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ABSTRACT

“DOOMED TO DEVIANCE?”: EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF PERCEIVED ABILITY TO CHANGE ON OFFENDING BEHAVIOR

By

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AUGUST, 2016

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Major Department: Criminal Justice and Criminology

Several studies suggest that desistance from crime is influenced by factors such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, prior offending, delinquent peer associations, self-control, educational attainment, and social bonds (e.g. Blumstein, Farrington, & Moitra, 1985; Elliot, 1994; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Laub and Sampson, 1993; McCord, 1980; Uggen & Kruttschnitt, 1998). In addition, Maruna (2001) alludes to the importance of personal agency suggesting that offender’s perceptions about their own ability to change are an essential component of the desistance process. Drawing upon qualitative data, Maruna finds that persisting offenders “...feel powerless to change their behavior” (2001:74). Maruna refers to this perceived lack of control over the future as a sense of being “doomed to deviance” and suggests that persistent offenders struggle to desist because they view themselves as victims of circumstance(s) and unable to change. Thus, offenders’ perceptions about their own ability to change are said to play a significant role in desistance.

Using longitudinal data involving 1,354 serious youthful offenders from the Pathways to Desistance study, the primary purpose of this investigation was to conduct a quantitative test of

Maruna's (2001) arguments. The data were used to examine the statistical relationship between future behavior and offenders' perceptions about their ability to desist. In addition, this study examined substance abuse and social support as factors that potentially shape offenders' expectations regarding their own ability to change. Consistent with Maruna's (2001) work, the results indicate that offender's perceptions about their ability to stay out of trouble with the law do impact future offending behavior. The results also show, however, that substance abuse and social support do not exert significant (direct) effects on perceived chances of staying out of trouble with the law, controlling for other variables. Implications for policy and theory are discussed.

**“DOOMED TO DEVIANCE?”:
EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF NEGATIVE FUTURE EXPECTATIONS ON OFFENDING
BEHAVIOR**

BY

TRICIA MARIE JOHNSTON

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Science
in the
Andrew Young School of Policy Studies
of
Georgia State University

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2016**

ACCEPTANCE

This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Thesis Committee. It has been approved and accepted by all members of that committee, and it has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Criminal Justice and Criminology in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies of Georgia State University.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | iv |
| LIST OF TABLES | vii |
| LIST OF FIGURES | viii |
| CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW | 4 |
| Methodological Challenges in Studying Desistance | 4 |
| Desistance Paradigms | 6 |
| The Role of Agency | 8 |
| Predictors of Agency | 12 |
| Current Study | 13 |
| Hypotheses | 14 |
| CHAPTER III. DATA AND METHODS | 17 |
| Measures | 19 |
| Perceived Ability to Change | 19 |
| Delinquency | 20 |
| Substance Abuse | 21 |
| Social Support | 21 |
| Control Variables | 22 |
| Analyses | 23 |

| | |
|------------------------------|----|
| CHAPTER IV. RESULTS | 25 |
| CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION | 30 |
| CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION | 37 |
| APPENDIX | 39 |
| REFERENCES | 40 |
| VITA | 46 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | |
|--|----|
| TABLE 4.1 Regression Results Showing the Effects of Perceived Ability to Change on Future Offending Behavior | 28 |
| TABLE 4.2 Regression Results Showing the Effects of Drug Abuse and Social Support on Perceived Ability to Change | 29 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|--|----|
| FIGURE 2.1 Conceptual Model Linking Perceived Ability to Change to Future Offending Behavior | 15 |
| FIGURE 2.2 Conceptual Model Linking Drug Abuse and Social Support to Perceived Ability to Change | 16 |

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Several studies suggest that desistance from crime relies on factors such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, prior offending, delinquent peer associations, self-control, educational attainment, and social bonds (e.g. Blumstein, Farrington, & Moitra, 1985; Elliot, 1994; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Laub and Sampson, 1993; McCord, 1980; Uggen & Kruttschnitt, 1998). However, following Maruna's (2001) qualitative work on desistance and persistence among habitual offenders, there is reason to believe that expectations about one's *ability* to change will play a significant role in the desistance process. Utilizing narratology and a supplemental content analysis, Maruna found that negative perceptions about the self inhibit the desistance process (2001:147). In regards to persisting offenders Maruna writes, "...they feel powerless to change their behavior...they do not want to offend, they said, but feel that they have no choice" (2001:74).

Maruna (2001) refers to this perceived lack of control as the sense of being "doomed to deviance" and suggests that the persistent offenders in his sample struggle to desist because they view themselves as victims of their circumstance(s). Persisting offender's lack of faith in their ability to stay out of trouble with the law was also prevalent in Howerton, Burnett, Byng, and Campbell's study of prisoners nearing release (2009). For example, one interviewee stated that he did not have control over his actions and believed that he would continue to commit crimes in the future as a result (2009:454). These studies illustrate how qualitative research has illuminated the importance of faith in one's ability to desist from crime. This research could have significant policy implications. Presently, there is little quantitative research supporting

these qualitative findings, therefore an important goal for future research is to verify the findings of these qualitative studies in the context of quantitative examinations.

Meanwhile, it is also essential to examine potential determinants of an offender's perception about their ability to change and explore the role that such predictors play in the desistance process. Prior studies indicate that age, gender, race/ethnicity, neighborhood conditions, socioeconomic status, self-worth, and academic adjustment impact expectations about the future in general (Dubow, Arnett, Smith, & Ippolito, 2001; Haynie, Soller, & Williams, 2014; O'Donnell, Schwab-Stone, & Muyeed, 2002; Piquero, 2014; Swisher & Warner, 2013), however less is known about the factors that shape perceptions about one's own ability to desist, in particular. Nevertheless, various qualitative desistance studies have alluded to a link between negative perceptions about the self and factors such as drug abuse and social support, implying that persistent drug abuse and/or insufficient social support negatively shape one's perceptions of the self and promote offending as a result (Howerton, Burnett, Byng, & Campbell, 2009; Maruna, 2001).

In this study I investigate the relationship between offenders' perceived ability to change and youth delinquency. The current study draws on longitudinal data from a large sample of serious youth offenders in order to allow for the quantitative examination of findings derived from qualitative desistance studies. The primary purpose of this study is to conduct a quantitative test of Maruna's (2001) arguments, examining the statistical relationship between future behavior and offenders' expectations about their own ability to desist. In addition, this study examines factors that may shape offenders' perceptions

regarding their own ability to change, including substance abuse and social support. First, however, I review the literature in greater detail.

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Desistance has become an important topic in criminological research. Despite its increasing popularity, however, key methodological challenges remain associated with the analysis of desistance from crime. The primary concern involves the conceptualization of desistance. Researchers have struggled with such questions as, “Can desistance occur after one act of crime?” (Laub & Sampson, 2001:6). Or, “How many years of non-offending are required to establish with certainty that desistance has occurred?” (Kazemian, 2007:7). With these questions in mind, establishing a unified definition of desistance is essential, unfortunately Laub and Sampson (2001) find that few studies provide an operational definition of desistance and that there is little consensus within the field.

Methodological Challenges in Studying Desistance

Conceptualizations of desistance have been advanced, but are often vague or arbitrary making it difficult to draw generalizations from the desistance literature (Uggen & Massoglia, 2003:316). Moreover, the conceptualizations that have been advanced frequently fall under two categories: static desistance or dynamic desistance. Static desistance is defined as an event, where offending is presumed to be indefinitely terminated, thus emphasizing its permanence (Kazemian, 2007). For example, Farrall and Bowling define desistance as the “moment that a criminal career ends” (1999). Similarly, Shover writes that desistance is the “voluntary termination of serious criminal participation” (1996:121), where termination has been defined as the “time when the criminal or delinquent behavior stops permanently” (Weitekamp & Kerner, 1994).The

concern with definitions such as these is that criminal behavior is often too sporadic to identify absolute termination (Maruna, 2001:23).

Dynamic desistance, on the other hand, defines desistance as a causal mechanism that supports the cessation of criminal activity, thus emphasizing process and maintenance (Bushway, Thornberry, & Krohn, 2003). An example of dynamic desistance is offered by Uggen and Kruttschnitt (1998) which implies that desistance is a “shift from a state of offending to a state of non-offending and its maintenance” (Kazemian, 2007:7). Maruna argues that this is a more effective way to define desistance, and suggests that the focus be on the ability to maintain crime-free behavior despite difficulties and hardships (2001:26). Maruna writes that studying termination focuses on *why* offenders cease criminal behavior, whereas the study of maintenance focuses on *how* this process occurs (2001:26-27). Desistance, then, is best understood as the “causal process that supports the termination of offending” (Laub & Sampson, 2001:11).

Conceptualizing desistance isn't where the methodological concerns end, however. Researchers must also agree upon how to measure desistance, which has proven problematic in the desistance literature. Laub and Sampson (2003) contend that the length of the follow-up period is critical to the measurement of desistance, but researchers have found that it frequently varies across studies, making findings nearly impossible to compare (Bushway, Thornberry, & Krohn, 2003). According to Laub and Sampson's (2001) review of desistance studies, standard research on drug addiction tends to use a three-year follow-up period, while follow-up periods in other criminological studies vary considerably and are typically between six months to a year or two given the nature of longitudinal studies.

Furthermore, the use of self-report data versus official report data as sources of desistance information pose an additional methodological concern to researchers. While Kazemian (2007) finds that most desistance studies rely on official data, Maruna (2001) makes the argument for the use of self-report data, stating that criminal behavior may go unnoticed by law enforcement. This is supported by Nagin, Farrington, and Moffitt (1995) who studied desistance using both types of measurement involving the same sample. Using official records, they found that 62% of the sample had desisted from crime, while only 11% of the sample had desisted according to self-report data (Nagin, Farrington, & Moffitt, 1995).

Desistance Paradigms

Studies on desistance from crime frequently fall into either ontogenetic or sociogenic paradigms (Maruna, 2001:27). Ontogenetic models suggest that desistance is a natural byproduct of development, age, and maturity. These models define desistance as normative and highlights the roles of cognitive and behavioral change. Perhaps the most famous study using this theoretical paradigm is Glueck's Study. Based on their seminal research, the Gluecks proposed that the desire to engage in delinquent behavior naturally declines after the age of 25 (Glueck & Glueck, 1940). Several scholars continue to apply this theory of maturational reform, arguing that crime declines with age, as behavior changes (e.g. Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Moffitt, 1994).

While the relationship between age and crime has been established in criminology, ontogenetic explanations of desistance fail to explain the meaning of age (Sampson & Laub, 1992). Sociogenic models of desistance attempt to illuminate the

mediating mechanisms of age by arguing that the formation of social bonds foster desistance (e.g. Denzin, 1989; Graham & Bowling, 1995; Warr, 1998). These models stress the importance of turning points, opportunities, and stakes in conformity (Maruna, 2001). Sampson and Laub's life-course perspective is a primary example of this. Their model suggests that "turning points" such as marriage, a job, or children will provide offenders with a stake in conformity, therefore giving them a reason to turn away from delinquent behavior (Sampson & Laub, 1993).

The sociogenic model has been widely accepted within the field of criminology, yet Maruna maintains that "nothing inherent in a situation makes it a turning point," suggesting that their value is overstated (2001:25). Taking advantage of a possible turning point may require that one have the motivation or capacity to change, for example (see also Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002; Maruna, 2001). Likewise, several scholars have argued that turning points are not randomly distributed. Individuals with certain dispositional characteristics (e.g. self-esteem, emotional stability, an internal locus of control, openness to change, etc.) may situate themselves into settings where positive turning points are available (Laub & Sampson, 1993; Uggen, 2000; Uggen & Massoglia, 2003). According to Kazemian (2007), these cognitive predispositions are too closely tied to social bonds (i.e. turning points) within the sociogenic paradigm to determine whether or not turning points are a cause or consequence of desistance.

Phenomenological paradigms attempt to address the issue of causal ordering by supplementing ontogenetic and sociogenic approaches. Phenomenological models propose that desistance is a complex process that relies on both objective (i.e., institutions and developmental events) and subjective (i.e., cognitions, future expectations, and

personal agency) factors (LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, & Bushway, 2008). These models highlight shifts in personal agency by explaining how the interaction of objective and subjective factors influence an individual's identity and subsequent behavior (Maruna, 2001).

A principle of phenomenological research is that individuals are able to experience, interpret, and react to similar environments differently (Caspi & Moffitt, 1995). Additionally, these models focus on the foreground of crime (Katz, 1988), emphasizing the “underlying cognitive mechanisms by which information about the world is selected, attended to, and processed” (Clark & Cornish, 1985:147).

Phenomenological paradigms have gained considerable popularity in recent years as several researchers have argued that they strengthen criminology's understanding of desistance by providing knowledge of how offenders construct their situations and behave accordingly (Burnett, 1992; Farrall & Bowling, 1999; Healy, 2010; Laub & Sampson, 1993; Maruna, 2001; Polizzi, 2010).

The Role of Agency

Maruna supported the use of phenomenological paradigms in his study, stating that it allowed him to focus on his participants as “agents of their own change” (Laub and Sampson, 2001:27). Phenomenological models of desistance highlight the role of personal agency, and Laub and Sampson contend that agency is the “missing link” in desistance research (2003:141), yet agency is often difficult to conceptualize given its various components (Laub & Sampson, 2001:55). Matza defines agency as “having a sense of command over one's destiny” (1964:29). Agnew (2011) writes that agency has two components. According to Agnew, the first component of agency is that choices are

not determined by forces beyond an individual's control, therefore individuals have the ability to make choices despite conditions, contexts, etc. The second component is that individuals are able to act on their choices and are not prevented from doing so by forces beyond their control (Agnew, 2011:45). Furthermore, Agnew argues that individuals are more likely to exercise agency when they are motivated to modify their behavior, believe they can change their behavior, have the resources necessary to implement change (e.g. power, autonomy, knowledge), and are in environments that do not restrict the ability to make certain choices (2011:60).

According to Bandura (1997), agency is the mechanism by which people are able to make contributions to their own psychosocial functioning. As such, people are able to intentionally influence their choices and actions (1997:3). Bandura states that agency functions interdependently between the self and society, permitting individuals to “behave differently from what environmental forces dictate” (1997:7). While Bandura suggests that agency impacts behavior, empirical evidence suggests that agency also plays a role in identity construction/reconstruction (Burnett & Maruna, 2004; Howerton, Burnett, Byng, & Campbell, 2009; LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, & Bushway, 2008; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009). “Agentic factors” such as the motivation and belief that one can change allows offenders to develop pro-social identities and thus influence desistance from crime (Agnew, 2011:49). In their review of the extant literature, Visher and Travis find that desistance requires identity transformation and “a personal decision to change” (2003:98). Sampson and Laub's come to a similar conclusion in their reanalysis of the Glueck's data set, suggesting that agency is essential for ex-offenders to reconstruct their lives (2003:289-281).

Identity reconstruction is a critical component of the desistance process as it typically evokes feelings of optimism and hope for the future. Based on their interviews with prison inmates, Howerton, Burnett, Byng, and Campbell found that prisoners who had more optimism about their chances to change post-release were more likely to desist (2009:454). LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, and Bushway's (2008) quantitative research has emphasized the role of agency in the process of identity reconstruction as well, finding that hope is necessary for an individual to desist from crime. In this context agency is defined as an individual's perception that their goals can be achieved (Stotland, 1969), and it is important to note that for hope to have the intended effect, individuals must be willing to work toward achieving the desired outcome (Burnett & Maruna, 2004:395).

A central component of agency is perceived self-efficacy. Perceived self-efficacy is one's belief in their ability to produce particular outcomes or actions (Bandura, 1997:20).¹ According to Bandura, people with the same means performing differently under given circumstances is an example of how perceived self-efficacy operates. He states that the difference in performance is the result of "efficacy beliefs affecting how well they use the means at their disposal" (Bandura, 1997:27). Maruna (2001) offers a detailed account of how agency and perceived self-efficacy aid in the desistance process. Drawing from the Liverpool Desistance Study (LDS), Maruna analyzed data collected

¹ Perceived self-efficacy is often considered synonymous to locus of control, however Bandura contends that these two phenomena are not the same (Bandura, 1997:20). Bandura writes that locus of control refers to one's "beliefs about whether actions affect outcomes" (1997:20). He maintains that people with an internal locus of control are more likely to be active than those with an external locus of control (1997:19). This notion is supported by Liebrechts et al., (2015). In their study of persistence and desistance in heavy cannabis use, Liebrechts et al., (2015) found that desisters exhibited an internal locus of control, referring to themselves as "active agents" who were in control on their futures. Persisters, on the other hand, demonstrated an external locus of control attributing their behavior to forces beyond their control (2014:630).

from interviewing 30 “desisters” and 20 “persisters” (2001:48). This sample was comprised of “career criminals” that reported habitual offending for a stretch of at least two years (2001:46). Maruna defined “desisters” as those who felt that they would not commit crimes in the future and reported not having committed a crime for at least a year, while “persisters” were defined as those who admitted that they would continue engaging in criminal behavior (2001:47). He considers the narratives of those who have seemingly desisted from crime as “redemption scripts” and finds that interviews with these participants contain themes of agency associated with a willingness to seek out opportunities for personal development (Maruna, 2001).

Maruna writes that redemption scripts enable individuals to rewrite their pasts through a process of “making good” (2001:87). He implies that this requires ex-offenders to be resilient in the face of strain (Maruna, 2001). Healy supports Maruna’s claim, arguing that in order for desisters to maintain a crime free lifestyle they must “possess a variety of coping strategies which enable them to avoid risky situations, alleviate negative emotions and remain optimistic even in challenging circumstances (2013:8). Having a “mind over matter” mentality clearly helps individuals to overcome disadvantages and to make the best of negative situations (LeBel, Burnett, Maruna, & Bushway, 2008:155). Personal efficacy and optimism, therefore, are critical for desisters to withstand social obstacles (Bandura, 1989:1176).

While desisters display resilience and optimistic outlooks regarding their futures, persistent offenders have been found to exhibit a fatalistic mindset, believing that their destiny is out of their control (Burnett & Maruna, 2004:399). In Maruna’s study of career criminals, he refers to these narratives as “condemnation scripts” (2001:75). Maruna

found that several of the persisting offenders talked about wanting to desist from crime, but described feeling powerless to change (2001:74). Maruna refers to this perceived lack of control as a sense of being “doomed to deviance” and suggests that the persistent offenders in this sample struggle to desist because they view themselves as victims of their circumstance(s). Furthermore, Maruna states that the persisters in this study tended to exhibit an external locus of control, attributing their criminal behavior to forces beyond their control that caused them to commit crimes, thus condemning them to a life of delinquency and run-ins with the law (2001:79). Persisting offender’s lack of efficacy was also prevalent in Howerton, Burnett, Byng, and Campbell’s qualitative study of prisoners nearing release. For example, one interviewee stated that he did not have control over his actions and believed that he would continue to commit crimes upon release (2009:454).

Predictors of Agency.

While these qualitative studies demonstrate the importance of agency in the desistance process, they also allude to drug abuse and insufficient social support as predictors of agency, but these relationships are less understood. There is currently little research devoted to the relationship between social support and desistance, however, certain qualitative data suggest that persistent offenders often attribute their weak sense of personal control to drug dependencies (Howerton, Burnett, Byng, & Campbell, 2009:452; Liebrechts, et al., 2015; Maruna, 2001:74). These studies find that substance abuse not only negatively shapes one’s expectations for the future, but also suggests that it can hinder desistance from crime as a result. Hussong, Curran, Moffitt, Caspi, and Carrig (2004) examined data from the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and

Development Study ($N = 461$) and found considerable variability in the association between substance abuse and desistance among adolescents. In contrast, Schroeder, Giordano, and Cernkovich (2007) contend that drug use significantly influences persistent offending from their analysis of data from the Ohio Life-Course Study ($N = 254$). It is possible that the discrepancy in these results is the consequence of small sample size. Nevertheless, it is clear that further research is needed to gain a better understanding of how factors such as drug abuse and social support influence offenders' expectations about their futures.

Current study

Several studies suggest that desistance from crime relies on factors such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, prior offending, delinquent peer associations, self-control, educational attainment, and social bonds (e.g. Blumstein, Farrington, & Moitra, 1985; Elliot, 1994; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Laub and Sampson, 1993; McCord, 1980; Uggen & Kruttschnitt, 1998). However, Maruna (2001) suggests that it is offenders' expectations about their own ability to desist from crime that is key. To test Maruna's argument, quantitative research is needed that examines offenders' perceptions about their own ability to change in order to identify its role in the desistance process. Furthermore, little is known about the factors that shape offenders' expectations about their future ability to change, though there is reason to believe that substance abuse and social support may play a role. Consequently, the final objective of this study is to examine the impact of these factors on offenders' perceptions regarding their ability to desist from crime.

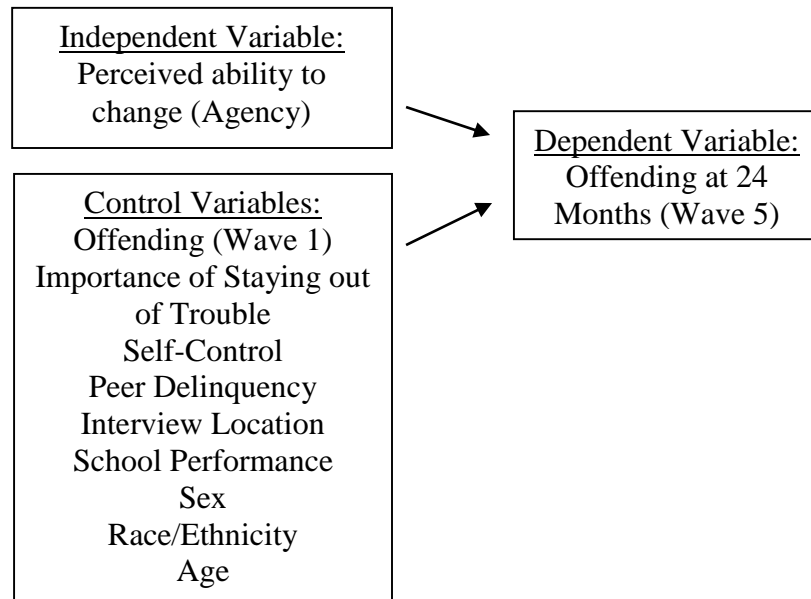
Hypotheses.

These arguments are tested in the following sections, and three testable hypotheses were formulated to address the issues disclosed in the preceding discussion. The first hypothesis states that offenders' perceptions about their own ability to desist from crime predict their future behavior. Specifically, offenders who see little chance of avoiding crime/delinquency in the future will tend to persist in their offending (controlling for other relevant factors). Offenders who are optimistic about their ability to change, on the other hand, will tend to desist.

For the purpose of this study, I define desistance as a process that unfolds over time. In addition, as described in the next section of the paper and following the lead of other researchers, I measure desistance as the change in offending over 24 months. Accordingly, a decrease in offending over 24 months indicates that offenders are in the process of desisting (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1

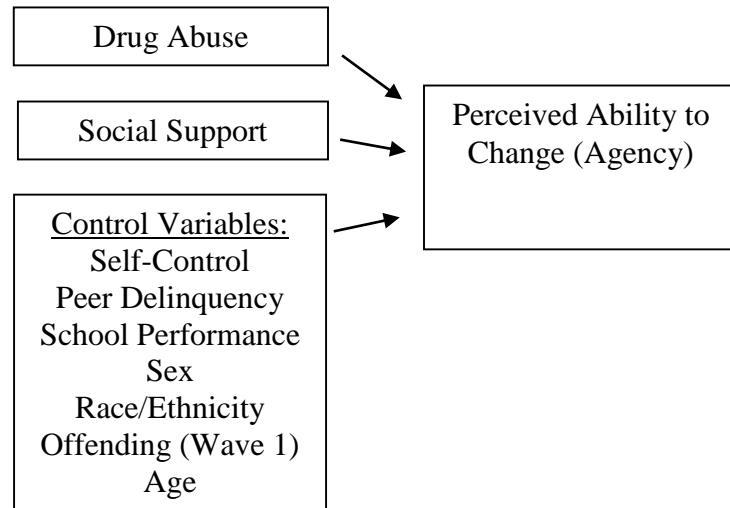
Conceptual Model Linking Perceived Ability to Change to Future Offending Behavior



If the data support the first hypothesis, and offenders' perceptions about their ability to change do impact desistance, then the second and third hypotheses will examine drug abuse and social support as possible predictors of this perception. In other words, hypotheses two and three suggest that offenders' perceptions about their ability to desist are shaped, in part, by persistent drug abuse and/or insufficient social support, respectively (Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2

Conceptual Model Linking Drug Abuse and Social Support to Perceived Ability to Change



CHAPTER III. DATA AND METHODS

To test these hypotheses, I conducted a series of analyses using data drawn from the Pathways to Desistance study. The Pathways to Desistance study is a large, longitudinal study of serious adolescent offenders from Maricopa County, Arizona, and Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania. These counties were selected by investigators due to their high rates of serious crime committed by juveniles, the diverse racial/ethnic mix of potential participants, and the sizeable number of female offenders (Mulvey, Schubert, & Piquero, 2014). The purpose of this data collection effort was to investigate the mechanisms that influence desistance from delinquent behavior within a group of serious adolescent offenders who are transitioning from adolescence into early adulthood (Mulvey, 2011). At present, Pathways to Desistance has collected the most comprehensive data set available regarding adolescent offenders and their lives. Across both sites, 1,354 serious juvenile offenders (184 females and 1,170 males) were enrolled between November, 2000 and March, 2003. The initial participation rate was 67%.

The Pathways to Desistance study employed a prospective design and focused on a broad range of measures (Schubert et al., 2004). There were multiple sources of information, and the mode of data collection was computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI), which was accompanied by a trained interviewer. In an attempt to provide a private setting for participants, interviews were completed at participants' homes, institutional placements, or in public places such as a library. Baseline interviews were conducted at enrollment and covered six domains: background characteristics, indicators of individual functioning, psychosocial development and attitudes, personal relationships, and family and community contexts. There were two baseline interview

sessions, each taking approximately two hours to complete. Follow-up interviews occurred every six months for the first three years and annually thereafter. Follow-up interviews were similar to the baseline interview, but also included life-event information such as education, income-generating activities, and self-report information concerning involvement with the legal system and antisocial activities. Each of these interviews lasted roughly two hours and participants were paid anywhere between \$50 and \$150, depending upon the interview period. The study was able to achieve an average response rate of 89.5% for each follow-up interview. Data collection also included interviews that were conducted following release from residential facilities and collateral interviews with family members and friends. Additional data was collected from FBI and official court records. Data collection concluded in April, 2010 and resulted in 14,604 adolescent subject interviews, 4,521 collateral interviews, and 1,158 release interviews (Mulvey, Schubert, & Piquero, 2014).

Using a convenience sampling method, Pathways to Desistance subjects were purposefully selected to be comprised of offending youth (Schubert et al., 2004). Enrollment criteria required potential participants to be under the age of 18 at the time of the study and to have been found guilty of at least one serious violent crime, property offense or drug offense. The study limited enrollment of male drug offenders at each site to 15% to maintain a heterogeneous sample. This limitation was not applied to female drug offenders because the investigators wanted to ensure a large enough sample of female offenders (Mulvey, 2011). Overall, the sample represented approximately one in three adolescents adjudicated on the aforementioned charges in these two locales during the enrollment period. Participants were between the ages of 14 and 17 at the time of

enrollment ($M = 16.2$, $SD = 1.1$), and the sample was ethnically diverse with 20% Caucasian youth, 41% African American, 33.5% Hispanic, and 5% youth of “other ethnicity.” On average, individuals in the sample had 3.2 ($SD = 2.2$) petitions to the court prior to the baseline interview. Felony assault or felony weapon charge represented 39% of enrolled youth at the study index, followed by drug felony (18%), burglary (15%), major property felony (10%), other felonies (7%), murder/rape/arson (7%), or another less serious charge (4%).

Measures

Delinquency.

For the purposes of this study, delinquency was measured at two time points: (1) during the baseline survey (wave 1), and (2) during a follow-up survey occurring 24 months later (wave 5). This follow-up period was chosen following the work done by Mulvey et al. In their examination of this same dataset, Mulvey et al. found that two years after court adjudication, nearly three-quarters of this sample reported “very low, almost near zero, levels of criminal involvement” (2010:470). In other words, after a period of two years, most of the participants in the survey had largely desisted from serious illegal activity. Therefore, measuring delinquency after 24 months is an effective way to gauge desistance considering that this study defines desistance as a process. Specifically, a decrease in offending over 24 months would indicate that offenders are in the process of desisting. It is important to note that self-reported offending at wave 5 was originally skewed to the right, therefore the frequencies above the 90th percentile were recoded to the 90th percentile to create a more normal distribution. This was done to ensure that the results of the analysis would be accurately interpreted.

Continuing to follow the approach taken by Mulvey and his colleagues (2010), this study utilizes a general variety score derived from self-reported offending (SRO). Self-reported offending was adapted from a common delinquency measure (Huizinga, Esbensen, & Weiher, 1991) and contained 22 items regarding serious illegal activities. Items captured by this measure include destroying/damaging property, carjacking, shoplifting, committing arson, selling drugs, driving drunk and/or high, aggravated assault, and murder, to name a few. Respondents were asked to indicate (i.e. yes or no) whether or not they had ever engaged in any of the 22 items. Scores from these variety scales are calculated as proportions (i.e. the number of items that get an affirmative response are divided by the total number of items in the scale). Scores closer to one demonstrate a greater variety of offending. Numerous studies have verified the reliability and validity of the self-reported offending scale developed from the Pathways study (e.g. Thornberry & Krohn, 2000), and according to Mulvey et al., "...research has shown that general variety scores provide a consistent and valid estimate of overall involvement in illegal activity" (2010:458).

Perceived ability to change.

Maruna (2001) focuses special attention on offenders' expectations about their own *ability* to change, thus illuminating the importance of agency in the desistance process. Agency is difficult to measure, however, given its various components (Laub & Sampson, 2001:55). For the purposes of this study, agency was measured as an offender's perceived ability to change. In the Pathways to Desistance survey, respondents were asked, "What do you think your chances are to stay out of trouble with the law?" The following response categories were provided: Poor, Fair, Good, Very Good, and

Excellent (1 = Poor, 5 = Excellent). This is an effective way to measure agency given that participants in the Pathways to Desistance study had previously engaged in delinquent behavior and therefore perceived ability to *change* indicates that they expect that they will be able to desist from crime. The perceived ability to change one's behavior is an important ingredient of the exercise of agency. As stated by Agnew, individuals are more likely to exercise agency when they believe they can change their behavior (2011:60). Perceived ability to change is a single-item measure.

Substance abuse.

Substance abuse was measured using a subset of The Substance Use/Abuse Inventory, a modified version of the substance use measure developed by Chassin, Rogosch, and Barrera (1991). Participants were asked ten items intended to assess lifetime drug related dependency (e.g. "Have you ever wanted a drink or drugs so badly that you could not think about anything else?"), and were prompted to provide a "yes" or "no" response. Items endorsed by each participant were summed to create an overall dependency score (i.e. 0-10). Higher scores indicate a greater amount of drug related dependency.

Social support.

Social support was measured by determining the presence of supportive adults in the participant's life. Using a revised version of the Contact with Caring Adults inventory (Phillips & Springer, 1992), social support was assessed across eight domains: adults you admire and want to be like, adults you could talk to if you needed information or advice about something, adults you could talk to about trouble at home, adults you would tell

about an award or if you did something well, adults with whom you can talk about important decisions, adults you can depend on for help, adults you feel comfortable talking about problems with, special adults who care about your feelings. Participants were asked to identify the number of adults who are supportive in each of the eight domains and were prompted to nominate the three adults that they were most likely to turn to within each domain. This measure assesses the number of adults who are mentioned in more than two domains and distinguishes between familial and non-familial sources of support. Higher scores indicate a greater amount of expressive social support.

Control variables.

This study includes controls for a host of variables known to be associated with desistance in both criminological theory and previous research, such as prior offending, performance in school, self-control, and peer delinquency (Piquero, 2014). Prior offending is measured using the baseline version of the self-reported delinquency scale. Performance in school was measured by asking the respondent's to report whether they got mostly A's, about half A's and half B's, mostly B's, about half B's and half C's, mostly C's, about half C's and half D's, mostly D's, or mostly below D's. These response categories were coded 1 through 8, where higher scores indicate poor school performance. Self-control was measured in the Pathways to Desistance study using the eight item Weinberger Adjustment Inventory (Weinberger & Schwartz, 1990). Participants were asked to rank their impulse control in the past six months based on statements such as, "I say the first thing that comes into my mind without thinking enough about it" (1 = False, 2 = Somewhat False, 3 = Not Sure, 4 = Somewhat True, 5 = True). Higher scores indicate more impulse control. The peer delinquency measure

contained 12 items borrowed from the Rochester Youth Study (Thornberry, et al., 1994). Intended to assess the degree of antisocial activity among the participant's peers, participants were asked questions such as, "How many of your friends have sold drugs?", and were prompted to respond on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = None of them, 5 = All of them). Scores were calculated as the mean rating of friends who engaged in the 12 behaviors included in this measure.

A variable accounting for the interview location was also controlled for to indicate whether or not the participant was incarcerated during the time of the interview (Mulvey, et al., 2010). The following response categories were provided: 1) Subject's home, 2) Detention center, jail, or other locked facility, and 3) somewhere else. Moreover, in the analysis that focuses on the effect of perceived ability to change on offending behavior, a measure asking respondents to report on the importance of staying out of trouble with the law was included. Participants responded to this single-item measure using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all important, 5 = Very important). Demographic variables such as gender (0 = male, 1 = female), race/ethnicity (0 = non-white, 1 = white), and age at baseline ($M = 16.04$, $SD = 1.14$) were included in these analyses as well. See Appendix for the descriptive statistics associated with each of the study variables.

Analyses

The hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analyses. In the first multiple regression analysis (designed to test hypothesis 1), self-reported offending at wave 5 served as the dependent variable and perceived ability to change functioned as the independent variable. In this analysis, the following control variables were included: self-

reported offending at wave 1, importance of staying out of trouble with the law, self-control, peer delinquency, interview location, performance in school, and demographic variables.

To examine the impact of substance abuse and social support on future expectations (hypotheses 2 and 3), a second analysis was conducted. Using multiple regression, perceived chances of staying out of trouble functioned as the dependent variable in this analysis, while substance abuse and social support served as the independent variables. Performance in school, self-control, self-reported offending at wave 1, peer delinquency, and demographic variables were included as controls.

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS

Table 4.1 presents the results of the first multiple regression analysis, examining the effect of offenders' perceived ability to change on their future offending behavior, controlling for a host of variables. This analysis is based on the full sample of juvenile offenders in the Pathways to Desistance sample. Following the listwise deletion of cases, the sample for this analysis was reduced to 1,190. The results for the first analysis show that five of the ten variables that were included in this analysis had a significant impact on future offending behavior. Consistent with previous literature, self-reported offending at wave 1 had the strongest impact on future offending behavior (.105, $p < .05$), indicating that respondents who had participated in a greater amount of criminal activity in the past were more likely to engage in delinquent behavior in the future. As suggested by numerous studies past behavior is often a significant predictor of future behavior (see e.g. Nagin & Paternoster, 1991; Sampson & Laub, 1992).

To determine the relative importance of each predictor, the standardized regression coefficients (*Beta*) in Table 4.1 are presented. For example, the standardized regression coefficient for self-reported offending at wave 1 is .176, indicating that a one standard deviation increase in self-reported offending at wave 1 is associated with a .176 standard deviation increase in self-reported offending at wave 5. Of all the variables in the analysis, self-reported offending at wave 1 is the strongest predictor of future offending. As in previous research, the results of this analysis also show that delinquent peer associations, self-control, and sex have significant effects on future offending behavior ($p < .05$). Unlike previous studies, however, this analysis failed to observe

significant effects for school performance, age, and race/ethnicity. Additionally, this analysis also failed to observe significant effects for interview location.

The main focus in Table 4.1 is on the effect of perceived ability to change. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, this measure exerts a significant negative effect on future offending behavior ($-.005, p < .05$), controlling for other variables. Each unit increase in perceived ability to change is associated with a .075 decrease in future offending. Specifically, this model shows that offenders who are optimistic about their ability to change decrease their offending over time, whereas offenders who see little chance of avoiding crime/delinquency in the future display an increase in offending over time.

Table 4.2 presents the effects of drug abuse and social support as predictors of perceived ability to change. Following the listwise deletion of cases, the sample for this analysis was reduced to 1,306. Only controlling for demographic variables (i.e. sex, race/ethnicity, and age), the first equation presented in Table 4.2 shows that substance abuse had the strongest impact on perceived ability to change, ($-.506, p < .05$), indicating that respondents who had demonstrated substance abuse dependency symptoms were less likely to anticipate that their behavior would change. This preliminary analysis is consistent with hypothesis 2. This analysis failed to observe significant effects for social support, however.

A second equation was constructed to present the effects of substance abuse and social support on perceived ability to change while controlling for the remaining variables. According the results of this analysis shown in Table 4.2, substance abuse no longer exerts a significant effect on perceived ability to change. To better understand this relationship, a supplemental analysis was conducted. In the supplemental analysis

(results not shown), it was determined that delinquent peer associations and prior offending appear to mediate the relationship between substance abuse and perceived ability to change. In other words, this analysis suggests that delinquent peer associations and prior offending account for the relationship between substance abuse and perceived ability to change.

Table 4.1

Regression Results Showing the Effects of Perceived Ability to Change on Future Offending Behavior
(*n* = 1,190)

| <i>Independent Variables</i> | <i>Dependent Variable: SRO (Wave 5)</i> | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---------------|--------------|
| | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>Beta</i> |
| Perceived Ability to Change | -.005* | (.002) | -.075 |
| Importance of Staying out of Trouble | .001 | (.003) | .006 |
| SRO (Wave 1) | .105* | (.020) | .176 |
| Self-Control | -.008* | (.003) | -.099 |
| Delinquent Peers | .011* | (.003) | .127 |
| Interview Location | -.004 | (.005) | -.023 |
| Performance in School | .000 | (.001) | .005 |
| Sex (1 = female) | -.026* | (.006) | -.112 |
| Race/Ethnicity (1 = white) | .008 | (.006) | .040 |
| Age | -.002 | (.002) | -.026 |
| Adjusted <i>R</i> ² | .133 | | |

Note. Significant coefficients are highlighted in bold type. Standardized (Beta) and unstandardized (B) regression coefficients are presented, with standard errors (SE) shown in parentheses.

**p* < .05, two-tailed.

Table 4.2

Regression Results Showing the Effects of Drug Abuse and Social Support on Perceived Ability to Change (n = 1,306)

| <i>Independent Variables</i> | <i>Dependent Variable: Perceived Ability to Change</i> | | | | | |
|------------------------------|--|---------------|--------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------|
| | <i>Equation 1:</i> | | | <i>Equation 2:</i> | | |
| | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>Beta</i> | <i>B</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>Beta</i> |
| Substance Abuse | -.506* | (.013) | -.118 | .013 | (.014) | .028 |
| Social Support | .004 | (.032) | .003 | -.021 | (.031) | .018 |
| Self-Control | | | | .188* | (.038) | .091 |
| Delinquent Peers | | | | -.243* | (.044) | -.181 |
| SRO (Wave 1) | | | | -1.227* | (.292) | -.133 |
| Performance in School | | | | -.065* | (.017) | -.099 |
| Sex (1 = female) | .368* | (.099) | .102 | .138 | (.097) | .038 |
| Race/Ethnicity (1 = white) | .208* | (.085) | .067 | .135 | (.083) | .044 |
| Age | -.019 | (.030) | -.018 | -.008 | (.029) | -.008 |
| Adjusted R^2 | | | .021 | | | .113 |

Note. Significant coefficients are highlighted in bold type. Standardized (Beta) and unstandardized (B) regression coefficients are presented, with standard errors (SE) shown in parentheses.

*p < .05, two-tailed.

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION

Utilizing narratology and a supplemental content analysis, Maruna found that negative future expectations about the self appear to inhibit the desistance process (2001:147). In regards to persisting offenders, Maruna stated, "...they feel powerless to change their behavior...they do not want to offend, they said, but feel that they have no choice" (2001:74). This qualitative work on desistance and persistence among habitual offenders suggests that there is reason to believe that expectations about one's *ability* to change will play a special role in the desistance process.

Since the publication of Maruna's book, *Making Good*, there has been a small but growing body of research that has tested a number of his claims. Despite this, there has been no quantitative research to date that explicitly tests whether or not offenders' expectations about their own ability to change play a significant role in the desistance process. Using data from a seven-year study of serious youthful offenders in two large urban cities, this research has confirmed that there is a statistically significant relationship between future offending behavior and offenders' expectations about their ability to desist. Persisting offenders believe that they do not have control over their actions and view themselves as being "doomed to deviance", thus leading them to continually engage in offending behavior (Howerton, Burnett, Byng, & Campbell, 2009; Maruna, 2001).

Studies such as Maruna's illustrate how qualitative research has highlighted the importance of agency in desistance research, and the current study strengthens research in this area by quantitatively verifying and supporting these findings. Laub and Sampson contend that agency is the "missing link" in desistance research (2003:141), yet only a small number of studies devote their attention to the relationship between agency and

desistance (Healy, 2013). One possible reason for this is that agency has been deemed difficult to measure given its complex nature (Laub & Sampson, 2001:55). This study, however, examines agency as an offender's perceived ability to change and this measure suggests that offenders who perceive that they can desist from crime are exhibiting agency given that they have previously engaged in delinquent behavior.

While these results are consistent with Maruna's (2001) arguments, they are also consistent with previous research on agency, including the work of Albert Bandura. Bandura (1997) suggests that agency allows people to alter their behavior by intentionally influencing their choices and actions. For example, Bandura (1997) states that agency permits individuals to "behave differently from what environmental forces dictate" which is critical in the desistance process as ex-offenders often need to overcome what Maruna considers to be "shameful pasts" (2001). The outcome of the first hypothesis is also consistent with Agnew's (2011) study of agency, suggesting that "agentic factors," such as the belief that one can change, allows offenders to develop pro-social identities, thus influencing desistance from crime.

The findings of the initial test not only increase confidence in the findings of Maruna's qualitative study, but also have important implications for desistance research. Although many criminologists endorse the use of sociogenic paradigms in desistance research, the results of this study are consistent with studies such as Maruna's which are rooted in phenomenology. Phenomenological models of desistance highlight the role of personal agency, and Maruna endorsed the use of phenomenological paradigms in his study stating that it allowed him to focus on his participants as "agents of their own change" (Laub and Sampson, 2001:27). The results of the main analysis appear to

confirm this notion, suggesting that offender's perceived ability to change was associated with decreased offending over a 24 month period, underscoring the importance of agency in the desistance process.

In an attempt to understand what impacts an offenders' perceptions of their ability to desist from crime, an additional feature of this study was the examination of potential determinants of offender's perceptions about their ability to change. While prior studies have indicated that age, gender, race/ethnicity, neighborhood conditions, socioeconomic status, self-worth, and academic adjustment impact expectations about the future in general (Dubow, Arnett, Smith, & Ippolito, 2001; Haynie, Soller, & Williams, 2014; O'Donnell, Schwab-Stone, & Muyeed, 2002; Piquero, 2014; Swisher & Warner, 2013), less is known about the factors that shape perceptions about one's own ability to desist, in particular. In an attempt to eliminate gaps in this area of research, a quantitative analysis was conducted to further investigate the link between perceptions about the self and factors such as drug abuse and social support that have been alluded to in qualitative studies (Howerton, Burnett, Byng, & Campbell, 2009; Maruna, 2001).

These studies imply that persistent drug abuse and/or insufficient social support negatively shape one's expectations for the self and promote offending as a result. While the first equation of this second regression analysis showed that substance abuse had a significant negative effect on perceived ability to change (controlling for only demographic variables), results of the second equation show that drug abuse did not exert any significant effects on perceived ability to change, controlling for the remaining variables. It is important to note that a supplemental analysis was conducted to further examine the change in substance abuse significance between these two equations and it

was determined that delinquent peer associations and prior offending appear to mediate the relationship between substance abuse and perceived ability to change. In other words, the results of this supplemental analysis imply that a history of drug abuse *indirectly* reduces agency by contributing to offending and association with delinquent peers. While this analysis suggests that delinquent peer associations and prior offending mediate the relationship between substance abuse and perceived ability to change, future research employing more advanced statistical techniques could formally test for mediation.

These results underscore the importance of prior offending and peer delinquency as predictors of future behavior (see e.g. Nagin & Paternoster, 1991; Sampson & Laub, 1992), but also signify that these factors have implications for perceptions about one's self as well. As mentioned, a central component of agency is perceived self-efficacy. Bandura defines perceived self-efficacy as one's belief in their ability to produce particular outcomes or actions, and that people with an internal locus of control are more likely to exhibit self-efficacy than those with an external locus of control (1997). It is possible, therefore, that offenders with substance abuse dependency symptoms demonstrate lower levels of perceived self-efficacy due to blaming their behavior on external factors such as prior offending and peer delinquency (Harris, 2011; Liebrechts et al., 2015). Likewise, Schroeder, Giordano, and Cernkovich (2007), help to explain this relationship by suggesting that drug culture complicates the desistance process by involving social dynamics such as prior offending and delinquent peer associations which often accompany this lifestyle. Despite findings from previous research, impulse control did not mediate the relationship between substance abuse and perceived ability to change.

In addition, the results of the second regression analysis show that social support also did not exert any significant effects on perceived ability to change. While there is currently little research devoted to the relationship between social support and desistance, several criminologists contend that there is a link between social support and delinquent behavior (see e.g. Cullen, 1994). Cullen's social support theory suggests that social support (both instrumental and expressive) can decrease the likelihood of reoffending by providing social capital and subjecting individuals to effective social control (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2015). Studies testing the complex nature of social control remain limited, however, and most research exploring differences in instrumental and expressive social support tend to focus on gender differences (e.g. Ashton & Fueher, 1993; Olson & Schultz, 1994). In regards to the social support outcome in this analysis, it is possible that instrumental social support (i.e. tangible support) is a better determinant of future expectations than expressive social support. Several studies suggest, however, that services, material goods, and financial assistance lessen the burden of reentry, consequently promoting desistance (Berg & Huebner, 2011; Hochstetler, DeLisi, & Pratt, 2010; Martinez & Abrams, 2013). Further research in this area is needed.

Some limitations must be noted. The data used in this study focused on juvenile offenders, albeit serious offenders, while Maruna's (2001) study was conducted on adults that classified as "career criminals." As such, it is possible that the results of this analysis should not be compared to Maruna's. Being that the offenders in the Pathways data have demonstrated serious patterns of offending, however, it seems unlikely that the samples are completely unrelated. Another potential limitation associated with using a sample of juvenile offenders in this study is that certain research suggests that juveniles are less

likely to reflect on their pasts in a way that meaningfully impacts their futures (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008).

With respect to the dataset itself, another limitation is that establishing definitive causal order between the relationships examined within this study is beyond the scope of the Pathways dataset. As demonstrated by this study, perceived ability to change influences future offending behavior while prior offending was found to mediate the relationship between substance abuse and perceived ability to change. This is a common limitation of many datasets, however caution should be employed when interpreting results. Furthermore, there are limitations associated with using a single-item measure as a key variable (i.e. perceived ability to change). While using this single-item variable has proven suitable for conducting an initial test of the hypotheses featured in this study, future research and/or data collection efforts should focus on incorporating similar measures to ensure explanatory power.

Despite these limitations, the results of this study have some relevance to policy. The finding that offender's expectations about their *ability* to change does, in fact, play a role in the desistance process should be viewed as an opportunity for programs aimed at increasing self-efficacy. Although there are a plethora of programs offered to offenders in prisons, detention centers, and the like, better counseling and/or reentry efforts could be considered as a potentially effective means of addressing offender's perceptions about their own ability to change or desist. More specifically, cognitive behavioral therapy has shown promise in correctional settings (Pearson, Lipton, Cleland, & Yee, 2002; Wilson, Bouffard, & MacKenzie, 2005). Cognitive behavioral therapy is a therapeutic treatment that is typically delivered to groups of 8 to 12 individuals in a classroom-like setting by

trained correctional staff (Dobson & Kharti, 2000). While cognitive behavioral therapy is often geared toward making the offender understand his/her responsibility toward others and the community by laying an emphasis on empathy building, victim awareness, victim empathy, social conditioning, it is worthwhile to consider incorporating a component that focuses on fostering perceived self-efficacy and increasing agency as a result.

CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION

Several studies suggest that desistance from crime relies on factors such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, prior offending, delinquent peer associations, self-control, educational attainment, and social bonds (e.g. Blumstein, Farrington, & Moitra, 1985; Elliot, 1994; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Laub and Sampson, 1993; McCord, 1980; Uggen & Kruttschnitt, 1998). However, following Maruna's (2001) qualitative work on desistance and persistence among habitual offenders, there is reason to believe that expectations about one's *ability* to change will play a significant role in the desistance process. Using data from a seven-year study of serious youthful offenders in two large urban cities, this research has confirmed that there is a statistically significant relationship between future offending behavior and offenders' expectations about their ability to desist.

Specifically, this study shows that offenders who are optimistic about their ability to change decrease their offending over time, whereas offenders who see little chance of avoiding crime/delinquency in the future display an increase in offending over time. These findings also have important implications for desistance research. While many criminologists have supported the use of sociogenic paradigms in desistance research, the results of this study are consistent with studies such as Maruna's (2001) that support the use of phenomenological models of desistance. Phenomenological paradigms provide a useful framework for interpreting the complex influence of agency in the desistance process and the results of the main analysis suggest that offender's perceived ability to change was associated with decreased offending over a 24 month period, underscoring this relationship.

Given that the first analysis in this study confirmed the statistical relationship between offender's perceived ability to change and future offending, a second regression analysis was conducted to examine potential determinants of this perception and explore the role that such predictors play in the desistance process. While prior studies indicate that age, gender, race/ethnicity, neighborhood conditions, socioeconomic status, self-worth, and academic adjustment impact expectations about the future in general (Dubow, Arnett, Smith, & Ippolito, 2001; Haynie, Soller, & Williams, 2014; O'Donnell, Schwab-Stone, & Muyeed, 2002; Piquero, 2014; Swisher & Warner, 2013), various qualitative desistance studies have alluded to a link between negative perceptions about the self and factors such as drug abuse and social support, implying that persistent drug abuse and/or insufficient social support negatively shape one's perceptions of the self and promote offending as a result (Howerton, Burnett, Byng, & Campbell, 2009; Maruna, 2001). Despite this, the results of the second analysis indicate that drug abuse and social support do not exert a significant effect on perceived ability to change after controlling for delinquent peers and prior offending behavior.

APPENDIX

Table A.1

Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables

| <i>Variable</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Std. Dev.</i> | <i>Range</i> |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|------------------|--------------|
| Offending (Wave 1) | .14 | .13 | 0-.45 |
| Offending (Wave 5) | .05 | .08 | 0-.27 |
| Perceived Ability to Change | 3.58 | 1.24 | 1-5 |
| Importance of Staying out of Trouble | 4.65 | .75 | 1-5 |
| Interview Location | .52 | .49 | 0-1 |
| Substance Abuse | 2.08 | 2.71 | 0-10 |
| Social Support | 6.64 | 1.75 | 0-8 |
| Self-Control | 2.96 | .95 | 1-5 |
| Delinquent Peers | 2.32 | .93 | 1-5 |
| Performance in School | 4.8 | 1.89 | 1-8 |
| Sex (1 = female) | .14 | .34 | 0-1 |
| Race/Ethnicity (1 = white) | .20 | .40 | 0-1 |
| Age | 16.04 | 1.14 | 14-19 |

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