



Chapter 11

'Less than the average citizen': stigma, role transition and the civic reintegration of convicted felons

*Christopher Uggen, Jeff Manza and
Angela Behrens*

Previous research in life-course criminology has shown how desistance from crime is linked to the successful transition to adult roles (Sampson and Laub 1993; Uggen 2000). In particular, offenders who establish a stable work history and a strong marriage appear to have better post-release adjustment than those who have yet to enter such work and family roles. More generally, the transition to adulthood is characterized by the assumption of age-graded roles and the attainment of specific behavioural markers. Completing formal education, obtaining a full-time job, marrying and voting are all markers signalling adult status, although their sequence and timing may vary over time and space (Shanahan 2000). Specifying the social-psychological process underlying role transition among offenders has therefore emerged as a critical question for theory and empirical research on the desistance process (Shover 1996; Maruna 2001).

In this chapter we unite and extend these lines of research in two ways. First, in addition to work and family, we suggest that *civic reintegration* represents a third important reintegrative domain, one not examined by previous researchers. Following Maruna's contention that desistance is only possible when ex-offenders 'develop a coherent prosocial identity for themselves' (2001: 7), we specify the varieties of civic participation that contribute to such an identity and their subjective meaning to ex-felons. Secondly, building on the work of Matsueda and Heimer (1997), we show how a symbolic interactionist theory of role transition across socioeconomic, familial and civic domains is especially useful in explaining identity shifts over the life course. Although we do not attempt a rigorous empirical test of this theory in this chapter, we



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will elucidate the model using illustrative evidence taken from intensive interviews with a small sample of convicted felons. Based on these interview data and our conceptual model, we suggest that self-concept as a deviant or conforming citizen is the principal mechanism linking adult role transition and desistance.

A life-course model of role transition and desistance from crime

Symbolic interactionist theories of crime hold that a person's self-concept as deviant or law-abiding is developed through processes of role-taking and social interaction (Cohen 1965; Thornberry 1987; Matsueda 1992; Matsueda and Heimer 1997). For example, released offenders who are embedded in networks of criminal activity are likely to take the role of felon when considering illicit activity (Matsueda and Heimer 1997). When repeated over time this process increases the salience of a deviant identity and strengthens role commitment and social relationships with others in the network (see, e.g. Stryker and Burke 2000). As persons identify and commit to such roles, they become subject to informal social controls (Heimer and Matsueda 1994). To explain changes in offending with age, symbolic interactionists look to the different deviant and conforming roles that individuals are likely to take at each life-course stage – the 'socially recognized and meaningful categories of persons' it is possible to be at a particular age (Cohen 1965: 12). The choice of roles in a given situation is the product of the relative salience of deviant or law-abiding identities, which, in turn, are functions of social relationships and role commitments.

Symbolic interactionists emphasize adult work and family roles in explaining desistance and the transition away from crime (Matsueda and Heimer 1997). They call particular attention to the changing identities that accompany these new roles, and the stabilization of new identities through role commitments (Schwartz and Stryker 1970; Matsueda and Heimer 1997). In most cases, commitment to work roles (as co-worker, supervisor or employee) and family roles (as spouse or parent) reduces the likelihood of criminal behaviour, although precocious or 'off-time' events (Hagestad and Neugarten 1985) such as teenage pregnancy may solidify already marginalized identities and foster criminal behaviour.

Adding civic reintegration to a conceptual model of role transition

Much of the empirical research literature has similarly focused on work



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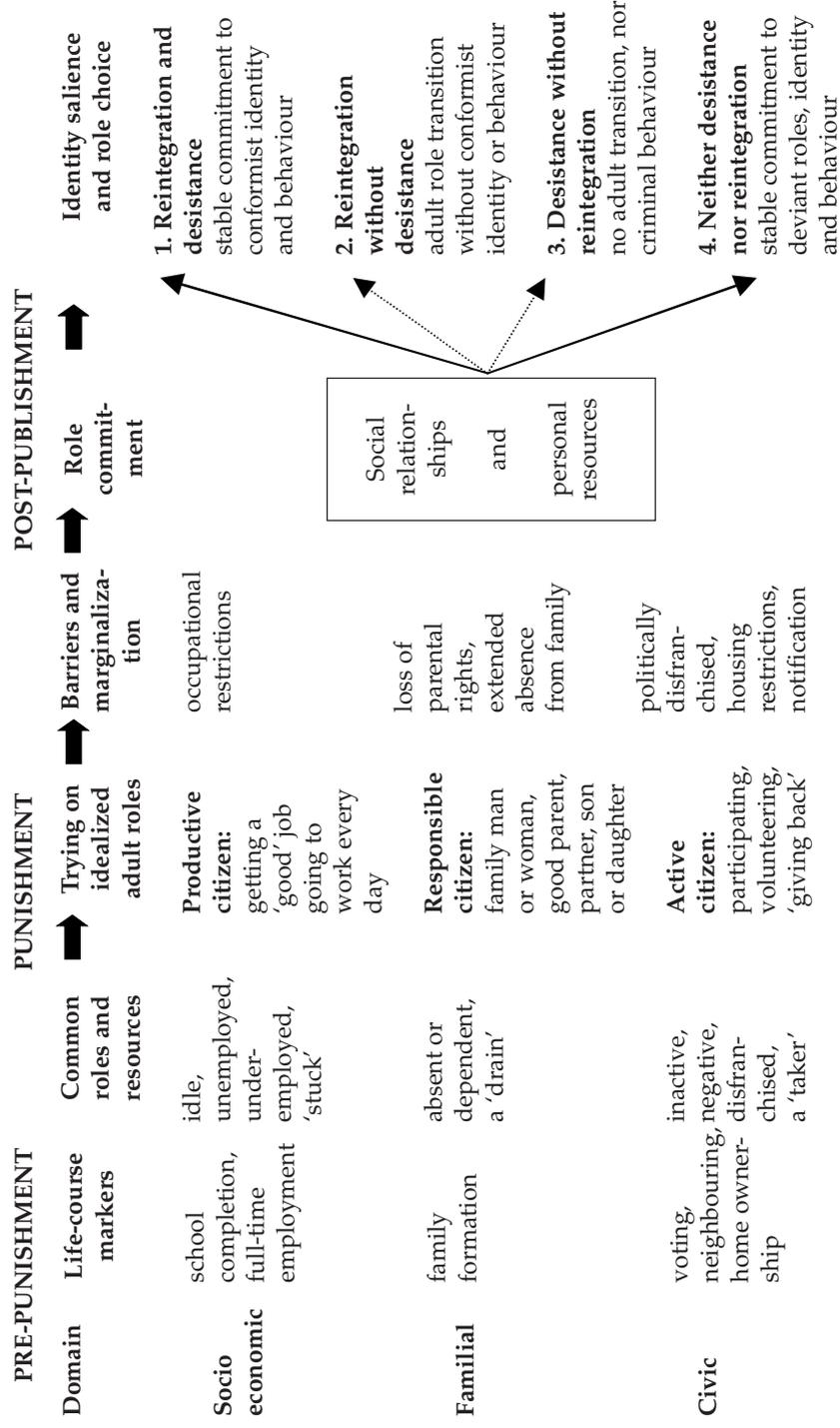
(Sampson and Laub 1990; Uggen 2000) or family (Laub *et al.* 1998) roles. Civic participation and reintegration into community life, however, have received comparatively little attention, although the desire to 'be productive and give something back to society' appears to be critical to the desistance process (Maruna 2001: 88). Moreover, criminal offenders, and crime itself for that matter, are explicitly defined in relation to the state and its citizens. We suggest that civic reintegration and the citizen role, as well as work and family roles, may prove central to successful reintegration. In fact, we will argue that work and family roles may also be subsumed under a general 'law-abiding adult citizen' identity construct.

As we point out elsewhere (Uggen *et al.* 2000), criminal offenders are less distinguished by class or by social status than by their legal relationship with the state and their separation from their fellow citizens. The concept of citizenship is particularly relevant here. The diverse models of citizenship that have been developed in recent years have, broadly speaking, distinguished two central components (Shafir 1998; Manza 2001): citizenship as a set of entitlements that citizens acquire by virtue of membership in the polity (e.g. Marshall 1950); and citizenship as practice, something which is achieved through virtuous action or participation in the community in one way or another, as communitarians have argued (e.g. Oldfield 1990). In his famous mid-century writings on citizenship and social class, T.H. Marshall argued that 'citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties to which the status is endowed' (1950: 28). Yet a felony conviction often strips the offender of the most basic rights of citizenship, including the right to vote, the right to hold elective office and the right to serve on juries. Moreover, the enduring stigma of a felony conviction imposes restrictions on parental rights, work opportunities, housing choices and myriad other social relationships, isolating ex-felons from their communities and fellow citizens. In short, both the *rights* and *capacities* of ex-offenders to attain full citizenship are threatened.

A model of role transition and reintegration

Adding civic reintegration to life-course models yields a new picture of how roles and identities interact with work, family and community to shape the prospects for desistance. Our provisional model of identity transformation across these domains is shown in Figure 11.1. Prior to formal sanctioning, many criminal offenders occupy marginal social

Figure 11 Roles and identity transformation of convicted felons across socioeconomic, familial, and civic domains





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positions and few have attained standard life-course markers of the transition to adulthood (see, e.g. United States Department of Justice 1993, 2000b; Uggen and Massoglia 2002). Many are idle or under-employed with few close family or community ties. Even when they have attained established markers, such as full-time employment or parenthood, their criminal histories suggest that they have not always taken the role of the 'good citizen.'

During the process of punishment, however, felons are often eager to establish or re-establish adult roles as workers, family men and women, and citizens. For example, a recent study of life narratives of 300 low-income fathers finds that many former prisoners experience incarceration as a period in which there is space for reflection and recommitment to rebuilding broken family ties (Edin *et al.* 2001). Although the felons we interviewed recognize the stigma of a felony conviction and the civil disabilities imposed on them, we will show how they have little difficulty taking idealized roles such as 'family man,' 'good worker,' or 'active citizen' in conversation.

Their desire to claim membership in such categories, however sincere, is not founded on a solid base of training or socialization for these roles. Trying on a conformist identity in prison, as a purely cognitive process, is much easier than establishing the role commitments that will elevate the salience of this identity and guide behaviour upon release. Offenders may lack both the personal resources and social relationships necessary to sustain an identity as a law-abiding citizen, as well as a realistic understanding of what the roles themselves entail. Nevertheless, in our view such expressions constitute more than fictive storytelling or 'fantasizing' (Snow and Anderson 1987). We believe that trying on the roles of productive citizen, responsible citizen and active citizen provides, at minimum, an imaginative rehearsal for their assumption upon release.

After release, however, establishing commitment to such pro-social roles and thereby securing a conformist identity is undermined by the stigma of a felony conviction, as well as any pre-existing personal or social deficits. Ex-felons face additional barriers as collateral consequences of their felony conviction, including occupational restrictions, loss of parental rights or standing, political disfranchisement and other formal and informal social stigma. Moreover, post-release adjustment is complicated by the abrupt discontinuity between pre-punishment and post-punishment roles and social positions.

Once offenders complete their sentence and bump up against their own limitations and the stigma of a felony conviction, the relative



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saliency of deviant and law-abiding identities is likely to shift. Their choice of roles in given situations – and, ultimately, their likelihood of desistance from crime – is a product of identity saliency and the role commitments they have established. Although we expect most persons who have established role commitments as law-abiding citizens to desist from crime, it is useful to distinguish between conceptions of societal reintegration and desistance from crime. Adopting the roles of productive, responsible and active citizen across work, family and community domains will generally increase felons' likelihood of behavioural desistance from crime because people seek to create and maintain stable and coherent identities (Schwartz and Stryker 1970: 15). We illustrate the greater probability of congruence in Figure 11.1 with solid lines for agreement between desistance and reintegration and dashed lines where they are in conflict. According to our model, the latter incongruent role choices and identities are likely to represent unstable or transitional states.

Albert Cohen once described the process of role commitment as becoming 'hooked' on a role (1966: 101). Once 'hooked,' new identities are fashioned out of new roles. 'Whole bundles' of behavior inconsistent with the claims of the new self are cast aside, and new bundles that are expressive or supportive of that role are picked up (1965: 12–13). Prisoners may experiment with new roles and try on new identities, though they lack the network of social relationships and other resources necessary to establish commitment to them. The likelihood that a fragile pro-social identity will strengthen and take root upon release is therefore a function of resources and role commitments: ex-felons must become a productive citizen at work, a responsible citizen at home and an active citizen in the community.

In short, work, family and community inhibit (or promote) crime by changing the way that offenders think about themselves as citizens. We do not view these role behaviours and reintegrative domains as fixed or isolated. To the contrary, each domain is mutually reinforcing, with work and family combining in the breadwinner role, work and community in the volunteer role and community and family in the informal 'neighbouring' role. Following Schwartz and Stryker (1970), some of the fundamental assumptions of this model are that people seek stable and coherent identities, that these identities are motivational and can impel behaviour and that identities are fixed or stabilized by role commitments. Although identity shifts may appear to occur rapidly among convicted felons, role commitments and the relative saliency of these identities will only change gradually after sustained social interaction.



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Working hypotheses

From this model, we offer the following working hypotheses:

- H₁: felons are likely to be delayed or 'off-time' with respect to standard life-course markers of the transition to adulthood (see, e.g. Uggen and Massoglia 2002).
- H₂: the stigma of a felony conviction imposes additional barriers to establishing or maintaining successful adult roles.
- H₃: felons link adult role behaviour to desistance from crime, both generally when talking about other felons and personally in discussing their own life histories.
- H₄: the primary idealized adult roles within the socioeconomic, familial and civic reintegrative domains include the productive citizen at work, the responsible citizen at home and the active citizen in the community.
- H₅: convicted felons may envision themselves in these idealized roles and express a sincere desire to assume them, but they often lack the resources and social relationships necessary to establish role commitments and solidify new identities.
- H₆: the mechanism linking adult roles and criminal behaviour is one's generalized self-concept as a deviant or conforming citizen.

Data and sample characteristics

We conducted 33 semi-structured interviews with convicted felons in Minnesota during the spring of 2001. The interviews were undertaken as part of a larger project examining the consequences of felon disenfranchisement laws in the USA (Uggen and Manza 2000; Manza and Uggen forthcoming). Prisoners, parolees and felony probationers were asked about their voting behavior, their participation in political and civic life before and after conviction and their attitudes about crime and community. Each taped interview lasted approximately one hour, with the printed transcripts ranging from 16 to 44 typed pages.

Overall, 10 female prison inmates, 13 male prison inmates, 7 male probationers and 3 male parolees were interviewed at two state correctional facilities and one county community corrections office. Although the interviews were conducted within these facilities, we arranged for a private room with a closed door so that correctional and administrative staff would not overhear the interview questions or responses. The volunteer respondents ranged from 20 to 54 years of age,



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with a racial distribution of 22 white respondents, 6 African-American respondents and 5 Native American respondents. To protect the participants' confidentiality, we do not identify their race or real names when quoting from the interview transcripts. All major offence categories were represented among the interviewees, although most had been convicted of at least one violent crime.

Elsewhere we have used survey data to explore the impact of a felony conviction on a range of measures of civic and political participation (Uggen and Manza 2000; Manza and Uggen forthcoming). However, the limited survey data available have some significant limitations: the underlying factors accounting for the relationship between variables (in this case felony convictions and civic participation) remain opaque; and the data on hand are limited to analysing a one-way causal flow, the impact of conviction on participation. The in-depth interviews we rely on in this chapter allow us both to probe more deeply into how different statuses are related to behaviour and simultaneously consider the impact of civic participation on desistance. To be sure, we cannot make strong claims about the reliability and external validity of the interview data, given our semi-structured interview format and the non-representative sample. Instead, we will use these data as illustrative evidence to elucidate the concepts and causal connections we hypothesize in our model of identity, citizenship and desistance. We organize the interview data around the three domains and role identities discussed above: socioeconomic reintegration and the productive citizen role; familial reintegration and the responsible citizen role; and civic reintegration and the active citizen role. We discuss the barriers to establishing role commitments within each domain, its connection to desistance from crime and the resulting implications for the felon's identity as a law-abiding citizen.

Socioeconomic reintegration and the productive citizen role

Apart from their limited human capital and social networks, a felony conviction imposes additional barriers to employment for the ex-offender, such as employer reluctance to hire convicted felons and occupational licensing restrictions (Uggen 1999; Holzer *et al.* 2001; Pager 2001). The probationers and parolees interviewed were currently facing these problems while the prisoners interviewed were well aware of the work-related obstacles awaiting them upon release. Both current inmates and those under community supervision spoke about the



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dominance of the felon label when seeking employment. For example, Karen, a 39-year-old female inmate, described her experiences as follows:

What is it, the fourth question of every job interview? 'Have you ever been convicted of a crime?' They ask you that before they ask you for your prior work history or your education. All that's on the second page, so they read 'felon' before they ever read that side.

Because of such resistance to hiring convicted felons and their resulting restriction to secondary sector or 'survival' jobs, many felt they had 'lost the right to get a good job that's not paying minimum wage' (Michael, male probationer, aged 23) and were 'forced to take [a] lower position' (Travis, male parolee, aged 27). Most of the interviewees who presently had jobs or had arranged employment from prison relied on their limited social networks: family members and a few close friends and, in one case, a well connected fellow prisoner. Offenders generally have few 'weak ties' (Granovetter 1973, 1974) to acquaintances that would help them expand their limited social circle to access jobs of higher quality.

Felons who have been embedded in dense networks in the illegal economy may believe that their illegal opportunities exceed their legitimate earning potential (Sullivan 1989; Bourgois, 1995; Sullivan, 1989). With illegal opportunities more readily available, such offenders may have only vague plans for non-criminal employment. Rita, a 41-year-old female prisoner, exemplifies these points:

I don't know what I'm going to be able to do to make money unless I go out and sell drugs again ... And the easiest thing for me to do would be to go back out and go stay with my dope people. And I can make money, you know? And I mean I know how to make money illegally and do it good, but that will bring me back here ... I'm one of them that's pretty much doomed to fail unless I get really lucky out there and find a job right away ... I mean I'm gonna get a job that probably, if I'm lucky, make \$8 or \$9 an hour, which I can go make a drug deal in a half-hour and make \$300, you know?

Struggling to make ends meet, one probationer noted: 'You gotta survive, you need money. So a lot of people resort to crime ... So, you know, do what you gotta do' (Peter, male probationer, aged 24).

Lacking both legitimate networks and opportunities and hoping to avoid returning to illegal activities, some of our interviewees expressed



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concern about recent policy debates over welfare reform. Sally, a 30-year-old incarcerated mother, explained:

It's really gonna affect us. You know we get out, we're felons. It's hard to get a job for some of us ... Even though we are willing to work, it's hard to get a job. We can get a job paying \$7, \$8 an hour, but that doesn't feed me, my child, and pay the rent and pay the bills.

Even the limited forms of social provision available to low-income families in the American welfare system can seem like lifesavers when opportunities in the legal job market are so severely constrained.

In addition to the structural constraints they identify, convicted offenders must also overcome the role symbolism embodied in the generalized felon label (Cohen 1965). Several of our interviewees recognized an explicit contradiction between their identity as a felon and their identity as a productive citizen by taking the role of potential employers. The over-riding dominance of the felon label, particularly in relation to the world of work, is especially painful for many ex-offenders. Karen catalogues her positive attributes in the excerpt below, but notes that her status as a felon will likely take precedence when she seeks employment:

It doesn't matter what your felony conviction is, it's still there. So it doesn't matter what that says. I have to realize I am more than what is written on and in paper about me. *I am more than a felon*. I am educated, I am intelligent, I'm hard-working, I'm a good mother, I'm dependable, all of those things. I don't have to worry about parole telling me I'm a felon because there's gonna be a ton of other people that are going to say, 'You're a felon'. ... You know, and without that, if you can't stand up for yourself and say, '*I understand that you're concerned about hiring me as a felon*', it doesn't matter that I'm college-educated, graduated valedictorian of my class. None of those things matter because 'felon' is what matters. (Prisoner, aged 39, emphasis added)

Many of our interviewees spoke of their fatigue with 'street life' and a desire to adopt adult socioeconomic roles (see also Shover 1996). Despite his belief that a man his age should have a 'decent job' and should be 'going to work every day,' Michael felt 'stuck' in street life:



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Street life will catch up with you real quick ... I've been doing this since I was 13 and I am truly tired, and I'm 24, and I just feel like I'm just wore out. [I feel] like *I'm just stuck* in the middle [of street life]. Stuck in the middle. I don't want to be here, I don't want to be doing this, I want to get out, but there are certain things that will always be tied to you forever ... I caught a brand new case like three days ago, for narcotics. Now I've got to go to trial with that...so this could be a turning point. If I get convicted, I don't know how I'm going to do the time. For real. (Male probationer, aged 23¹; emphasis added)

Most of the jobs that ex-offenders with limited skills are able to obtain upon leaving prison are very poor (Uggen 1999). But even a low-paying job can be connected to the broader goal of shaking a felon identity if it evokes a sense of becoming a productive citizen and returning something back to the community. Consider the case of Lori, a 37-year-old prisoner. Working with children at a park in her community helped change the way she thought of herself and her identity as an addicted felon:

I worked at the parks board ... You take someone like me and you put me working with kids. I tell you kids can get a whole lot of guidance from some of us ... And the reason that I was working at [name of park] was because the person that was in charge of that park, he was at one of my [Narcotics Anonymous] meetings. And he said 'You'd be ideal at this.' ... I think that was the touchstone in my life when I knew that I was really in recovery. Because – you know what? Drug addiction – any kind of addiction you got going on is a real selfish situation. It's about you and your shit, and that's it. You know? The world can fall off, drop off, and quit breathing. I gotta get my money and get my dope or whatever, you know? It's really, really selfish ... I was able to start stepping outside of myself. ... When the healing really starts to begin within you, you feel you have something to give, and you know *you have something to offer this world*. And you want to put it out there ... As my sobriety got better and clearer, I was saying, you know what? *My identity as an offender didn't come into play*. It was like, 'Who cares? Big deal! It has nothing to do with me now.' And I'll tell you what – it won't have anything to do with me when I leave here. This is just something that's happening right now. (Emphasis added)



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Lori's job is somewhat unique in that working with children reinforced the connection between work, community and a sense of self-worth that was not available as drug addict and petty criminal.²

Lori's comments exemplify the power of visible connections between the socioeconomic and civic domains. Other interviewees discussed the relationship between work and family life. For example, the reflected appraisals of children and other family members – and their perceived reactions to an ex-offender's socioeconomic role behaviour – may be especially important for role identities. Scott, a 26-year-old male probationer with children, discussed how becoming a 'family man' made legitimate work more attractive to him:

I think being a family man has changed me in that [career] way. To want to be – to get my money right because *I don't want to look like a piece of nothing in front of my kids*. So stuff like that has to do with pride, too. That helps, man. That helps to have a family. (Emphasis added)

Familial reintegration and the responsible citizen role

Reintegration into family life also poses obstacles to convicted felons, as they are often separated from family members for extended periods of time (cf. Edin *et al.* 2001). This physical and emotional distance is experienced as a 'huge loss' (Pamela, female prisoner, aged 49); several asserted that while their crimes may have appeared to be 'victimless,' their families were victimized by their absence:

You know they say my crime is a victimless crime, okay? Because it's conspiracy to commit, it's nothing that I overtly did. It was not an action that I committed. But you know what? There is victims: my parents, my father-in-law, my mother-in-law, my four children. There are victims because I'm not there to help them through any education. I'm not there to give them their loving, nurturing that children deserve at tender ages. Even at 21, 22, they still need mom's guidance. And, you know, my parents depended on me to do a lot of things (Mary, female prisoner, aged 40)

Even more extreme than the temporary separation all inmates experience, however, some offenders may be permanently severed from their families after their parental rights are legally terminated. For many



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of the female inmates, this process 'shatters' (Mary, female prisoner, aged 40) their identities as mothers. It is possible for incarcerated parents to maintain legal custody of their children, but the general consensus among inmates was that, 'it's pretty near impossible' (Lori, female prisoner, aged 37). One woman felt fortunate that her father was able to adopt her son once her rights were terminated, and another remarked that 'if my ex-husband knew about them laws, he'd probably have me lose my parental rights' (Rita, female prisoner, aged 41).

The legal termination of rights and the perceived finality of this act strip away felons' claims on the title, if not the role or identity, of parent. Unmarried women, in particular, are at great risk of losing parental rights (Hagan and Dinovitzer 2000). For many of the women interviewed, the termination of parental rights, and even the temporary separation from their children, was an extremely sensitive subject that was difficult to discuss with a male stranger. Several female respondents established verbal distance in talking about their children, shifting from the first person 'I' to the third person of 'women,' 'they,' or 'she,' or by talking about specific women besides themselves. Lori related her reaction to losing custody of her son and her subsequent breakdown before directing the conversation away from herself and towards women in general:

It's so aimed at hurting people's hearts and souls that they're not getting – I remember when they took my son from me. Let me tell you something – I was literally nuts for two years. I didn't give a shit. I did as I pleased when I pleased, and I didn't give a shit about the consequences. I was literally nuts for like two years, you know? ... After six months if you ain't got your shit together here – I think the women with kids, that's such a key component of their life, and then you take that away. I mean *a lot of these women, their children are like their sole identity.* (Prisoner, aged 37, emphasis added)

Mary, another incarcerated mother, offered similar comments:

And it crushes a lot of women. I mean *their whole world gets totally shattered in here because they don't have their children nearby.* Or their children are in different homes and things like that. There's a lady here who has four children, and they're each in a different foster home. When she gets out is she going to be able to collect her children back? I don't know. (Female prisoner, aged 40)

The acute pain experienced by the temporary or permanent suspension



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of parental rights has been reported by other analysts, and is one of the hidden social costs of high incarceration rates (Smith and Goretzky Elstein 1994; Gabel and Johnston 1995; Amnesty International, 1999; Hagan and Dinovitzer 2000; US Department of Justice 2000a; Enos 2001). Additionally, however, our interviews underscore the very strongly expressed desire of many offenders with children to be good role models – and the conflict between family roles and deviant roles emerged repeatedly in the interviews. Several respondents emphasized becoming a conforming role model for their children:

Otherwise what's gonna happen? Your children are going to end up where you've been. You know that's the last thing you want. You want them to learn from your mistakes. You don't want them to copy your mistakes. (Mary, female prisoner, aged 40)

Despite a sincere (if abstract) desire to become a responsible parent, however, offenders may not have experienced the anticipatory socialization that would ease their assumption of parental roles. Thomas, a 23-year-old parolee who described his father as a 'pimp' and 'player,' stressed how his childhood experiences made it difficult for him to assume a responsible parental role, but noted that fatherhood was changing him none the less:

Because you can't be a father in jail. But I ain't never had a father. I never had a father, was out doing God knows what. And I don't want my children to have to go through that ... 'Cause you can party 'til your head fall off, but you know it ain't all about that. I wanted to live the fast life, but it ain't all about that anymore. There's consequences to that. There's consequences, and I paid them. I paid for that. I have been shot at, I have been in prison ... so that's where my mind was set at ... [Having a family] changes a lot of things. It changes my opinions [and] views, my belief system, things like that. (Emphasis added)

Such reflections on emerging family roles as responsible citizens – as parents, partners, adult children or siblings – are representative of the interviews and appear to be central to a developing identity as a conforming citizen. For most of the men interviewed, this change was either relatively recent, still occurring or a change that they foresaw in the future as they step into familial roles (Edin *et al.* 2001). In fact, while few male felons discussed their children, several described fatherhood in terms of idealized role behaviour. Scott, the young probationer quoted



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earlier, planned to show his children his court papers when they reached adolescence to document his failures, as well as his later efforts to assume a law-abiding paternal role:

I got two kids. And I always wanted to be that neighbor who *takes the kids to soccer* and stuff like that. Or the guy who *comes home from work and plays ball with his son*. And there was a couple neighbor kids, you know, take them all to a game or something ... But it just takes time, doing the right thing ... I've got a life and I'm doing things for myself. I go to this domestic abuse project thing because I was involved in some other problems with my fiancée so I'm almost completed with that. And I went through alcohol treatment 'cause I used to drink alcohol and smoke marijuana. I completed that, it's been almost a year now. So some changes I've made in my life, I feel like I'm going towards the right thing. (Emphasis added)

One additional aspect of family ties is important to mention. Our respondents often expressed a new or renewed appreciation for their importance and gratitude that their parents, partners or children remain in their lives. Pamela, an incarcerated mother who retains legal custody of her daughter but is currently incarcerated over 1,000 miles away from her, expressed gratitude for what is left in her life:

Yes, I'm in prison, and yes, I lost my daughter and that comes up, but I still have a lot that God's left me to work with. You know? And I focus, I choose to focus on that. And those are resources that I can lean on when – you know go to a nursing home, there's people that have no one. *I have my family*. You know I have God. I have a lot to give people. (Emphasis added)

As this excerpt illustrates, the chance to reunite with their families may provide motivation and social support for offenders facing an otherwise uncertain future.

Civic reintegration and the active citizen role

In addition to socioeconomic and familial reintegration, convicted felons are expected to return to their communities and either resume or begin their lives as active and law-abiding citizens. Their prior behaviour and stigmatized current status as ex-felons, however, often limits participation. As one male noted, 'there's too many sanctions against me



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for me to be an active part of the community' (Paul, male prisoner, aged 37). Some sized themselves up from the perspective of others in their communities:

They say, 'Okay, I want you back into the community,' and then you point your fingers at them and keep your fingers pointed at them and say, 'This guy did a bad thing'. ... Make it easier to come back into society instead of saying, 'We're accepting you back, but you can't do this and you can't do that, and you can't do this. You can walk around our streets, but after 9:00 at night, *I want you to be out of sight so the good people of, you know, Pleasant Acres won't see you*'. (Roger, male probationer, aged 54, emphasis added)

For you to make a transition from prison and come out here and they expect you, '*you need to do this*' and '*you need to do that*'. You know, you're telling me to do so much, and there's only so much that I can do. I don't have too many options. I'm a felon. (Thomas, male parolee, aged 23, emphasis added)

People just look at you like, 'I can't believe you. I can't believe you. *Look at her. Oh my God, she went to prison*'. (Rachel, female prisoner, aged 20, emphasis added)

'You broke the law, you bad. You broke the law, bang – *you're not a part of us anymore*'. (Henry, male parolee, aged 25, emphasis added)

The felons we interviewed often cited loss of privacy and concern for personal safety as an additional barrier they face in the community 'because it's on record. It's public information. So ... it's really difficult to get somewhere' (Scott, male probationer, aged 26). Susan, a 31-year-old inmate, discussed how her public identification as a murderer makes it difficult for her to establish an identity as anything other than a murderer:

It's kind of scary now for felons, with the internet ... if I'm going to be on there, you know, if people can know my address and stuff. That kind of makes me want to go back underground in a criminal element. I mean, *I was, I'm a, I committed a murder. I'm not a murderer 'cause that's not what I am*. But I did do a big mistake once, and, you know, a lot of people like to judge you on your past mistakes. And they like to label you and not see you, but that's not the totality of my being, you know? I'm, I'm a really good person. I have a good



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heart, and a lot of people are like, 'Yeah, right.' *But what if it's true?* ... You're going [to] squelch that, you're not going to let that happen, you're not going to let me be good because you have these labels on me? And you're going to make it hard for me to get a job, and you're going to make it hard for me to get a place to rent? And if my address is on the internet, what if some local renegade kind of, I don't know, people, just want to go kill an ex-con, or something or go harass them? I mean ... I mean, that's scary to me. (Emphasis added)

Such concerns about privacy and public exposure are particularly acute for offenders formally classified as sex offenders, or for one of our interviewees, as a 'sexually dangerous predator' under Minnesota law. Their situation raises unique concerns because registration laws give them an extra 'black mark' (Alan, male prisoner, aged 38) and hyper-stigmatized status. 'They notify everybody – your community, all the schools, all businesses, everything. They just blurt you out there to everybody. And it really screws your chances up' (Dennis, male prisoner, aged 23). They face further scrutiny in comparison to other felons because the stigma of their crime is so powerful that 'a person would rather have a murderer living next-door than me' (Alan, male prisoner, aged 38).

The reaction felons receive when re-entering the community may instil an ongoing sense of punishment that goes beyond anything court imposed. Their hostile reception in the community may restrict informal neighbouring and other civic participation, but felons must also contend with formal sanctions that literally disfranchise them. At present, 48 of the 50 US states bar some or all convicted felons from voting – in most cases including those on probation or parole (as is the case in Minnesota). At least ten of those states also bar ex-felons from voting, two other states permanently disfranchise recidivists and one more state requires a post-release waiting period (Uggen and Manza 2000). Losing the right to vote incited a range of emotion because 'on top of the whole messy pile, there it was. Something that was hardly mentioned, and it meant a lot' (Steven, male probationer, aged 52). One prisoner described how the loss of voting rights is part of a larger package of restrictions that make it impossible for her to become a 'normal citizen':

I think that just getting back in the community and being a contributing member is difficult enough ... And saying, 'Yeah, we don't value your vote either because you're a convicted felon from



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how many years back', okay? ... But I, hopefully, have learned, have paid for that and *would like to someday feel like a, quote, 'normal citizen,' a contributing member of society*, and you know that's hard when every election you're constantly being reminded, 'Oh yeah, that's right, I'm ashamed'. ... It's just like a little salt in the wound. You've already got that wound and it's trying to heal and it's trying to heal, and you're trying to be a good taxpayer and be a homeowner ... Just one little vote, right? But that means a lot to me. ... It's just loss after loss after loss. And this is just another one. Another to add to the pile ... When I said salt in the wound, the wound's already there. Me being able to vote isn't going to just whip up and heal that wound ... And I am looking forward to and trying to prepare to be that productive member of society that I've always wanted to be. I have this wound and it's healing ... But it's like it's still open enough so that you telling me that I'm still really bad because I can't [vote] is like making it sting again. It's like haven't I paid enough yet? ... You can't really feel like a part of your government because they're still going like this, 'Oh, you're bad. Remember what you did way back then? Nope, you can't vote'. (Pamela, prisoner, aged 49, emphasis added)

These sentiments were echoed throughout our interviews. Many suggested in one way or another that the right to vote was fundamental to citizenship and a pro-social identity, even if they had never exercised that right in the past. Voting is 'part of being a citizen and being an adult' (Lynn, female prisoner, aged 38), with franchise restrictions leaving felons feeling 'exiled' from their fellow citizens. Paul, a 37-year-old inmate, declares:

I have no right to vote on the school referendums that will affect my children. I have no right to vote on how my taxes is going to be spent or used, which I have to pay whether I'm a felon or not, you know? So basically I've lost all voice or control over my government ... And this system, once you're a felon you're punished for life. And you don't have a voice ... People don't want to recognize that *we can still be citizens and still be patriotic* even though we made a mistake. And that's a hard pill to swallow ... I can't say anything because I don't have a voice. Or 'cause I can't vote about it ... I'm not saying give back gun rights or anything like that to people that definitely don't deserve them. But giving back voting rights is another way to make a person feel part of that



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community. How can you feel that you're giving back to a community that you're a part of when you're *exiled* from it by not being able to vote and have a voice in it? (Emphasis added)

Other respondents described their disfranchised status as 'outsiders,' stating that they were 'less than the average citizen' (Rachel, female prisoner, aged 20) or that their citizenship was currently 'put on hold' (Dennis, male prisoner, aged 23). As Karen, a prisoner who had been an active voter prior to her conviction, told us:

I voted every single solitary year from the day I was granted voting privileges when I was eighteen until I was convicted ... For me it's important because I like to know that when I leave here, I will start – I will continue my life because I won't start it over – *although there's a whole new part of me coming out of here – I will continue my life,* and I would like to have that position back. To be able to vote. (Emphasis added)

For Karen, the restoration of the right to vote provides a clear marker of civic reintegration, while the loss of voting rights is a visible symbol of the costs of a felony conviction.

Although their civic participation is limited in many ways, ex-felons often express a desire to volunteer their time or 'give back' to their communities in other ways. While most of the felons interviewed said they planned to volunteer, coach youth sports, speak publicly about their crimes or engage in some other form of civic participation, their motivation for doing so differed. Susan believed that criminals 'kind of have a responsibility. You can't always undo what you've done, but you can try to promote harmony in another area' (female prisoner, aged 31).

To be sure, the rhetoric about 'giving back to the community' is not universally shared. Henry, a young parolee, disagreed with the idea of restitution or 'earned redemption' (see, e.g. Bazemore 1998):

[The concept of prisoners saying 'I want to give back to my community' is] something that they were taught in treatment. They got a therapist that installs that inside of their head. That if you take something or hurt somebody around your neighborhood, which is your community, don't you think you should give back? *'Cause only a bad person wouldn't.* So they make a person think maybe they should feel that way. They should give back if they took something or harmed somebody... I don't feel I owe anyone anything. I owe



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myself something. I owe myself a better life, you know? I owe myself a chance to do better. That's what I owe. (Male parolee, aged 25, emphasis added)

Scott affirmed his commitment to an identity as a law-abiding citizen, but resisted the role of the contrite ex-felon:

I don't feel guilty, man, after spending five years in the joint. I'm sorry, I just don't ... I feel like I repaid my debt. I don't feel guilty at all for it. All the people that are smoking drugs and do that, yeah, I did help them get high. I helped them hurt their body, yes, I did. But when you're talking about my freedom, the price of my freedom? I already paid for it ... And to me that'd be really selfish to say that I didn't hurt anybody, I don't feel bad about it. But as far as me feeling guilty about it like I owe somebody something else – what I owe society is to not get in trouble no more. *To be law-abiding.* I've got that brand already, you know. I fucked up. (Probationer, aged 26, emphasis added)

If such brands are indeed permanent, offenders will never be 'dellabeled' as deviants (Trice and Roman, 1970). Such beliefs make it difficult for offenders to envision themselves rejoining their communities as active citizens. Paul, a convicted sex offender, explicitly resented the idea of 'giving back' to the community that cast him out:

I really get kind of peeved when people say 'give back to the community' because *I'm not a part of the community anymore* as far as I can see it ... And so when they [say], 'What are you going to give back to the community for this and for that?' I'm like well, *hey, community doesn't want a damn thing to do with me*, why should I go back and give anything to do with the community? (Prisoner, aged 37, emphasis added)

The bitterness underlying these comments shows the flip side of the power of community reintegration: when stigma and rejection are the dominant experience, the potentially restorative benefits of civic participation are lost.

In spite of such concerns about community rejection on the part of some interviewees, almost all said they planned some form of participation as active citizens in the future, with several specifically linking civic participation with their desire to stay away from crime.



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Pamela provided volunteer services by making blankets for children and spoke of the letters she had received from the recipients:

I'm doing it for kids I'll never see and they'll never see me. But that makes me feel so good that I'm doing something here that's not about me. You know that's not selfish ... And it is so fulfilling for them and that's just a small example of the same thing on the outside. If you start filling yourself up. It's the same principle of sponsorship in AA and NA. You start helping other people who have less time than you clean and sober, *you stay well, too*. Because there's a connection there and there's people relying on you. (Prisoner, aged 49, emphasis added)

One of the most common ways in which felons expressed a desire to give something back is through public speaking or sharing their stories with others. Alex, a 37-year-old male inmate who killed his brother while intoxicated, hoped to solidify his identity as sober and law-abiding upon his release by communicating his personal experiences with alcoholism:

When I leave [prison], I want to go maybe going around to juvenile detention centers. Speaking about alcoholism ... from the first time I started drinking to my incarceration and what I went through in prison. And just sharing that with younger kids around the community ... will *keep me aware of what I want ...* it would just remind me of what could happen, what I could go back to. (Emphasis added)

Some ex-felons envisioned themselves in an idealized role as an active citizen by sharing their insights with young people. The desire to impart hard-won knowledge about crime and punishment is often voiced. Dylan, a 29-year-old male inmate, spoke of his volunteer work and public speaking in some detail:

Well, the first thing I'm going to do, even when I'm on work release someday, there's an extension of the [city] Youth Services Bureau. We work with them here where they bring in their repeat offenders, and we talk to them. But once I'm on work release, or even once I'm paroled, you can go to schools, you can go to community centers, all kinds of places and talk to kids ... I'm in here for murder, and I can't ever get that person's life back. I can't return him to his family, I can't balance that scale any way, but I can keep trying for the rest



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of my life ... We have a Toastmasters Club here. And I've been involved with that for the last two and a half years, so that's definitely helped my communication skills of being able to articulate myself so I want to be able to use that when I go out, too. Actually go give talks, not – *I watch the legislators talk sometimes on [channel] 17, and I can see myself actually, as ... It seems probably unrealistic right now.* A friend of mine who got out, he was a doctor before came in. He's up in [city] now and he's given a talk to a criminology class ... So I'm like, 'If you can do that ...' I mean I'd love to go to criminology classes or talk in front of the legislators about all kinds of issues. (Emphasis added)

However much these plans seem 'unrealistic right now,' offenders such as Dylan express commitment to civic-minded role behaviour that may help solidify identities as conforming citizens: I've done everything I could since I've been in here to try and do that [contribute something]. I've started youth groups to try to talk to youth, and tried to get as much of an education as I could, get as many job skills as I can. Similarly, one woman whose drug use and criminal activities were widely discussed in her small town was eager to rejoin that community and establish a new role as an active citizen. Lynn said that 'people seen that I changed' and had written her with offers of employment and other support:

When I get out I'll be home in time to do whatever I can to help out with [my hometown] centennial. The last two years I've been on house arrest so I couldn't be involved. I had to sit at home. So this will be my first year not [on house arrest], and I plan on, you know, whatever day if they need me to clean up the streets, whatever, I plan on doing it. (Prisoner, aged 38)

Paul, who had a high level of community involvement prior to his conviction, wished to resume his former role as an active citizen:

I get *Sessions Weekly* and *Senate Briefly* every week, and I follow along on what's going on in the legislature and committee reports ... I was really involved in my community. There was a community group in our area that I was involved in that was having to do with [business name] and businesses and gun shops moving in too close to our parks and stuff like that. You know all the business people in the area and the residents kind of teamed up and we had the ear of the government because we were such a



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forceful group. [I plan to get involved again] to a degree that I can. I'm going to be limited in what I can and can't do. If there's an open mike at some committee hearing, I may well be down there voicing my opinion. I've been known to do that in the past. (Prisoner, aged 37)

Despite prior community involvement and a willingness to involve themselves, ex-felons face a multitude of barriers that prevent full participation. Whether it is the enduring 'felon' label or the formal loss of citizenship rights, these restrictions send messages that lead many to question whether they truly belong – 'not being able to vote kind of says you don't matter, and you're not really a part of this community. But then here I am, your next-door neighbor' (Susan, female prisoner, aged 31).

Stigma, citizenship and identity

While the preceding sections focus on the socioeconomic, familial and civic domains in isolation, felons often experience stigmatization across all three reintegrative domains simultaneously. The pervasive generalized 'felon' label that defines the relationship between ex-felons and society complicates problems of adjustment upon re-entry. Many considered their status as felons to be a scarlet letter, leaving them permanently marked or 'branded' (Scott, male probationer, aged 26). Thomas, a young parolee, referred to the 'F' on his record:

You are labeled as a felon, and you're always gonna be assumed and known to have contact with that criminal activity and them ethics. And even when I get off parole, *I'm still gonna have an 'F' on my record*. I can have twenty million dollars just sitting in an account. I'm still gonna be a felon. (Male parolee, aged 23, emphasis added)

Moving from an environment in which 'felon' is simply a 'term' to one in which it is a generalized label with wide-ranging consequences induces a sense of role discontinuity. As Karen stated:

When I leave here it will be very difficult for me in the sense that I'm a felon. That I will *always* be a felon ... Being a felon is *a term* here, obviously it's not a bad term. Being a felon in this



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environment, everyone is – this is acceptable. [Outside prison] I don't have a single, solitary friend who has a speeding ticket, let alone a criminal record, you know? So for me to leave here, *it will affect my job, it will affect my education, ... custody, it can affect child support, it can affect everywhere – family, friends, housing ...* People that are convicted of drug crimes can't even get housing anymore ... So I know that when I leave here, I have to be a whole lot stronger than I have ever been ... yes, I did my prison time. How long are you going to punish me as a result of it? And not only on paper, I'm only on paper for ten months when I leave here, that's all the parole I have. But, that parole isn't going to be anything. *It's the housing, it's the credit re-establishing, uh...* I mean even *to go into the school, to work with my child's class – and I'm not a sex offender – but all I need is one parent who says, 'Isn't she a felon? I don't want her with my child'.* Bingo. And you know that there are people out there like that. (Prisoner, aged 39, emphasis added)

Susan characterized her loss of citizenship rights as tantamount to losing the 'right to belong':

Right now I'm in prison. Like *society kicked me out.* They're like, 'Okay, the criminal element. We don't want them in society, we're going to put them in these prisons'. Okay, but once I get out – then what do you do? What do you do with all these millions of people that have been in prison and been released? I mean, *do you accept them back? Or do you keep them as outcasts?* And if you keep them as outcasts, how do you expect them to act? (Prisoner, aged 31, emphasis added)

Seeing themselves as 'outcasts' from the perspective of their communities calls felons' identities as citizens into question: if society rejects them no matter what they do, the incentive to transition into a law-abiding citizen role is correspondingly reduced. Moreover, most of the felons interviewed were significantly 'off-time' with respect to the standard life-course markers of adult status. In taking stock of their current circumstances, many respondents lamented that they had not gotten further in life, building careers, forming families, purchasing houses and taking on other adult roles. This sense of being behind schedule further exacerbates feelings of isolation and separation from community norms:



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[I] have so much to make up for like lost time, and I have nothing to show for it. I'll get out when I'm 34. I have no house, no car, no anything. (Dylan, male prisoner, aged 29)

I'm about 25 now, and *I need a decent family, decent job, car, going to work every day ...* the way I'm going, I need to slow down and do something positive. So I can show my little brothers, 'cause they know I'm in the street, they in Chicago, too, though. My main focus really though is to get everything right so I can have them move up here with me and go to school and college. I don't want them growing up in Chicago, like I did. (Michael, male probationer, aged 23, emphasis added)

Conscious of the enduring stigma of their felony convictions, most respondents were careful to separate their criminal act from their overall sense of self. Roger, a middle-aged probationer, drew from his Gambler's Anonymous experience, declaring that 'it's the person who did something bad, but they're not a bad person'. Rachel, a young female inmate, asserted, 'I'm not a criminal. I mean I'm guilty of what I did, and I'm here, but my crime – I'm twenty, I'm almost twenty-one, but my crime was committed when I was eighteen'.

Even as they stress their own intrinsic worth, however, felons attach great importance to the perceived reaction of others in their communities: I just want them to say, 'You're not a bad person' ... *It's just weird to me that it means so much to me that society thinks of me in a certain way.* (Susan, prisoner, aged 31, emphasis added). Finding ways to manage stigma and establish an identity as a law-abiding citizen thus becomes a primary concern for offenders upon release, imposing additional barriers to reintegration. Thomas, who had already been released from prison twice at 23, explained how the ability to deal with stigma is important in avoiding recidivism:

I'm a felon. And I'm on parole. So what choice do you have? You either deal with this [stigma], or you go back to prison ... They say that when you first get out, you shouldn't let someone know if you just got out. You should try to hold it low until you can be sure. But you also have to be confident. You got to be comfortable and it will all be right. *And it'll all float away ...* The second time I got out [of prison], I changed myself, my surroundings, the people I was with. A lot of things, but at the same time I wasn't gonna allow myself to be put down, and I was gonna be persistent. I was gonna show that



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I can do that, you know? I was gonna show that I can do, more or less, *the same that any man can do*. (Parolee, emphasis added)

Given such concerns, the extremely modest goal of simply being perceived the same as 'any man' or woman in their social relationships was paramount for several of the felons interviewed.

Regardless of the imminent barriers, many looked to the future and saw a chance to salvage what is 'left' and to contribute something as citizens. The following comments from Scott and Dylan show both recognition of potential for change and a 'generative' (Erikson 1968; Maruna 2001) concern for the well-being of others:

I'm *very appreciative* right now. I feel like I've got another chance. I feel like somebody somewhere, something didn't want me to just fall in the cracks and die and do nothing. So I feel grateful that I have the opportunity to make myself better, to try to move my children into what they need to be to survive. To not only survive, *but to make a mark. A positive mark*. I have a lot of hopes. (Scott, male probationer, aged 26, emphasis added)

And once I wound up here looking ahead in my life and *saying this is what I have left when I walk out*. I can either be like the rest of these guys and get out and come back, get out and come back, and basically amount to nothing my entire life, or I can *try to make the best of what I've got left and try and contribute something*. (Dylan, male prisoner, aged 29, emphasis added)

Summary and conclusions

In this chapter we have drawn from symbolic interactionist theories of crime over the life-course and some original interview data to develop a life course model of role transitions and desistance. We hypothesized that ex-felons are likely to be off-time with respect to standard life-course markers of the transition to adulthood and that the stigma of a felony conviction imposes additional barriers to successful adult role transition. Although our small sample of felons can only provide illustrative evidence on these points, the interview data demonstrate how the stigma of a felony conviction creates new obstacles to assuming adult roles and exacerbates pre-existing barriers. Karen summarized the impact across different domains: 'it will affect my job, it will



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affect my education ... custody ... child support ... housing ... credit re-establishing,' and even the ability to 'go into the school, to work with my child's class.'

We also hypothesized that felons would link successful adult role transition to desistance from crime, both generally when talking about other felons and personally in discussing their own life histories. Although the majority of our sample remains incarcerated, it is clear that they had already established a connection between desistance and their roles as workers, 'family men' and women, and citizens. Some viewed themselves as 'stuck' in street life and 'pretty much doomed to fail' until they established commitment to adult roles, whereas others attributed changes in offending to taking on roles as a 'family man' or obtaining a 'decent job.'

Unlike previous work on role transitions and desistance, we hypothesized that such idealized roles could be organized around the concept of *citizenship* – the productive citizen at work, the responsible citizen at home and the active citizen in the community. Citizenship themes were most pronounced in discussions of voting rights and volunteer experiences, but were also evident in the way felons spoke of their work and family lives as a 'good taxpayer' and 'productive member of society,' or as wanting to 'be that neighbor' who takes the kids to ballgames. As with the social science literature on citizenship, our interviewees collectively expressed both a desire for the rights of citizenship and willingness to involve themselves in civic life.

In response to our questions, the interviewees frequently provided detailed and thoughtful responses to the hurdles they faced in the three reintegrative domains we had identified. Additionally, many respondents linked these domains in ways that we had not foreseen – connecting family roles with socioeconomic and civic roles in particular.

We also observed some clear differences between prisoners and felons living in the community. Those who were currently incarcerated were more likely to envision themselves in idealized roles, such as becoming model parents, speaking to schools and legislators or assuming leadership positions such as co-ordinating transitional housing programmes. The expressed goals of probationers and parolees, in contrast, were tempered by their recent experiences in their communities. After presenting himself in an idealized family role, for example, one ex-prisoner said: 'I don't know if I could do it. I don't want to put myself that high, you know?' (Scott, male probationer, aged 26). This is consistent with our expectation that convicted felons may express a sincere desire to assume these idealized roles, but they often lack the resources and social relationships necessary to establish role com-



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mitments and solidify new identities. For those supervised in the community, the struggle to establish such commitments was an immediate concern, as many considered themselves 'branded' as a felon with a permanent 'F' on their records.

Finally, we hypothesized that the primary mechanism linking adult role transition and crime is a generalized self-concept as a deviant or conforming citizen. Although we cannot provide definitive evidence on this point, the interview data are generally consistent with this interpretation. For example, Lori noted that her 'identity as an offender' no longer came into play once she began working in a park with children. Of course, levels of civic participation and conceptions of citizenship vary among felons as they do in the general population.

Almost all respondents spoke of how their felony convictions made them outsiders, occupying a status that is 'less than the average citizen.' The increasing availability of public information about their crimes, however, made many feel especially marked and vulnerable. Although the most stigmatized respondents distanced themselves from 'the good people of Pleasant Acres,' who do not want a 'damn thing' to do with them, they consistently defended their rights and embraced their responsibilities as citizens.

Perhaps most surprisingly, we found that barriers to establishing or re-establishing adult roles appear to engender a new or renewed sense of their importance. Offenders are eager (if sometimes naïvely optimistic (see, e.g. Maruna 2001: 97) to establish or re-establish their roles at work, home and in the community and to capitalize on 'what's left' for them in each of these domains.

Caveats and remaining questions

Our analysis was designed to illustrate a conceptual model of role commitment and identity transformation among convicted felons rather than to provide a critical test of competing hypotheses. We should note that our sample is unlikely to be representative of the felon population and that we cannot address behavioural desistance from crime because many of our respondents remain incarcerated. We have also emphasized a general model of identity transformation without attention to potentially important subgroup differences. For example, it is possible that the criminal history, race and gender of the respondents may condition the processes we describe.

An important remaining question for research and policy concerns the societal management of stigma. At present, communities are ill-prepared to accept felons as fellow citizens. Prohibitions on ex-felons'



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occupational licensing, parental rights and ownership of firearms may serve a needed societal interest in minimizing the risk associated with their release in the community. Our interview data suggest that many felons support some of these restrictions in principle (though they are *not* supportive of disfranchisement and housing restrictions), but argue convincingly that such restrictions should be much more narrowly tailored and limited in duration. For example, the felons we interviewed believed that voting restrictions should be limited in scope (to election crimes) and duration (for the term of imprisonment); firearms restrictions should be limited to violent offenders; and restrictions on parental rights should be exercised with greater concern for families' individual situations.

A related question concerns the potential for deviant decertification or reintegration ceremonies (Braithwaite and Mugford 1994). As Kai Erikson observed in the 1960s (1964: 16–17), one is 'ushered into the deviant position by a decisive and often dramatic ceremony, yet is retired from it with hardly a word of public notice. And as a result, the deviant often returns home with no proper license to resume a normal life in the community'.

In our view, the skills training and role commitments necessary to overcome stigma and adopt a law-abiding identity must begin long before release from correctional supervision. The felons we interviewed needed assistance or anticipatory socialization to turn their idealized role conceptions into workable commitments that would foster identities as law-abiding but imperfect citizens. Although many correctional programmes provide such socialization in the socioeconomic domain and, increasingly, the family domain, felons are currently ill-prepared to re-enter their communities as participating citizens. Creating avenues of participation that reinforce, rather than limit, citizenship would appear likely to enhance the possibilities of successful reintegration. This restoration of citizenship should entail both the customary bundle of social rights citizens possess and the creation of opportunities to participate in communal life.

Partially to address this concern, one inmate suggested establishing a civics curriculum in the prison. We second this idea by suggesting voluntary pilot projects that would provide goal setting, planning and preparation to resume or establish civic participation. These might include opportunities for community projects before release that would begin to activate the nascent desire for active participation many felons articulate in different ways. We can speculate that a well structured programme would be very likely to increase intermediate outcomes



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such as voter turnout and, potentially, to influence long-term desistance patterns. If the argument of this chapter is correct, the challenge for policy is to provide those links in meaningful ways during and after incarceration. In addition to their policy importance, we believe that evaluations of such programmes could dramatically increase scientific knowledge of the desistance process.

To date, most research and policy efforts on reintegration have emphasized juvenile offenders (Braithwaite and Mugford 1994) and those convicted of minor crimes, such as soliciting prostitution (see, e.g. Bazemore 1998 for examples of current programmes). In our view, the assumption of greater malleability among youth and minor offenders may be mistaken. In particular, we believe that older offenders with more serious criminal histories may ultimately be those most amenable to policy efforts that promise to facilitate their transition to adult roles (Uggen 2000).

Conclusion

When criminologists refer to 'citizens,' they generally use the term in opposition to criminal offenders, placing criminals on one side of the street and law-abiding community residents on the other. Our research demonstrates that felons think of *themselves* as citizens, assuming roles as taxpayers, homeowners volunteers, and voters. As they develop socioeconomic, familial and civic role commitments, the salience of their identities as law-abiding citizens rises and the salience of their identities as felons recedes. With this gradual shift in the identity salience hierarchy, their actions will more consistently meet the expectations of the citizen role. We therefore suggest that civic reintegration and establishing an identity as a law-abiding citizen are central to the process of desistance from crime.

Notes

- 1 Although this respondent's age is recorded as 23, he states that he is 24 and 25 at different points in the interview.
- 2 It is worth noting that a felony conviction would often preclude the opportunity to work in job that involves extensive contact with children. Lori was able to get the job through a surprising 'weak' tie established by meeting her future job supervisor at a Narcotics Anonymous meeting.



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