” (C1 P.2.I.1).

Participants identified economic factors, particularly the need for financial stability, as the key reason for their crimes. Therefore, successful long-term desistance requires stability, including economic stability, as the lack thereof was either an impetus or motivator for criminalized behaviour or desired and deemed necessary to remain in the community. Thus, employment has multiple meanings for former prisoners, beyond providing them with status identification, and making them a contributing member of society, it provides a necessary stability and may allow a lifestyle that deters criminal participation. Sadly, securing employment is challenging for formerly incarcerated individuals for many reasons, including criminal record restrictions. Criminal records elicit stigma, proscribing the formerly incarcerated prisoners’ employment eligibility, a reality to which we now turn.

4.6.2 CRIMINAL RECORD RESTRICTIONS

Individuals with criminal records encounter employment challenges, causing most of them to attain employment in precariously low-wage jobs (Western & Pettit, 2002). Of the participants, four described feeling stigmatized by hiring managers when seeking employment due to their criminal records. A criminal record affects participants' employment prospects and the type of job they can secure. For example:

“Definitely, if you want to get a good job but if you want to work construction or something you can do that no problem. But I guess you could do a good job too but it is a setback for sure. A lot of businesses have HR, and they do background checks. And when it comes to some of those jobs they want to find out if you’re a criminal. If you have a criminal background and you’re not anymore it wouldn’t matter either” (C.1 P.2.I.2).

“No that’s no problem, they’ll let you do that. At the same time, this has been the situation with the job and I came out wanting to be a medical administrator because I came out from George Brown and I had the medical courses and the administration courses. But it turned out that the medical thing was never going to happen. But I could do the computer stuff and my expectations have just gone lower and lower. I’ve gone from wanting to work in an office to realizing that I’d be lucky to even wash dishes” (C.4 P.1.I.2a).

C.1 P.2.I.2's words reveal the difficulty they experienced finding white-collar jobs despite their credentials because of their criminal record. In C.1 P.2.I.2's view, the simple act of doing a criminal record check precluded their eligibility. The participants felt overlooked, despite their qualifications, when seeking employment, which left them few options outside of precarious labour. Likewise, C.4.P.1.I.2a suggests that they had 'lowered their standards' in pursuit of

employment. Given their criminal record, they sought employment below their qualifications and credentials—less able to find gainful employment, they now strive for precarious employments.

Overall, a criminal record is considered a major setback to the reintegration effort of former prisoners. Participants encounter stigma due to their criminal records, making securing employment based on their qualifications challenging and unlikely. The challenges criminal records present decrease the desire and determination of the participants to secure legitimate stable employment. The result is an openness to more precarious forms of employment, where criminal record checks are mostly not followed through, making long-term successful desistance difficult.

4.6.3 CRIMINAL RECORD CHECK

According to Cherney and Fitzgerald (2016b), former prisoners tend to seek employment in precarious industries, mainly because such occupations are more open to hiring without doing a criminal record check. Precarious jobs are barriers to desistance due to their lack of long-term stability, which hinders the financial stability of formerly incarcerated individuals.

With this in mind, four participants did not voice concerns about having a criminal history when acquiring employment. These participants explained how they apply for ‘menial’ jobs, where most employers do not pay for new employee criminal record checks to be completed (e.g., *“I’m gonna say no, they’ve gotta pay 40 bucks to get the check done and most companies don’t wanna shell out the 40 bucks”* [C.I.P.1.1.1]). Thus, their competition for employment failed to account for the discrepancy imposed by a criminal record (i.e., acknowledging that some employers regularly hire criminalized people for such precarious positions). A participant, echoing others, explains:

“I’m not gonna work in a bank or for the government, so I really, I don’t think that it will.

I always work construction or labour jobs, so most those kind of jobs people have been to jail so its not an issue" (C.1 P.1.I.2).

The commonality of providing labour recognized as welcoming to criminalized persons is salient here. For participants who are accustomed to such employment, they felt their employment opportunities were not affected. There was also comfort in criminal record checks being outside the scope of hiring (i.e., opted out of by employers). Failing to do a record check eliminated liabilities tied to non-disclose (i.e., the notion of not providing information that is not requested). But also, if an employer does a criminal record check without disclosing it to the potential employee, there is liability for the employer:

"Yeah, but if they go and do a background check without saying they need to do one I can actually go back towards them on that." (C.1 P.3.I.FINAL)

C.1 P.3.I's words evidence a creation of agency around employer behaviours tied to criminal record checks—which was not common, but a notable interpretation. This participant felt empowered in having a course of action no matter what the directive of the employer (i.e., disclosing or not that a record check was forthcoming). Likely, these participants also valued their agency to disclose at their discretion (i.e., by choice when asked or voluntary). Participants who did not desire disclosure stated when asked about their criminal record, they lied, thus hopeful or believing that not all employers conducted criminal record checks. Cost was thought to be a disincentive for employers conducting record checks. For example:

"I think that's a farce, any time I apply for a job and they ask if I have a criminal record I lie and say no, cause people don't want to pay the 40 dollars to find out. Like Most

companies aren't going to pay out 40 dollars out of their own pocket to do a criminal record check on you. You know" (C.1.P.1.I.2).

C.1.P.1.I.2 is averse to disclosure and lies about their criminal record when seeking employment. Participants believe that although employers may demand disclosure, most of these employers do not perform a criminal record check. Although criminal records can burden participants, some participants highlighted the role good social support plays in helping them minimize disclosure anxiety by connecting participants to employment.

4.7 SOCIAL NETWORK

Berg and Huebner, (2011) have shown former prisoners with good-quality ties to relatives are more likely to be employed post-release and less likely to re-offend. They suggested former prisoners' ties with quality relatives connect them to jobs and sustain their involvement in the job. Some participants described having a social network as more impactful than the drawbacks of a criminal record to securing employment. For instance:

"Finding a job? Well so far I don't think it's that it's just there's work out here but you got to know someone cause I have friends who haven't been in the system once and they find it hard to get employment. I know people who have done school and they find it hard so I look at it like with me and that person go for the job – ok I did high school and tried to go to college but they're done college and can't get a job inside their field it's like a game. If me and that person apply for a job and they do a CPIC on me and they do a CPIC on the other person I won't have a chance" (Cohort 1 P.9.I.1-2).

C.1.P.9.I.1-2 opines that although numerous jobs are available, irrespective of one's credentials or criminal record, without a social network, finding employment becomes more challenging.

Participants described a dependency on social networks to secure employment or even employment opportunities. However, they also admit to being the unselected candidate if competing for employment against an applicant without a criminal record. Others echoed this sentiment, feeling their criminal record impedes opportunity for initial (and thus sustainable) employment. Arguably, participants were divided, some concerned about their criminal record and others less so, largely dependent on the types of employment they sought and the likeliness of employers requesting criminal background checks.

4.8 DISCLOSING

Researchers have noted formerly incarcerated individuals adopt identity disclosure strategies to help mitigate stigma when securing employment (Harding, 2003). According to Ricciardelli and Mooney (2018), adopting identity disclosure strategies enables the formerly incarcerated individual to exert some semblance of control over how others perceive him/her/them. Of the select participants, eight disclosed their criminalized status when seeking employment. These participants had in common a belief in how disclosure helps to manage the potential stigma tied to former incarceration, possibly from employers responsible for hiring. To demonstrate:

“I’m a pretty honest person so I would be straightforward with people because I would hate to be living with the fact that I had a record and I didn’t tell you... I have a lot of anxiety and I know that would create more of it, so if there’s a way to relieve some of it then I am inclined to do that” (C.1 P.5.I.1).

C.1 P.5.I.1 is forthcoming about their criminal record, preferring to be upfront and have agency over their disclosure, thereby associating disclosure with honesty and avoiding awkward future

conversations. This is in contrast to others, who felt that disclosure of their criminal record was best reserved for people close to them or whom they held in confidence:

“For me telling people that I was in jail that’s not a problem. It’s just going into details that I don’t really do unless it’s someone I can trust with it. Like the campus president he knows what I was in for. Right down to everything” (C.1 P.3.I.FINAL).

C.1P.3.I show their hesitancy for disclosing details of their criminal record, especially to people they deem to be of mistrust, believing explaining their criminal record to some is difficult. In contrast, some participants preferred to adopt a non-disclosure strategy, feeling disclosure reduced the likelihood of securing employment. Basically, they felt disclosure would remove them from the job competition:

“I had an important job where experience played a factor. Driving a reach truck, experience would be a factor, If I could drive it better, I’d probably still be at that job. I wouldn’t be talking to you today cause I’d be working. It was a nice job. It was a night job, night shift, It was really good and the pay was really good, \$18 an hour. It was really good. But with experience I can’t just tell them I learned to drive a forklift in 4 days in the penitentiary like, you know” (C.1 P.2.I.1).

Despite C.1 P.2.I.1’s experience driving a reach truck, which informs their training and thus opportunities to secure employment in the area, they could not disclose where they acquired the skills for fear the prison component of this learning – their incarceration – would eliminate them from the competition. Ultimately, the participants were not hired because they could not disclose their occupational experience. Thus, they rested in tension of ‘experience’ versus ‘stigma of incarceration,’ choosing to avoid the stigma at the cost of their experience.

For those who choose disclosure, a strategy is to dissociate from their crimes or past behaviour to avoid liability and stigma. Examples include:

“This was a one-time thing that happened that’s not going to happen again. It’s not like I go out every day and say ‘oh yeah, I’m going to do this’. It’s a one-time thing with me and it just happened, it was bad, choices on my part. I chose to stay there, and I had nowhere else to go. I was young, I was uneducated, I had kids, and I financially wasn’t stable. There’s a lot of circumstances that people don’t understand” (C.2 P.3.I.1).

“I’m hoping they will give me a better way to explain to the employers that they’re not much different than myself. They’re judgmental because I have the criminal record with the drugs. But a better position to explain to them and [then I would] have more of a chance in the job market” (C.3 P.1.I.1).

C.2 P.3.I.1 describe their criminalized act as a ‘one-time thing,’ in essence absolving themselves from responsibilities by drawing their life circumstances at the time. They portray their person positively, but as having made poor choices in support of their dependents in light of their financial strain. Similarly, P C.3.1.I.1 attribute their negative behaviours to drug use, explaining their history no longer shapes them, given they have ceased being limited by addiction. Thus, in their sobriety, they feel more able to be labour force participants and live within their legitimate means.

Altogether, excerpts from the various participants show disclosure is influenced by their sense of ‘self,’ referring to personal history, positionality, and motivations for the future. Disclosure strategies are guided from within, reflecting on the possible impact a disclosure strategy will have on their chances for long-term employment and how they can live with their disclosure

or lack thereof. Some participants expressed having no anxiety or concern about their criminal record, which we now turn.

4.8.1 HAVE DISCLOSED

Altogether, five participants did not have concerns about peoples' opinions of them after disclosure. These participants explained that, even after disclosure, employers never judged them by their past criminalized behaviour but rather offered them an opportunity to prove themselves as changed individuals. For example. *“Well like I said I have one prospective employer which is actually off of the coast of Newfoundland on the oil rigs out there keeping up satellite communications. And even they know about my background. And they said that they don't give a rats ass. They just want someone to help who knows what they're doing”* [C.1 P.3.I.FINAL]). Participants expressed having no concern after disclosure because their labour is precarious. Participants felt that it was unlikely to be replaced after disclosure because of the risky nature of their jobs. Also, some participants asserted:

“Oh absolutely. In the back of my mind I was thinking that it would be more of an issue anywhere. It was a lot of relief. That was also one of the reasons why I was thinking about the other job was because it was full time but I thought that it wouldn't be good for me because they didn't know that I had the record and I thought that even though I'm making less money right now I should stay where I am” (C.1 P.5.I.FINAL).

Participants are in tension about disclosing. The decision to remain in their current occupation or to secure other employment elsewhere. However, participants acknowledge their criminal record weighs on them; some elected to stay precariously employed because they believed securing a better job would be difficult due to their criminal history.

Other participants exhibited no concern about disclosure because their work included criminalized people.

“Not really, I couldn’t care. I’m there to do a job, I know my castes and responsibilities. I’m not ashamed that I have a criminal record but I’m not gonna brag about it. If someone confronted me on it, I’d tell them the truth. It’s not something people talk about” (C.1 P.1.I.2).

C.1 P.1.I.2’s words suggest that they are not concerned about disclosing their criminal record due to the inclusion of criminalized people in their occupational group. Thus, participants agree to focus on their duties as employees and refrain from feeling burdened by their history, making disclosure a lighter choice.

However, participants with better qualifications and credentials who want to secure long-term formal employment are concerned about disclosure because revealing their criminal record can lead to their rejection from employment.

4.8.2 REJECTION

A criminal record can arouse potential stigma (LeBel, 2012) and affect former incarcerated individuals’ employment opportunities (Waldfoegel, 1994; Western, 2002, 2007; Western & Pettit, 2005). Seven participants articulated being overlooked for employment eligibility because of their criminal record. These participants mentioned that employers were interested in hiring them after interview until criminal record checks were performed (eg: *Ok, I originally was supposed to go somewhere else and they got my name and googled my name and they were sort of like I don’t think we should hire him and I did the interview with them and they wanted to hire me” [C.1*

P.5.I.FINAL])). The participant's criminal record was the major challenge barring them from employment. Others shared this experience:

"It does. They're just around when I need them. My last interview I did on Tuesday I got a call back that same day to say sorry but due to our policies we can't hire you. So I got down in the dumps there cause that was the sixth one in two weeks. I was at school and I had to leave cause I couldn't deal with the rest of the day. I went home and my mom said to just take it easy and try not to think about it because she knows the first thing that happens when I keep going over something. I just go into a depression and I don't want to do anything so just take it easy, do what you have to do, do some of your home work at least" (C.1 P.3.I.FINAL).

C.1P.3.I. expresses sadness from feeling continuously rejected from work due to their criminal record. The participants acknowledge social support as key to managing their pain of rejection. This is in contrast with participants who revealed fearing the possibility of encountering stigma from social relations, particularly friends, because of their criminal record:

"Oh yeah, the criminal record. It's killing you everywhere you go. You can't get a decent job. And meeting your friends is a problem because you don't really know if they're judging you about it. I don't really mind about the friends because if they're really my friends they know what I do and they forgive me and I don't mind. Those who don't want to forgive me, they are not my friends and never were in the first place. That's how I take it. Whoever comes then great and whoever doesn't then I'm not going to beg for friendship. The other challenges is the criminal record. There's no way to get around it. I tried to ask for a pardon and they told me there's no way I can ask for a pardon until the next ten years. I'm wondering what have I done to deserve this" (C.3 P.1.I.1).

Here, C.3 P.1.I.1 laments how difficult it is for formerly criminalized individuals to secure legitimate formal employment when their criminal record is known. Participants reported that their criminal record leads to stigma not only when they are securing employment but also in their social relations. Participants' difficulty in securing employment affects their successful long-term desistance progress. Other participants mentioned the type of crime they committed as a factor influencing employers' hiring decision. An example:

“No they wouldn't accept me there because of the type of charge. I just got told due to the nature of my offence they wouldn't allow me at reunion. That's what Graham told me. They won't take anyone with any kind of a sexual offence” (C.1 P.3.I.2).

C.1P.3.I.2's chance to secure employment is deemed negatively influenced by their sexual offense. Additional employment barriers, some tied to legislation and others to stigma, emerge when convictions are sexual (Brown et al., 2007). Participants argued that although some employers work to ensure former prisoners' successful reintegration by providing them with employment, these employers too often discriminate against sex offenders, thus perpetuating the prison subculture, which categorizes offenses into hierarchy. Participants denial of job placement due to the sexual offense makes their successful desistance and community reintegration even more difficult.

The above narratives show that even when participants are willing to work, they are shut out of legitimate employment due to their criminal record. This impacts the 'self;' and discourages their interest and determination to secure employment. The difficulty of obtaining employment due to criminal record checks creates discomfort for participants and prevents them from disclosing readily.

4.8.3 UNCOMFORTABLE DISCLOSING

Harding (2003) has shown that some former prisoners feel discomfort with others knowing about their criminal record and adopt a non-disclosure strategy, hoping to free up space for a healthy self-interpretation removed from their criminalizing past. Of the participants, four mentioned feeling anxious discussing their criminal record with people. According to these participants, it takes a lot of effort to explain their criminal record to people, particularly strangers (for instance., *“Not everybody recognize that I’m innocent. I have to explain that to everybody and I’m tired of explaining the same thing over and over to everybody. It brings me back to the stress and the anger and all of that you know? The people who know me and who have worked with me before, they will understand straight away, the people who don’t know me, they doubt. Very few people understand. Those people who know me but not everybody”* [C. 3 P.1.I.1]).

Participants argue how explaining their criminal record as a less serious crime to people not close to them is challenging because these people have a preconceived notion about people with a criminal record. Therefore, it becomes exhaustive to prove themselves as ‘good.’ However, the participants clarify that, unlike these strangers, people who know them are more receptive and are willing to give them a chance, irrespective of their criminal record. Helping strangers understand the criminal record becomes very cumbersome. Expressed differently, others stressed:

“Yeah I get that all the time people don’t know what you’re talking about and I’m just like oh forget it. Yeah I don’t want to talk about it, it’s too complicated. Yeah I get that here I got my problems and I’ll work it out and they want to talk and I’m like how do I talk to you if you don’t understand or have any input for what I’m going through how can you give me an answer” (Cohort 1 P.2.I.2).

C.1.P.2.I.2 expressed how explaining their criminal history to strangers is challenging because many are out of touch with their realities as formerly criminalized persons. Therefore, discussing the criminal record with them is uncomfortable and may be met with prejudice, which creates uncertainty and distrust.

Another participant stated discussing their criminal record with strangers was an invasion of privacy:

“No it’s not humble. It’s not about being humble, it’s about privacy. It’s also about the fact that I don’t know how the customers I deal with everyday would react. I try not to ever be the centerpiece. Which I don’t know if it’s good or bad. It is what it is but I could be the poster boy about what this program is about and it bugs me because I don’t know if I want to be that” (C.1 P.5.I.FINAL).

Although considering modeling desistance, C.1.P.5.I feels doing so would invade their privacy. Thus, they prefer privacy and non-disclosure to avoid soliciting unnecessary attention. Other participants had no problem with disclosure but declared they are willing to only give details about their criminal record to people they trust. For example:

“For me telling people that I was in jail that’s not a problem. It’s just going into details that I don’t really do unless it’s someone I can trust with it. Like the campus president he knows what I was in for. Right down to everything” (C.1 P.3.I.FINAL).

Participants had no concerns about disclosure but were very selective about whom to fully disclose, desiring trust. Overall, participants’ self-narratives reveal a desire for agency and control over their disclosure; participants decide on whom and what to disclose. Thus, they fully disclose the details

of their criminal record to people they trust because they believe these people understand them and are willing to give them a chance. However, they decline to fully disclose in select situations.

Even though participants desire for power over disclosure, the availability of criminal records on the internet makes this impossible for them. As a result, participants are forced to disclose even when they are unwilling, a phenomenon to which we now turn.

4.8.4 FORCED DISCLOSURE

Social media significantly contributes to the unemployment of former prisoners. Hiring managers can easily access information on former prisoners online (Finlay, 2008). A number of participants were forced to disclose their criminal record when seeking employment. Out of these participants, four stated disclosing because their history is easily accessible from online searches by hiring managers. A section of these statements by participants is below:

“Yeah at the same time I have an interview on Thursday with someone and I sent them my resume and they googled my name and they had a lot of concerns because of what came back with my name. And that’s the kind of thing I’m facing for the rest of my life.” (Cohort 1 P.5.I.1)

C.1P.5.I.1’s reveals having no control over disclosure because their criminal record information is accessible online if searched. Even though they have not decided to disclose, participants agency dissipates because when and how to disclose is removed from their discretion. This affects their employment prospects, which may impede desistance. Again, the participant expressed that employers demand disclosure of criminal records during the hiring process. Example:

“Not every job but a lot of jobs which I would think shouldn’t care they do ask. No Frills, it’s on their application. I’m thinking why is it on their application when you’re just

stocking grocery shelves. Why do you need to ask that? Some of the call centers required it, and stuff like that. Those places surprised me that they were asking and I think we have to draw a line that they don't need to know it. These general merchandising jobs I think we as society need to say we need to give people a chance to rebuild their lives, to get a job, support their family and to do all of this. If it's a fraud conviction then maybe you do need to know because you're dealing with money and customers information but overall I don't agree with it" (C1P.5.I.1).

Participants yearned for disclosure of choice, even when unwilling but forced due to the prerequisite of disclosure for most employment. Participants argue that even though employment is necessary for successful reintegration, they are overlooked after disclosure, making their community reintegration difficult as labour force participants.

Overall, participants' self-narratives on disclosure show disclosure as highly centered on the 'self;' authority over what to disclose and whom to disclose is entrenched in personal initiative. However, there is a direct relationship between disclosure and desistance. When participants have control over disclosure—whom and what to disclose- they can manage the potential stigma, thereby securing employment and undergoing long-term successful desistance. On the other hand, when participants' control over disclosure is usurped, and they are removed from employment, it affects their ability to undergo long-term successful desistance.

Disclosure strategies come from within—from the 'self.' Participants reflect on the possible impact a disclosure strategy will have on their chances for long-term employment and how they can live with or without their disclosure. Similarly, desistance from crime is centered on a strong 'self'—desire from within. To experience successful long-term desistance, an individual

should have the personal drive and determination to utilize the available opportunities in the face of obstacles.

Chapter 5—Discussion of Key Findings

5.1 Introduction

Despite a plethora of research conducted to better understand the employment experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals as they navigate their community re-entry, research on the relationship between desistance and disclosure is limited. My research contributes to this gap in the existing literature by examining how desistance and disclosure influence each other as formerly criminalized individuals navigate employment and employment seeking.

According to Goffman (1963), stigma is a discrediting attribute that causes the bearer to be perceived as tainted and discounted. Goffman's (1963) theory on stigma explains the experiences of underprivileged and marginalized people. Thus, I frame the study in stigma theory as per Goffman (1963) using descriptive thematic analysis of participants' desistance narratives related to securing employment. Thematic analysis is a valuable method for uncovering recurrent themes and patterns in data, providing insights into participants' lived experiences, viewpoints, behaviours, and practices. Through the lens of 'experiential' research, my approach sought to provide a deeper understanding of participants' thoughts, emotions, and actions (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Although my results are written with a lens to interpretation, I used the current chapter to summarize my findings in relation to the research questions I posed.

5.2 The role of disclosure in individuals' desistance from crime

I asked, "Do you feel that it was your criminal record that affected your ability to get that job?" to study the contextual relationship between desistance and disclosure during employment processes. I do this by centralizing the 'self' in desistance, disclosure and employment and/or employment seeking. The objective is to unpack the relation between desistance, disclosure, and

employment processes in reflection of their contribution to formerly criminalized individuals' reintegration.

5.3 Interdependent relations between employment, disclosure and desistance

Consistent with previous literature (Gillis & Nafekh, 2005; Visher et al., 2008), I found employment influences reintegration. Participants shared how legitimate stable employment serves as a desistance 'hook,' aiding their community re-entry and desistance journey. Legitimate stable employment provides participants with financial stability, achieved through long-term uninterrupted financial planning. With financial means, participants can meet their basic needs and feel they have a purpose or must resort to illegal means to support their lifestyle financially. In line with past literature (Uggen, 2000; Visher et al., 2008), participants revealed quality employment serves as a turning point toward a conventional lifestyle. Thus, employment provides formerly criminalized individuals with a routine and helps them develop a sense of purpose, making it less likely for them to become involved in criminalized activities and increasing opportunities for desistance (Hirschi, 1969).

Even though my study supports literature backing employment as having a direct relationship with desistance, I also show how securing employment as a formerly criminalized individual is affected by stigma, which influences disclosure. Participants shared that although employment is essential for their successful long-term desistance, they encounter stigma due to their discrediting identity, particularly their criminal history as they experience employment. In line with Harding (2003) findings, participants in my study revealed adopting disclosure strategies help them manage the stigma on their identity. Participants felt although disclosure could potentially eliminate them from employment, having authority over disclosure—to whom and what to disclose—helps reduce the stigma on their identity when securing legitimate employment.

My findings support Goodman (2020), who revealed from a study in the Greater Toronto Area that when formerly incarcerated individuals have control over selective disclosure, they can manage the stigma on their identity and maintain some semblance of privacy and dignity when securing employment. However, my study further shows that securing not only employment but long-term successful desistance from crime as a formerly criminalized individual hinges on control over disclosure. My study revealed that when participants' control over disclosure is supplanted, their discrediting identity is revealed, eliminating them from legitimate employment and making successful long-term desistance harder to achieve. On the other hand, when participants had full control over disclosure and were able to secure employment, successful desistance from crime was more achievable.

5.1.2. Influence of the 'Self'

The 'self,' specifically a desire from within, is central to employment obtainment and reflected by the identity employment provides (e.g., "What do you do?" is a common question), which is also a potential hook for desistance from crime and thus related to disclosure. In agreement with Laub and Sampson (1993) and Uggen (1999) findings, participants in my study showed that with legitimate stable employment, they are motivated to remain focused on their employment goal, and in response, many develop a positive attitude toward work, perhaps due in part to the resultant financial stability work provides. Here, the concept of 'self' is shaped by employment, which further creates routine, productivity, and purpose, possibly decreasing the desire to engage criminally. Giordano et al., (2002) cognitive transformation theory emphasizes the central role of the individual in their journey towards desistance from crime, lending further support to our findings. According to this theory, long-term desistance can only be achieved when formerly criminalized individuals wholeheartedly embrace opportunities for change and actively

utilize them for transitioning away from their criminalized behaviour. Participants used employment to develop a sense of ‘self’ and purpose—participants’ even used employment as a ‘hook’ for change which is then centered on the ‘self.’

Consistent with other studies (Paternoster & Bushway, 2009), I found that desistance from crime depends on ‘self.’ Participants demonstrated intrinsic motivation and a strong commitment to succeed in their desistance journey. They displayed personal drive and determination to pursue lawful avenues for making a living rather than engaging in criminal activities, many changing their lifestyle in many ways. They showcased their readiness to grow prosocially through effort. As Paternoster and Bushway’s (2009) study concluded, desistance is an intentional act of personal commitment to change. Even participants who initially lacked commitment to prosocial behaviour now exhibited the drive and the willingness to remain in legitimate employment to obtain their needs legally. Therefore, participants remain involved in their change toward a conventional lifestyle. Thus, the ‘self’ has influence.

Harding (2003) emphasizes the role of individual agency and rational calculations during disclosure. Participants' narratives showed disclosure as guided from within and based on agency. Some participants in my study exhibited control over disclosure. Participants can determine the extent of information shared and choose to whom they disclose. This is possible when aligned with ‘self.’ Ricciardelli and Mooney (2018) revealed that during disclosure, participants try to have some semblance of control over how others perceive them to manage potentially stigmatized identity. They showed that the decision to disclose is determined by participants’ present circumstances, criminal history, and future aspirations, influencing their disclosure strategies.

I also found that social networks and employment programs are integral in desistance, particularly when participants embrace and use them to support their desire to desist. Family support, employment, and re-entry programs, such as the gatehouse program, are considered essential for long-term desistance. However, the decision to use these resources comes from the ‘self’ i.e., personal drive and the commitment to limited opportunities in hopes for success. For example, participants’ voluntary participation in the gatehouse program evinces their willingness to improve their lives. The role of self, although not centralized in Laub and Sampson’s (1993) study (which sees social structures such as marriage, stable employment, and military service as serving as positive turning points in the adult life course). Yet, my findings are similar to Maruna (2001), who acknowledges the individuals’ active involvement in their desistance, even though the catalyst for change can be an external force. Therefore, this highlights the need for a strong self.

5.2. Changes formerly criminalized individuals undergo during desistance from crime

Participants’ narratives around change are tied to two main findings: identity transformation or changes in how participants see themselves and becoming a wounded healer, referring to formerly criminalized individuals using their experience as former prisoners to help young criminals make a positive change.

5.2.1. Identity transformation

My study found participants’ identities can transform through employment re-entry and with desistance. Participants shifted in their self-perceptions, seeing themselves as able to live law-abidingly. They move away from an identity informed by past criminalized behavior. With this movement, participants evidence drive and commitment to change toward a prosocial lifestyle.

According to participants, incarceration hugely impacted their change in perspective. As a result, participants made progress toward living, evidencing prosocial values.

5.2.2. Wounded healer

Participants, some specifically, sought to engage in regenerative activities. According to Harding (2003), formerly criminalized individuals may strive to create a new identity that merges or aligns their social identity as formerly criminalized individuals with the personal identity of law-abiding citizens by taking on roles that leverage their past criminal experience. Participants expressed an interest in contributing toward positive change in youth who transgress the law. They wanted to offer peer support or mentorship to youth to help redirect them to a prosocial path. Others showed interest in community development programs designed to help disadvantaged community members. Maruna (2001) revealed that helping others makes it possible for formerly criminalized individuals to create a ‘redemption script’ that acknowledges their past criminalized behaviour as a necessary good that has led them to their current prosocial path. Thus, helping others and contributing to community development becomes the ‘hook’ for positive growth and successful desistance from crime.

5.3 Reflection

In this chapter, I present participants’ desistance narratives, disclosure strategies, and employment experiences, finding a relationship between each. Legitimate stable employment serves as a desistance ‘hook’ aiding participants’ community re-entry and desistance journey. Employment provides participants with routine, giving them a sense of purpose and a prosocial way forward.

Similarly, I showed that disclosure influences employment and successful desistance. Formerly incarcerated individuals encounter stigma when securing employment due to their criminal history. However, they adopt disclosure strategies to navigate stigma. I showed how long-term desistance from crime is, at least in part, influenced by participants' control over disclosure. When participants' control over disclosure feels usurped, they may lose their job, or feel their employment status is under threat.

I highlighted the role of 'self' in desistance, disclosure, and employment. Participants used employment as a 'hook' for change. Employment helps them develop a sense of 'self' and purpose. Thus, employment and 'self' are interconnected. Participants exhibited personal drive and determination to succeed by pursuing lawful avenues for making a living. They are influenced by the 'self.' Participants control their positioning in society and self-presentation by choosing when and if to disclose their criminal history.

Finally, I discovered that participants desisting from crime experience a shift in their self-perception. They no longer identify themselves by their past criminalized behaviour and lifestyle. Others became 'wounded healers' by contributing toward positive change in others who transgress the law. These regenerative activities become the 'hook' for successful desistance from crime.

5.4 Recommendations for Policy Implementation

In the current study, I strive to enhance understanding of the employment experiences of criminalized individuals as they navigate community re-entry post-incarceration. Below, I provide three considerations:

1. Employment is centralized for supporting desistance. However, disclosure directly influences employment, leading to successful desistance from crime. Therefore, policies like 'ban the box' should be considered.
2. Participants' narratives suggest a desire to selectively disclose and this should be considered in policies mandating disclosure.
3. Since re-entry organizations are known for helping formerly incarcerated individuals overcome the challenges to their community re-entry, organizations should be encouraged and resourced to offer programs that focus on providing the formerly incarcerated with skills and techniques to help them present themselves as hireable in situations whereby they cannot avoid disclosure.

5.5 Study Limitations and Gaps for Further Research

A notable drawback to the study was attrition; out of the initial 24 participants, only 6 remained for the final follow-up interviews. The attrition occurred due to revoked parole, recidivism, and death. Future longitudinal research requires a larger sample.

My study had a sample size of 24 participants aged between 21 and 53 years. Future researchers can achieve a more diverse and inclusive age group by using a broader sample of participants.

The study's focus was confined to Toronto, Canada's major metropolis. To verify the generalizability of the results, future researchers can replicate the study across various provinces to determine if similar outcomes are achieved or if variations exist.

This study focused much on the individuals' personal motivation and drive to desist. Future researchers can look beyond desistance at the individual level and consider other external factors that can influence the individuals' decision.

CHAPTER SIX- CONCLUSION

The study sheds light on formerly incarcerated individuals' employment experiences as they navigate community re-entry. The study showed most formerly incarcerated individuals experience stigma and adopt disclosure strategies as they negotiate employment. I revealed a gap in scholarship – the connection between desistance and disclosure with employment. My empirical findings conclude that there is a direct relationship between employment, desistance, and disclosure.

I identified employment as key to the reintegration of the formerly incarcerated. Employment serves as a desistance ‘hook’ providing formerly criminalized individuals with a routine and helping them develop a sense of purpose, aiding their community re-entry and successful desistance from crime. Securing employment is challenging for the formerly criminalized due to their discrediting identity—their criminal history—which is influenced by disclosure. Having control over disclosure helps the formerly incarcerated manage the stigma of their discrediting identity, thereby securing employment, which brings about successful desistance from crime.

Another finding is the influence of the ‘self,’ a desire from within, on employment, disclosure, and desistance. Formerly incarcerated individuals used employment to develop a sense of purpose which is centered on the ‘self.’ Also, desistance from crime is centered on a strong “self” through the formerly criminalized drive and determination to succeed using legitimate avenues to make a living. Similarly, the ‘self’ influences disclosure. This is shown by the formerly criminalized ability to have control over disclosure. Moreover, most formerly criminalized

individuals undergo identity transformation i.e., changes in their self-perception during their desistance from crime.

Smooth community re-entry of the formerly criminalized individuals requires careful consideration of the interplay between employment, desistance, and disclosure. This study placed much emphasis on the individuals' personal motivation and drive to desist. Future researchers can look beyond desistance at the individual level and consider other external factors that can influence the individuals' decision.

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval Letter



**Interdisciplinary Committee on
Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)**

St. John's, NL Canada A1C 5S7
Tel: 709 864-2561 icehr@mun.ca
www.mun.ca/research/ethics/humans/icehr

ICEHR Number:	20222585-AR
Approval Period:	February 25, 2022 – February 28, 2023
Funding Source:	
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Rosemary Ricciardelli Department of Sociology
Title of Project:	<i>IDENTITY MANAGEMENT POST INCARCERATION: THE ROLE OF DISCLOSURE FOR DESISTANCE</i>

Title of Parent Project:	<i>Masculinity, risk, desistance, and lived experiences: incarceration and beyond</i>
ICEHR Number:	<i>20140465-AR</i>

February 25, 2022

Vincent Essandoh
Department of Sociology
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Dear Vincent Essandoh:

Thank you for your submission to the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) seeking ethical clearance for the above-named research project. The Committee has reviewed the proposal and agrees that the project is consistent with the guidelines of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2). *Full ethics clearance is granted to February 28, 2023.* ICEHR approval applies to the ethical acceptability of the research, as per Article 6.3 of the TCPS2. Researchers are responsible for adherence to any other relevant University policies and/or funded or non-funded agreements that may be associated with the project. If funding is obtained subsequent to ethics approval, you must submit a Funding and/or Partner Change Request to ICEHR so that this ethics clearance can be linked to your award.

The TCPS2 **requires** that you **strictly adhere to the protocol and documents as last reviewed** by ICEHR. If you need to make additions and/or modifications, you must submit an Amendment Request with a description of these changes, for the Committee's review of potential ethical issues, before they may be implemented. Submit a Personnel Change Form to add or remove project team members and/or research staff. Also, to inform ICEHR of any unanticipated occurrences, an Adverse Event Report must be submitted with an indication of how the unexpected event may affect the continuation of the project.

The TCPS2 **requires** that you submit an Annual Update to ICEHR before February 28, 2023. If you plan to continue the project, you need to request renewal of your ethics clearance and include a brief summary on the progress of your research. When the project no longer involves contact with human participants, is completed and/or terminated, you are **required** to provide an annual update with a brief final summary and your file will be closed. All post-approval ICEHR event forms noted above must be submitted by selecting the **Applications: Post-Review** link on your Researcher Portal homepage. We wish you success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Kelly Blidook, Ph.D.
Chair, ICEHR

KB/bc

cc: Supervisor – Dr. Rosemary Ricciardelli, Department of Sociology

ICEHR Clearance # 20222585-AR – EXTENDED

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dgulliver@mun.ca [via](mailto:dgulliver@mun.ca) researchservicesoffice.com

Feb 22, 2023,
9:38 AM

to me, Ricciardelli, dgulliver



ICEHR Approval #:	20222585-AR
Researcher Portal File #:	20222585
Project Title:	<i>IDENTITY MANAGEMENT POST INCARCERATION: THE ROLE OF DISCLOSURE FOR DESISTANCE</i>
Associated Funding:	Not Funded
Supervisor:	Dr. Rosemary Ricciardelli
Clearance expiry date:	February 29, 2024

Dear Vincent Essandoh:

Thank you for your response to our request for an annual update advising that your project will continue without any changes that would affect ethical relations with human participants.

On behalf of the Chair of ICEHR, I wish to advise that the ethics clearance for this project has been extended to **February 29, 2024**. The *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2) requires that you submit another annual update to ICEHR on your project prior to this date.

We wish you well with the continuation of your research.

Sincerely,

DEBBY GULLIVER

Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR)

Memorial University of Newfoundland

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Thank you for the update.

Thank you!

Thank you for informing me.

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